

A Taxonomy of Wrecks

A gentleman of Tyre; my name Pericles,
My education been in arts and arms,
Who looking for adventures in the world,
Was by the rough seas reft of ships and men,
And after shipwreck driven upon this shore.¹

It was reportedly a calm, bright day on the 31st of March, 1910, when the SS *Pericles* struck a rock off Cape Leeuwin, Western Australia, and promptly sunk. The 500 ft. steamer was carrying 461 people from Melbourne to London, all of whom were disembarked safely in a 'total absence of panic' (as reported by the *Evening Star*). The *Pericles*' cargo was not so fortunate, going down with the ship and becoming the subject of repeated salvage voyages until as late as 1961.² The wreck still sits 5.6 kilometres south of the Cape Leeuwin lighthouse, at the point where the Indian and Southern Oceans meet.

¹ William Shakespeare and George Wilkins, "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," in *The Oxford Shakespeare*, ed. Roger Warren (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 137-38.

² Peter Worsley, Jill Worsley, and Jeremy Green, eds., *Capes of Sunset: Western Australia's Maritime Heritage between Peel Inlet & Flinders Bay* (Fremantle: Australian National Centre for Excellence in Maritime Archaeology, 2012), 278-84.



The 'shipwreck' is a particularly Romantic motif, often used to allegorize elements of the human condition and the sublime. We could draw on this rich tradition to discuss Sophie Durand's *Where Two Oceans Meet: Selected Histories of Flinders Bay*, but we can gain just as much from talking about the legal elements of shipwrecks (which are somewhat less fanciful, but no less interesting). It may come as a surprise that there are different varieties of 'wreck', generally considered to be flotsam, jetsam, lagan, and derelict. These classifications have different legal status within salvage law and must be treated differently by salvors. In reporting the case of *Cargo ex Shiller*, John Farquhar Fraser outlines:

flotsam is when a ship is sunk, or otherwise perished, and the goods float on the sea; jetsam is when the ship is in danger of being sunk, and to lighten the ship the goods are cast into the sea... Lagan... is when the goods are cast into the sea... and such goods are so heavy that they sink to the bottom...³

Not addressed in the case is the final classification of 'derelict', defined by Sarah Dromgoole as a 'vessel [which] has been physically abandoned by the master and crew without intention of returning, or hope of recovery'.⁴ Interestingly, what distinguishes these types of wreck is not the object (be it cargo, fittings, or the ship itself), but the circumstances surrounding its loss. So, identical objects may be classified as different wrecks not by their appearance, but by how they were wrecked. When a salvor finds goods at sea, they must theorise the object's history in order understand its relationship to salvage law.

³John Farquhar Fraser, "Sir Henry Constable's Case," in *The Reports of Sir Edward Coke, Knt. [1572-1617]: In Thirteen Parts* (London & Dublin: Joseph Butterworth and Son & J. Cooke, 1826), 216.

⁴Sarah Dromgoole, "A Note on the Meaning of 'Wreck'," *The International Journal of Nautical Archaeology* 28, no. 4 (1999): 319.

In Sophie Durand's collaborative installation, *Where Two Oceans Meet*, we are immersed in an archive—a selection of experiences, objects and traces from Flinders Bay that invite us to wonder about their lives. It is a constellation of artefacts (found and made) around which wash variable histories. Much like the salvor, we must speculate as to the circumstances of our catch, shaping the lives of the objects before us, as have the actors with whom Durand has collaborated.

This same speculation is required of William Shakespeare and George Wilkins' *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*, a story of the good prince Pericles, whose life at sea is an allegory of his familial relationships. *Pericles* has a contested history—it was thought to be written first by Shakespeare, and then completed by Wilkins, an occasional dramatist who often worked in collaboration. This guesswork is further complicated due to a 'grossly corrupt' quarto being the only surviving record of the play. Certain passages are either nonsensical or missing, forcing any director who puts on the play to rewrite entire sections. The remaining manuscript is thought to be a 'reported text', compiled by actors who performed the work.⁵ We see *Pericles* paralleled in *Where Two Oceans Meet*, in which Alistair Kennedy, Georgia Jean Lewis, Nelson Mondlane, Ariel Tresham, and Amelia Tuttleby perform Durand's archive. At times they perform artefacts as scripts, other times tying items together in new narratives, filling the gaps with possible stories. Through this, the archive itself becomes a reported text; written through improvisation, cue, and recall.

Here, the opening passage from *Pericles* is somewhat equivocal; the *SS Pericles* is 'reft of ships and men' and 'driven upon this shore', much like the *Prince of Tyre*. Indeed, those ships and men found their way to Flinders Bay—life rafts were sold on as fishing boats, and the passengers of the *Pericles* departed from the Flinders Bay jetty on their way to Fremantle. The wreck of the *Pericles* becomes another transient presence in the town, occasionally surfacing in the local histories of Flinders Bay.

⁵Shakespeare and Wilkins, "Pericles, Prince of Tyre," 3.

The allegory of the shipwreck is parallel to the artefacts presented in Sophie Durand's installation. They are set in a fluctuating sea of stories, constantly being rewritten and re-told. Pericles, Prince of Tyre shares not only a namesake with the wreck of the SS Pericles, but its constant reconstruction and distributed authorship is mirrored in *Where Two Oceans Meet*. Alongside the local significance of the wreck of the SS Pericles, salvage law also shows that wrecking and salvaging are speculative practices, offering stories that can never be entirely concrete. Now the story of the Prince of Tyre, the SS Pericles, and the taxonomy of wrecks are all subsumed into Durand's archive, alongside the stories constructed by the actors, and by ourselves. Through our speculation of the stories in the work, we all play a part in authoring the *Selected Histories of Flinders Bay*, and through it, are inextricably tied to Flinders Bay itself.

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DAVIES RD

STORM BAY RD





Flinders Bay is connected to Wardandi Boodja (Country).

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