

IN DEEP WATER: THE OCEANIC IN THE BRITISH IMAGINARY, 1666-1805

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Colin Dewey

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# IN DEEP WATER: THE OCEANIC IN THE BRITISH IMAGINARY, 1666-1805

Colin Dewey, Ph. D.

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This study argues that the ocean has determined the constitution of British identity – both the collective identity of an imperial nation and the private identity of individual imagination. Romantic-era literary works, maritime and seascape paintings, engravings and popular texts reveal a problematic national and individual engagement with the sea. Historians have long understood the importance of the sea to the development of the British empire, yet literary critics have been slow to take up the study of oceanic discourse, especially in relation to the Romantic period. Scholars have historicized “Nature” in literature and visual art as the product of an aesthetic ideology of landscape and terrestrial phenomena; my intervention is to consider ocean-space and the sea voyage as topoi that actively disrupt a corresponding aesthetic of the sea, rendering instead an ideologically unstable oceanic imaginary. More than the “other” or opposite of land, in this reading the sea becomes an antagonist of Nature.

When Romantic poets looked to the ocean, the tracks of countless voyages had already inscribed an historic national space of commerce, power and violence. However necessary, the threat presented by a population of seafarers whose loyalty was historically ambiguous mapped onto both the material and moral landscape of Britain. I argue that the British Ocean as a phenomenally fluid space defined by the circulation of trade destabilizes ideological projections of the nation into the sea.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Once intending to become a lighthouse keeper, Colin Dewey spent many of the years between 1982 and 2004 living aboard his 29-foot sailboat in San Francisco bay and working as a merchant seaman aboard ships and tugs at sea and in the harbor. From 1992-2000 Colin was employed by the San Francisco Bar Pilots first as deck hand, rising to captain of the Pilot Boat California. He holds "full book" membership in the Sailors' Union of the Pacific. Colin received a Bachelor of Arts degree with highest honors from the University of California, Berkeley, in 2003. He has published articles on Melville and Byron, and on Melville's epic poem, *Clarel*. He also wrote reports from the Persian Gulf for maritime labor journals during the first gulf war. He received an MA from Cornell University in 2007.

For the Sailors,  
and most of all, for my parents, Maureen and Desmond Dewey

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## CHAPTER 1

### In Madness or In Death: Sea Stories and Oceanic Poetry

Oh! it makes the heart groan, that, with such a beautiful world as this is to live in, and such a soul as that of man's is by nature and gift of God, we should go about on such errands as we do, destroying and laying waste; and ninety-nine of us in a hundred never easy in any road that travels toward peace and quietness!

Wordsworth to Southey, Feb 12, 1805

But look! here come more crowds, pacing straight for the water, and seemingly bound for a dive. Strange! Nothing will content them but the extremest limit of the land; loitering under the shady lee of yonder warehouses will not suffice. No, they must get just as nigh the water as they possibly can without falling in. And there they stand—miles of them—leagues. Inlanders all, they come from lanes and alleys, streets and avenues—north, east, south, and west. Yet here they all unite. Tell me, does the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships attract them thither?

Herman Melville, *Moby-Dick, or the Whale*, 1851

This study seeks to understand how the ocean has participated in determining the constitution of British identity – both the collective identity of the imperial nation and the private identity of individual imagination. Romantic-era literary works, maritime and seascape paintings, engravings and popular texts reveal a problematic national and individual engagement with the sea. Historians have long understood the importance of the sea to the development of the British empire in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, yet literary critics have been slow to take up the study of oceanic discourse, especially in relation to the Romantic period. Since Marjorie Hope Nicolson and John Barrell, scholars have historicized “Nature” in literature and visual art as the product of an aesthetic ideology of landscape and terrestrial

phenomena. My intervention is to consider ocean-space and the sea voyage as topoi that actively disrupt a corresponding aesthetic of the sea, rendering instead an ideologically unstable oceanic imaginary. More than the “other” or opposite of land, in this reading the sea becomes an antagonist of settled, solid, ideologically sound terrestrial Nature.

I wish to begin with a pair of sea stories – a digression to suggest my idea of the “oceanic imaginary” and how it remains distinctly operative today. In 1998, a short story called “The Mermaid,” by Julia Blackburn, appeared in a special issue of the British quarterly *Granta* devoted to the sea. In the introduction, *Granta* asked whether the sea had lost power over the lives and imagination of modern readers; although the sea now “makes us scared or wistful, [...] the tide of its images, metaphors, and stories has been steadily retreating”<sup>1</sup> The editors speak of an antique sea, a literature receding into history, listing with some nostalgia the formerly bustling ports of New York, London, and Glasgow, their sailors now gone, wharves turned into museums, rivers empty.

It is not with nostalgia, though, but with knowing dread, that Julia Blackburn’s grim story looks at history, desire, and loss. The slight tale functions as both a gothic fairy tale and an origin myth for an age of discovery, a fable of modernity that is ironic rather than celebratory. Set early in the fifteenth century, a man sees a mermaid on the shore near his village. Although the strange encounter only lasts a moment, with the discovery of the mermaid a kind of madness sets in. She is completely passive, yet her appearance deeply upsets the man’s village and the villagers fear she constitutes a mortal threat to their way of life; the mermaid is blamed for a monstrous birth, a strange voice crying in the night, and the unexplained death of livestock. The mermaid breaches what was thought to be a boundary

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<sup>1</sup> James Hamilton-Paterson, ed., *The Sea*, vol. 61 (*Granta*, 1998).

between land and sea. The man becomes obsessed with finding her and returns to sea again and again. The story ends:

The man who had stroked her rough skin kept on stumbling  
against her image in a corner of his mind. Whenever he went out  
with his boat he would hope to find her glistening among the fish  
he had caught in his nets. Searching for her, he began to travel  
further and further from the shore.<sup>2</sup>

In Blackburn's tale, the community's deep psychic disruption and the awakening of wanderlust in the young man are the inevitable outcome of the encounter with the mermaid. The man's longer and longer voyages figure a troubled modern subject beginning to explore the globe, but as the horizon of "known," or charted, sea expands, his pursuit pushes the mermaid and her fantastic kind into the margins of maps and of memory.

Blackburn's "Mermaid" is akin to the stories Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan construct to map their ideas of self and desire and the beginnings of individual subjectivity. Imagining the origin of the subject through tales of contentious encounters with the unknown, Lacan famously theorizes the constitution of the infant subject through its traumatic assimilation into a system of linguistic "differences" centered in the symbolic realm of language. Most important for me is Lacan's idea of "identification" in ego formation. According to Shuli Barziali's essay "Lacannibalism," "[w]hereas Freud can contemplate the possibility of a successful or benign resolution to the Oedipal crisis [...] Lacan views the alienating effects of narcissistic identification with the (br)other as inescapable." She concludes, "A kind of madness is the basic ground for the emergence of consciousness as socially defined and socially constructed." Blackburn's story is a fable of the beginnings of the modern, "oceanic" subject and its desire to know itself as "a kind of madness."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> "The Mermaid," in *The Sea*, ed. James Hamilton-Paterson, vol. 61 (Granta, 1998), 160.

<sup>3</sup> "Lacannibalism," *Lacan and the matter of origins* (Stanford University Press, 1999), 114-15.

In Alain Corbin's history the seashore is a place of danger:

The sea-shore of antiquity, as imagined in the classical period, remains haunted by the possibility of a monster bursting forth or of the sudden incursion of foreigners[.] The outline of the ancient shore [...] was often imagined as a hesitant boundary threatened with the possibility of being broken down. Such a rupture would violate the harmonious peace of laborious, hard-working lives<sup>4</sup>

Aesthetically and historically, the shoreline is a place where apocalyptic events seem possible at any moment. It is an imperfect boundary, a space always contested, always in transition. In classical thought, as Alain Corbin notes, "the line of contact between the world's constituent elements was also a front along which they oppose one another and reveal their madness; this was where the precarious balance among them was in danger of being destroyed." The shoreline in this pre-Romantic sense is always an unsettled place of danger – not only of the sea overwhelming the land, but of the individual's being swept away. Corbin continues, "The ancient shore was often imagined as a hesitant boundary threatened with the possibility of being broken down. Such a rupture would in turn violate the harmonious peace of laborious, hard-working lives."<sup>5</sup>

Historians note the extraordinary coincidence of the growth of cartography and autobiography with the creation of the 'subject' in space and history. Tom Conley puts it bluntly, "The creation of the subject is buttressed by the subject's affiliation with the mapping of the world"<sup>6</sup> Blackburn's fable insists on a mirroring and interpenetration of interior and exterior spaces: the sea, the shoreline, and the body of the mermaid are at once constituted in the gaze of a man for whom the experience instantiates a growing sense of interiority, of self, of alienation and desire.

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<sup>4</sup> *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside in the Western World, 1750-1840* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994), 14.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>6</sup> *The Self-Made Map: Cartographic Writing in Early Modern France* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 22.

To adapt Conley, the consciousness of desire figured by Blackburn's mermaid is "that which language always aims at naming without ever being quite able to bring under rational control." Like the early maps that invented "terrae incognitae" as a category to consciously construe territories that only existed as speculation, the encounter with the mermaid marks "an intersection between things known and things yet to be named. [The mermaid] remains a site where visual signs and conjecture meet and disappear together." The encounter figures the historical crux between an age that knew itself through local folklore and the beginning of the age of exploration and commerce that inaugurated a world of two-dimensional symbolic representation and consequently depopulated the imaginary sea.

The young fisherman cannot leave the shore or the mermaid behind, nor can he put back what the sea cast up. Immediately following the encounter on the beach, he runs back to the village. First the man tries to report what happened, to render the unspeakable experience into language. The profound sense of alienation experienced by the young man is shared by the community as a feeling of unease, an unfamiliar awareness of the future, of "something about to happen." Imagined topographically, that uneasy sense of the future becomes a nervous scanning of the horizon. Though the narration is dreamlike, it is fixed temporally by the definite date given in the text: 1410. This signpost places the story in clear relation to the beginnings of European maritime expansion and exploration. The story is a myth, a fable about the desire and consequences of voyaging over the horizon.<sup>7</sup> Representations of that desire, whether imperial or individual, appear again and again as seafaring poems, narratives, paintings

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<sup>7</sup> Laura Brown emphasizes the cultural potency and formal dynamism of fable. She writes: "In general, we understand a fable to be more extended than a single text, and more momentous in its cultural import and influence than a story. A fable also has a narrative trajectory that moves beyond the local or static effect of a trope or figure. Thus, while I do not mean to allude to the narrowly didactic connotation often popularly attached to the idea of a fable, I do mean to evoke the sense of the fable as a distillation of meaning and significance – in this case the significance of a historical moment". *Fables of Modernity : Literature and Culture in the English Eighteenth Century* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

and cartographies produced by British and European artists. The historical mystery of the sea and the challenge of exploration becomes an existential condition in early modernity and especially the Romantic era, where poets grapple with philosophical theories and ideas of the equally vast, equally dangerous spaces of the imagination. I argue throughout this study that the sea remains, in the Anglo-American imagination, an ontological space and a condition parallel to the epistemological condition of modernity and post-modernity. The sea-story that follows illustrates the continued resistance to an oceanic epistemology that insists on vastness, depth, and unknowability.

Navigation, commerce, and conquest all rely on the reduction of complex, fluid, and dynamic spaces to two-dimensional symbolic representations that are understood to be imperfect. Newtonian mathematics that made eighteenth and nineteenth-century European navigation possible and voyages predictable are aware of built-in error and ships' officers must constantly recheck and correct for this. Yet even still, technological modernity refuses to acquiesce to an existence based on unknowability, repeating the tension between the mermaid's gaze, the empty horizon and the subject's desire to know and to understand.

The mystery of the recent disappearance of Jim Gray, the 63 year old computer scientist partly responsible for the way in which the earth is now digitally represented, has become part of the lore of both the sea and the high technology "blogosphere." The story was reported in newspapers and through traditional broadcast media, but it also developed a moment-by-moment immediacy through blogs and tech industry websites, which reported and speculated, sometimes wildly, on the case and the fate of Gray and his boat. On January 28, 2007, Gray boarded *Tenacious*, his red 40' sailboat berthed in San Francisco, California. He told friends he was sailing to the Farallon Islands, an area not far outside the Golden Gate, to scatter his

mother's ashes.<sup>8</sup> Jim was an experienced and careful sailor and had made many trips through the same area, both with crew and alone. Just before losing cell phone coverage on the outbound journey, he called his wife and reported fine conditions:

She asked him if he was wearing his harness; single-handed sailors can drown if a wave pitches them overboard and the ship sails on. "Yes, dear," he replied, saying that he would get in touch as soon as Tenacious came back into range.

A few minutes later, he left an upbeat voicemail for his daughter, Heather, in Santa Barbara. "I'm taking Granny out to her final resting place. I'm surrounded by dolphins out here. It's a little cloudy but very pleasant. No whales but lots of dolphins and very pretty. Love and kisses, take care, bye." At 11:50 am, his smartphone synched with Microsoft's email server one last time, pinging a Cingular tower south of San Francisco. A couple of hours later, on Southeast Farallon Island, a naturalist named Brett Hartl spotted a sailboat with a reddish hull a mile or two offshore, sailing north.<sup>9</sup>

When his boat failed to return to the marina that afternoon, his family began to worry. Trusting in his experience, however, they waited for some word. Despite excellent weather, good visibility, and repeated air and sea searches covering more than 16,000 nautical miles of ocean, on January 29, the Coast Guard reported "No signs of distress and no signs of the missing vessel have been found."<sup>10</sup> When the Coast Guard announced that after 48 hours they had suspended the search pending further information, Jim's friends and family were dismayed. Jim was an award-winning computer scientist for Microsoft and a recognized figure in the Bay area sailing community. Again, the Coast Guard dispatched planes and flew numerous search patterns using scientific drift and survival models predicated on past experience and the best

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<sup>8</sup> "SF Sailor Jim Gray Missing"

<<http://www.latitude38.com/LectronicLat/2007/0107/Jan31/Jan31.html#anchor1085433>>  
"Vast Search Off Coast For Data Wizard" <<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?file=/c/a/2007/01/31/MNGPMNRVD137.DTL>> Accessed 4 February 2009.

<sup>9</sup> "Inside the High Tech Hunt for a Missing Silicon Valley Legend"  
<[http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/15-08/ff\\_jimgray](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/15-08/ff_jimgray)> Accessed 4 February 2009.

<sup>10</sup> "Coast Guard Searches for Overdue Sailboat" <<http://www.uscg-sanfrancisco.com/go/doc/823/143117/>>  
Accessed 4 February 2009.

available wind and current data.<sup>11</sup> Again, no trace of the boat or crew was found: no oil slick, no flotsam or wreckage of any kind; Jim and his boat had simply disappeared, in the imagination of friends and searchers alike, swept further and further from shore.

For most of the history of seafaring, the story ends there, and dozens of ballads and poems attest to the near-universality of grief as a corollary of maritime endeavor. Until the late eighteenth century, ships leaving port were as good as lost until they were reported safe in port or sighted, “spoken,” by a homebound vessel. The colleagues and friends of Jim Gray refused to accept the Coast Guard’s suspension of the search and the agency’s tacit acceptance that “the cruel sea refuses to give up its secrets.”<sup>12</sup> First they turned to private pilots to conduct localized searches along the California coast; at the same time, as word spread throughout the hi-tech community, new technologies, some developed by Gray himself, were turned to the search effort. On February 12, *Information Week*, a tech industry magazine unused to reporting sea stories, headlined an article: “Technologists Apply Tools of Trade in Ocean Search”:

The odds get longer each day, but a network of colleagues, peers, and acquaintances has picked up where the Coast Guard left off. Jim Frew, an expert at using satellite imagery in environmental science and an associate professor at the University of California at Santa Barbara, and others quickly concluded that with the right imagery and enough eyeballs, a 40-foot boat could be found on the ocean.

On the day before the Coast Guard search ended, Joseph Hellerstein, a computer science professor at the University of California at Berkeley, established a Web site (at [www.openphi.net/tenacious](http://www.openphi.net/tenacious)) devoted to the ongoing civilian effort, and researchers at the Ames Research Center, a NASA

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<sup>11</sup> <<http://www.uscg-sanfrancisco.com/go/doc/823/143156/>>, <<http://www.uscg-sanfrancisco.com/go/doc/823/143579/>> Accessed 4 February 2009.

<sup>12</sup> This phrase is the headline of an Australian newspaper account of the unsuccessful search for three men missing from their yacht, which was later found adrift off the Whitsunday islands. “Cruel Sea Refuses To Give Up Its Secrets; GHOST SHIP.” *Sydney Morning Herald* (Australia), May 5, 2007, sec. NEWS AND FEATURES; Pg. 7. A key difference between the reports of the two events (only a few months apart) is the Australian emphasis on the realization by the bereft of the “reality” of their loss, even in the absence of the men’s bodies.



unit at Moffett Field in the valley, persuaded a high-altitude aircraft pilot to change his flight plan and take high-resolution imagery of the search area. And, at the request of the group and the Coast Guard, DigitalGlobe, a satellite imaging company, redirected its satellites to capture more imagery of the search area.

One of the people volunteering to help is Werner Vogels, CTO of Amazon.com, who has written several research papers with Gray. Vogels arranged for satellite images to be uploaded to Amazon, where its engineers subdivided the huge images into smaller 400-by-400-pixel tiles that were posted to Amazon's Mechanical Turk site, which divvies up routine tasks among many people. Twelve thousand volunteers viewed blown-up versions of the tiles and in a few days inspected all of them for objects that might be a boat.

<sup>13</sup>

The problem, for the mathematicians, astronomers, network and database theorists and others, was not one of seamanship, but of data analysis. By digitizing the ocean-space in which they believed Jim Gray was located, the engineers created a virtual model that seemed to become increasingly accurate as more and more data was gathered and added. The model, visualized in the form of a grid of 400 by 400 pixel photographs could be divided among thousands of individuals for simultaneous analysis. Converting the “problem” of the ocean – its very vastness – into a finite set of data seemed to be an innovative, yet for them, familiar way to find the pixel that represented Jim Gray. In July of 2007 Gray’s wife Donna Carnes talked to Wired magazine reporter Steve Silberman, “I am determined to find out what happened to my husband,” she said. “And I am determined to find Tenacious, because she is the key to Jim, and to this strange, singular, very painful mystery.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “Technologists Apply Tools Of Trade In Ocean Search,” *INFORMATIONWEEK*, February 12, 2007, 30. <[http://www.informationweek.com/blog/main/archives/2007/02/search\\_renewed.html](http://www.informationweek.com/blog/main/archives/2007/02/search_renewed.html)> Accessed 8 February 2009.

<sup>14</sup> “Inside the High Tech Hunt for a Missing Silicon Valley Legend” <[http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/15-08/ff\\_jimgray](http://www.wired.com/techbiz/people/magazine/15-08/ff_jimgray)> Accessed 8 February 2009.

William Wordsworth, writing in 1805, barely a month after the death of his seafarer brother John, asks why “ninety-nine in a hundred of us [are] never easy in any road that travels toward peace and quietness!” and instead, “go about on such errands as we do, destroying and laying waste.” John was captain of the East Indiaman *Earl of Abergavenny* when it grounded and subsequently sank at the beginning of an outbound voyage to the East Indian colonies. John’s death only confirmed William’s opinion of the ocean as a place of death and madness, yet a successful voyage (and nothing else) would have brought the family the very “peace and quietness” that they all sought.

Herman Melville, once a sailor himself and as a writer one keenly aware of the historical potency of the ocean, has his narrator, Ishmael, speak of the intense spiritual significance of “rivers and oceans” in which humans find “the image of the ungraspable phantom of life; and this is the key to it all.”<sup>15</sup> Yet Ishmael muses on maritime New York in terms familiar to eighteenth century poets’ celebrations of London: “insular city of the Manhattoes, belted round by wharves as Indian isles by coral reefs—commerce surrounds it with her surf” as he suggests that the “the magnetic virtue of the needles of the compasses of all those ships”<sup>16</sup> and not merely the sea draws people to the shore.

When Romantic poets looked to the ocean, the tracks of countless voyages had already inscribed an historic national space of commerce, power and violence. Besides being an engine of capitalism, ships and their crews became a multi-national seafaring diaspora as they both peopled and constituted the “British Ocean.” However necessary, the threat presented by a population of seafarers whose loyalty was historically ambiguous mapped onto both the material and moral landscape of Britain. Always ambivalent, even in the aspirations of the

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<sup>15</sup> *Moby Dick; or, The Whale* (University of California Press, 1983), 3, 4.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

early empire, by the 1790's deep water voyages are re-presented in surviving characters and the domestic landscapes they inhabit. I argue that the history of the British Ocean as a phenomenally fluid space defined by the circulation of individuals and commodities as agents or units of trade destabilizes ideological projections of the nation into the sea; this in turn offers a destabilizing perspective with which to examine the texts I have chosen. This project engages recent currents in ecocriticism as well as an interdisciplinary "oceanic turn" in the humanities and social sciences by bringing a focus on the literary and historical moment when exploring and defining ocean-space influenced British culture most profoundly. The voyage motif exerts a formal influence on narrative and lyric poetry wherever the sea is represented. The sailor and the voyage accrue special historical status by at least partly occupying the space of the unknown.

My second chapter provides a context for my Romantic-era readings. "The Peopled Ocean: A Problem of Poetics, Commerce and Empire" shows how Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* and *An Essay of Dramatick Poesie* fashion the vexed history of Anglo-Dutch conflict into an aspirational history of the advent of a British maritime empire, and *Ocean, An Ode*, by Edward Young praises virtuous commerce with allegorical representations of nature showing obedient land and sea serving Britannia: together, they imagine a "British Ocean." However, these poems strain to allegorize the ocean as a productive space circumscribed by British rule; both Dryden's and Young's oceanic works betray the fluid uncertainty of the early empire. By revealing the anxieties in these poems, I argue that the ocean is increasingly abstracted from the aesthetics of Nature as articulated in the eighteenth century, even as it becomes an important imaginary space of empire. I describe the construction of ocean-space as a social space settled and controlled by Britain, and then argue that navigation plays a special role in inscribing an

aquatic cultural imaginary. Eighteenth century poetry links British commercial and political aspirations to the marine environment. Scholars have long historicized “Nature” in literature and visual art as the product of an ideology of terrestrial phenomena mediated by a political aesthetics of landscape and agriculture. Poets such as John Dryden, Edward Young, and James Thomson often presented the ocean as an elemental force subservient to the crown and the interests of Britain. The “ship of state,” the oceanic field of conquest, and the trajectory of the heroic voyage narrative each suggest an identification of British ocean and British nation. As Dustin Griffin writes, these writers “shared in regarding ‘Britain’ not as a small agricultural island protected by the sea, but as a global power in which the sylvan rural heart is seamlessly connected to the maritime empire.”<sup>17</sup> For them, the sea became, in Edward Young’s words, a “peopled ocean” occupied by English ships and sailors, and poets imagined a maritime network settling the sea much as agricultural spaces were enclosed and put to production in England and the colonies. The sublime terrors of the sea were then second to the sublime majesty of the Crown and Trade.

In my third chapter, “The ‘British Ocean’ Unmanned: Coleridge, the Traffic and Pure Imagination,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s “Rime of the Ancient Mariner” confronts the “British Ocean” of the 1790’s and presents the career of Britain’s maritime enterprise as a prolonged national shipwreck. I argue that Coleridge’s poem enacts a mythic “voyage of origins” that has deep affinities with eighteenth-century patriotic discourse such as James Thomson’s *Alfred* and Edmund Burke’s conservative writings. The voyage is interrupted when the Mariner’s ship is becalmed in tropical seas. The crew of the mariner’s “ship of state” becomes a zombified mob with the potential to invade and contaminate England’s heartland. Emptied of the possibility

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<sup>17</sup> Dustin Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57.

for redemption, the Mariner's sea story satirically reflects the patriot poet's mythology. I read the "Rime" together with Thomas Clarkson's abolitionist writings, contemporary accounts of vodoun, obeah and slave rebellion in Saint Dominque and mutinies aboard Royal Navy vessels. The legacy of Britain's maritime nation and the oceanic circulation of trade, including the slave trade, is a sea of nightmares breaking on English shores. In poetry and visual art, the sea voyage – as an event with a specific material and ideological teleology – is constitutive of an aesthetic of the sea that otherwise corresponds in many ways to terrestrial representations. However, where land remains relatively stable in meaning and substance, the "sea story" contains frequent and fatal interruptions: shipwreck, stranding, becalming and mutiny are constant and essential forces that produce an oceanic imaginary that is ideologically volatile. Additionally, besides being an engine of capitalism, historically ships and their crews have been an unstable and multi-national seafaring diaspora as they both peopled and constituted the "British Ocean." The aporiae of interrupted voyages represent epistemological crises often figured as a becalmed ship, a ruined or castaway sailor, or the revolt of a mutinous crew.

By the end of the century, a strikingly different vision of the British Ocean emerges in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's "Rime of the Ancient Mariner." This poem, perhaps the most well-known sea story written in English, begins as a ballad of national glory, but becomes an agonizingly prolonged national shipwreck. In Coleridge's tale, the "peopled ocean" is inhabited by spectral creatures of the British colonial imagination. More tellingly, the poem represents the oceanic environment as one in which the colonial narrative falters and dies: imperial motility is reduced to helpless drifting; the transparent ocean (made legible by technologies of cartography, navigation and seamanship) becomes opaque, halting the Mariner's voyage until unexplained oceanic "spirits" propel the ship back to its home port.

William Wordsworth's *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* and *Prelude* are at the center of my fourth chapter, "'The Sea, the Real Sea': Nature and the Oceanic Gaze." I read the major poems with early poetic fragments, short poems, and the letters and journals of Dorothy Wordsworth and their sailor brother, John. John was the financial hope of the family and for them a heroic figure whose commission with the East India Company brought Britain's commercial empire into the Wordsworth family circle. Wordsworth's early work shows him developing a poetics of sublimity by imitating gothic images of terror; the sea and deep water are often employed as metaphysical figures for vastness or infinity. Character and landscape both dramatize the ocean as *Adventures on Salisbury Plain* brings the oceanic to the center of England in the *Sailor* and the *Female Vagrant* as well as the plain itself. Despite the importance of Wordsworth's rivers, streams, and bounded water to cleanse and renew, the "devouring" sea looms at the edges (borders) of his imagination. Not-Nature, and potentially atheist, the ocean threatens concepts of individuation, consciousness, and redemption that are based in the traditions of Western and Christian thought. There is a long tradition in Western thought of the sea representing an antagonist to terrestrial divinity. Christopher Connery points out the way that post-modern capital "dematerializes" the ocean as part of its long project of concealment of its spatial and social character.<sup>18</sup> In earlier chapters I have argued that oceanic representations across the eighteenth century are destabilized by attempts to elide the materiality of the sea for ideological ends. Dryden and Young's attempts to conceptualize the sea are ambiguous to the extent that their poems try to adopt the phenomenally material ocean in the service of national or imperial ideology; Coleridge's "Ancient Mariner" dramatizes the deadly consequences of the sea as a field of national influence with the wreck of the ship-of-state. Historically, artistic

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<sup>18</sup> "There was No More Sea: the Supersession of the Ocean, from the Bible to Cyberspace," *Journal of Historical Geography* 32, no. 3 (July 2006): 498.

representations that invoke the materiality of the sea often do so in order to oppose oceanic chaos to terrestrial creation, so as to define culture and order. But more than this, Connery argues, “the sea is too material, too spatial, too present, to be merely metaphorical. The antithetical quality of the sea seems to be more than a defining opposite, but rather [a] pure antithesis.”<sup>19</sup> The antithetical nature of the ocean resists consolidation into ideological constructions such as “Nature” but insistently announces its presence.

By “thinking” the sea, maritime, or oceanic, studies want to gain a vantage point from which to further critique the spatial character of human history and culture, “the terrestrial character of knowledge disciplines and administrative practice.”<sup>20</sup> Timothy Morton is trying to develop a poetics of the environment that will release ecological writing from the constraint of generations of idealizations of Nature. His idea of “ambience” seems to me similar to the qualities of the “oceanic” suggested by Connery and some other scholars pursuing the “oceanic turn” in literary and cultural studies. Morton criticizes and calls upon Romanticism to explore the “construction of worlds and environments that situate the thinking mind.” I have long thought that, before the 1950’s and the popularization of oceanographic films by Jacques Cousteau and the early environmental activism of Rachel Carson, notably in *The Sea Around Us*, the ocean did not “count” as nature to the Anglo-American mind. Now I want to turn that around to notice how the sea does figure, especially in Romantic writing. Morton writes:

"Ecology without nature" could mean "ecology without a concept of the natural." Thinking, when it becomes ideological, tends to fixate on concepts rather than doing what is "natural" to thought, namely dissolving whatever has taken form. Ecological thinking

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 499.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 497.

that was not fixated, that did not stop at a particular concretization of its object would thus be "without nature."<sup>21</sup>

By dropping the words “ecology” and “ecological” and perhaps adding “ocean” and “oceanic” Morton’s formulation becomes a useful way to think about how the ocean imposes on Nature, and how its antithetical nature might be turned to critical advantage.

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<sup>21</sup> Timothy Morton, *Ecology Without Nature: Rethinking Environmental Aesthetics* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2007), 24.



## CHAPTER 2

### The Peopled Ocean: A Problem of Poetics, Commerce and Empire

Eighteenth century representations of seafaring and the ocean link English (and then British) commercial and political aspirations to the natural, material environment. Such expressions as “ship of state,” the oceanic field of conquest, and the voyage narrative each suggest an identification of ocean and Britain and are easily found throughout early-modern English texts.<sup>22</sup> In the period from the restoration of Charles II to the defeat of Napoleon at Waterloo, certain texts register a set of complex problems with oceanic representation and the relationship of the individual to the nation. English poets imagined a maritime network settling the sea much as agricultural spaces were enclosed and put to production in England and the colonies. Instead of the plow turning fertile soil, the bows of British ships cut furrows in the sea and returned to England laden with a rich harvest of exotic goods.

The British trading fleet expanded rapidly during the seventeenth century. Cromwell’s Anglo-Dutch war of 1652-54 “had the effect of reconstituting the English merchant fleet, providing it with ships which could compete with Dutch and Scandinavians. The number of ships taken from the Dutch was enormous—the lowest contemporary estimate is 1,000 ships—and English losses were very much smaller.”<sup>23</sup> The English were poised to become major players in international trade, and even with the considerable losses from the 1665-60 war with Spain, by 1689 the merchant fleet has almost tripled over its level of 1629.<sup>24</sup> The cargo ship,

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<sup>22</sup> The “ship of state” and similar tropes are recorded in Phoenician and ancient Egyptian texts as well as Greco-Roman classical sources familiar to English scholars of the period.

<sup>23</sup> Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1962), 12.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

the naval ship of the line, and the voyage itself were rapidly assimilated into an iconography of commerce, trade, and virtuous domination of the seas by Britain. Poems whose titles and subjects include “commerce” “navigation” “trade” and “ocean” proliferate throughout the eighteenth century.<sup>25</sup>

Imaginative and ideologically freighted writing about the sea did not originate with the Restoration; William Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*, written around 1612, is a well-known example of adapting contemporary voyage narratives for artistic uses. But the beginnings of systematic mercantile capitalism and uncertainties surrounding the orderly operation of government in England following the return of Charles II and the decades after led poets to accentuate some of the moral, ethical and ideological difficulties of empire building in their work. Even in the overtly panegyric verse of John Dryden and Edward Young, the ocean resists representation in ways that are easily assigned ideological duties within the developing mercantile-naval empire of their moment.

John Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis: The Year of Wonders, 1666. An Historical Poem* (1667), projects an “aspirational” history from shortly following the events represented, but well before there could have been any real confidence in the outcome; it predicts a unified national and imperial scene that only imaginative verse can represent as a *fait accompli*. Formal consequences of oceanic representation, by which I mean the reciprocal influence of representations of water and of human activity connected with water, push the pressure and fluidity of the ocean into the poem, undermining its apparent controlling tropes of loyalty, unity and national success, and diluting the poem’s confidence in its prophesy. Edward Young’s *Ocean, An Ode* (1728) imagines a “peopled ocean” productively occupied by England’s

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<sup>25</sup> C. A. Moore, “Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760,” *PMLA* 41, no. 2 (June 1926): 362-401.

merchant ships and sailors and carefully distinguish greed from virtuous gain, but leave the lyric speaker troublingly exposed to the dangers of the voyage. Ocean strangely and dramatically ends with the speaker exhausted by the busy world of international trade, opting for seclusion and pastoral retirement.

In these poems' failures to sustain their rhetoric and in their forms of oceanic representation I read an unavoidable, if accidental aspect of these poetic attempts to represent the nature of ocean and trade in the same poem. These works participate in an ideological project which wishes to equate their images of the elemental material essence of the sea (the determination of which is itself an ideological project) with the heroic actions of sailors and ships, on one hand, and merchant-adventurers and Royal administration on the other. These features of these poems represent some important early efforts in English at natural descriptive poetry that involves the sea as part of the creation of a national identity that became an oceanic ideology.

These poems exist in addition to the hundreds of patriotic (or just bawdy) street ballads and "lesser" poems by jingoist versifiers such as William Lisle Bowles, Henry James Pye and James Stanier Clarke which, though popular, are less sensitive to the contradictory, hidden, difficult, and deeply problematic nature of oceanic poetry in England. What the poems of Young and Dryden succeed at doing, like the others, is imagining an English character and a national identity bound to the sea, but not in the manner of the facile patriotism of Clarke or Pye. When James Thomson imbues his lush landscape descriptions in the Seasons with the unmistakable qualities of British virtue, he is pushing this project further towards later Romantic engagements with nature of Cowper, Smith, Coleridge, and Wordsworth.

According to the title, *Annus Mirabilis*<sup>26</sup> “contains” and “describes” the events of the year, and even though Edward Hooker calls it an “act of inspired journalism,”<sup>27</sup> the poem performs an analytic and prophetic function as much as it chronicles what had just happened in the coastal waters of Britain. Over half the text is concerned with representing the sea war fought by England against the Netherlands in the summer of 1665, and the remainder relates the devastating London fire of September 1666 and the responses of the King and subjects in the aftermath.

The war was actually a disaster for the English fleet and many of the issues for which the war was fought would not be settled until the Treaty of Utrecht of 1713, or later still. However, *Annus Mirabilis* imagines Britain as a unified mercantile and oceanic empire emerging from its trials stronger and more virtuous than before. The poem’s doubly catastrophic narrative of destruction by water and fire shows the English nation surviving both recorded and predicted biblical apocalypses and rising like a pelagic phoenix to its new place in the world. Some scholars studying the genesis of the text suggest that the account of the fire may have been a second thought, but the shift from the sea battles to the burning city of London creates important dramatic and thematic movement.<sup>28</sup> The elemental instability of the sea parallels the conflagration ashore, and while eventual victory is assured by the wise leadership of the king in both cases, in the latter the common people of London are exhorted to match the heroism of the sea lords and admirals in battle. The naval war, in this version

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<sup>26</sup> Complete title: *Annus Mirabilis: The Year of WONDERS, 1666. An Historical POEM: Containing The Progress and various Successes of our Naval War with Holland, under the Conduct of His Highness Prince Rupert, and His Grace the Duke of Albemarl. And describing The Fire of LONDON.* (London: Henry Herringman, 1667).

<sup>27</sup> Edward N. Hooker, “The Purpose of Dryden’s “*Annus Mirabilis*,”” *The Huntington Library Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (November 1946): 49-67.

<sup>28</sup> John Dryden, *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1649-1680*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker and H. T. Swedenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956), 257.

decisively won by Britain, offers a heroic typology for defeating the fire and ultimately spreading a particularly maritime version of heroic Britishness across the sea.

A nation, writes Howard Weinbrot, determines its identity “slowly and by accident more than by design.”<sup>29</sup> Critics have read *Annus Mirabilis* as an aggressive imperial panegyric helping to create as well as describe the maritime empire.<sup>30</sup> For them, Dryden is an early voice in an ongoing cultural effort “regarding ‘Britain’ not as a small agricultural island protected by the sea, but as a global power in which the sylvan rural heart is seamlessly connected to the maritime commercial empire.”<sup>31</sup> Like earlier works by Marvell and Waller, Suvir Kaul argues, Dryden’s poems “emphasize naval and military strength, economic necessity and benefit, and scientific advance in their looking forward to English dominance of the seas (and thus the globe).”<sup>32</sup> Referring to *Annus Mirabilis*, the editors of Dryden’s *Works* agree: “[t]rade is the subject of the beginning stanzas, and the wealth and power of London and of the kingdom, secured though trade, is the prophetic vision with which the poem closes.”<sup>33</sup> This is certainly true, but Dryden’s England was far from secure in its hopes for dominance in trade or naval power, and *Annus Mirabilis* arose in and participates in a discursive scene of argument and confusion.

Another reading can account for the poem’s immediate engagement with its audience while exploring the affective undercurrents of its oceanic imagery. Michael McKeon calls attention to Dryden’s dramatization of his rhetorical strategy in *Annus Mirabilis*, and cautions critics who are too quickly taken in by the poem’s didactic position: “When Dryden defines the

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<sup>29</sup> Howard D Weinbrot, *Britannia's Issue: The Rise of British Literature from Dryden to Ossian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 1.

<sup>30</sup> Suvir Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire : English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000).

<sup>31</sup> Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry*, 57.

<sup>32</sup> Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire*, 45.

<sup>33</sup> Dryden, *Works*, I, 257.

literary kind within which he will perform, he simultaneously defines for his readers both the way he will persuade them and the way he will – in the cause of better persuasion – create the illusion of writing nonrhetorically [...] Dryden both intends to write a historical poem and intends to write a work that will be taken as a historical poem by his reader.”<sup>34</sup> I don’t wish to overstate the element of irony in Dryden’s heroic historical poem, but taking McKeon’s suggestion helps to lead my reading away from those critics whose interpretation of the poem as imperial panegyric are bound to insist too strenuously on a lack of ambivalence. *Annus Mirabilis* is not satire, quite, but it does require that we read it as a certain kind of text without believing fully in what that text says: that we appreciate its political content with a detachment sufficient to watch it work without reacting to or accepting uncritically its apparent “heroic” context.

Laura Brown writes that the promise of the successful imperial voyage at the end of the poem comes amidst a disturbing realization of the nature of the difficulties of the voyage, which mirror a poetic conception of the nature of the sea:

linked images: the conjunction of a conception of “fate” with the figure of a fluid waterway—a torrent, a tossing sea, a foaming main; the projection of a world of global compass within which that nautical fate is performed; the evocation of a contrastive structure of fear and hope, joy and frailty, glory and loss provoked by that fluid, rushing, or restless fate; and the conditional assertion of a state of tranquility in the midst of that headlong waterway—the wishful vision of a maritime calm.”<sup>35</sup>

*Annus Mirabilis*, despite lines lauding the king’s careful consideration before entering the war, rushes ahead describing event following event. The uneasy sense of a new world opening up and opening up quickly – perhaps too quickly for prudence – fills the poem. Brown

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<sup>34</sup> *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 7-8.

<sup>35</sup> *Fables of Modernity*, 56.

writes elsewhere about a “paradox of the imperial imagination,” “where the connection of hope with fear seems to reflect an anxiety about imperial destiny, or even an ambivalence about the peace and benevolism that accompanied the imperialist apologia of the period.”<sup>36</sup> Edwin Hooker argued that the poem was “part of a pamphlet-war. Dryden gave the official point of view dignity and prestige by setting it forth in skillful verse,”<sup>37</sup> but despite extensively studying the participants in the war of ideas Hooker does not register the effect of that turbulence in Dryden’s poem. Other poems participating in “imperialist apologia” deliver their message with varying degrees of skill, but with little evidence of reflection, and no time for ambivalence. The generic features of the historical poem would seem to proscribe critique or irony, requiring instead the glorification of heroic actions. It is difficult to separate aesthetic reflectiveness in *Annus Mirabilis* from, for instance, the of classical and panegyric tropes, set-pieces, and allusions, that are the generic materials of the poem. The reflective position is not dramatized by the poem as it is for Edward Young’s *Ocean*, by an image of the poetic speaker rejecting direct observation of events for a pastoral cottage and a contemplative existence.

Before the war with the Dutch begins, the poem portrays a cautious, thoughtful Charles

II ruling wisely over a restless people:

The loss and gain each fatally were great;  
And still his subjects call’d aloud for war:  
But peaceful King’s o’r martial people set,  
Each others poize and counter-balance are. (St. 12)

This stanza suggests a kingdom in balance, reflecting the neo-classical ideal of concordia discors. It is more likely that the newly restored Charles II was pressured by his brother James, then Duke of York, to promote the war over the objections of his Chancellor, Edward Hyde,

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<sup>36</sup> “Dryden and the Imperial Imagination,” in *The Cambridge Companion to John Dryden*, ed. Steven N. Zwicker, Cambridge companions to literature (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 73.

<sup>37</sup> “The Purpose of Dryden’s “*Annus Mirabilis*,”” 67.

Earl of Clarendon. International and domestic politics were chaotic. Mark Kishlansky's gritty account of the political scene in 1666 leaves no doubt as to the scene from which Dryden's poetic intervention emerged:

Foreign policy was conducted on few principles other than opportunism. French and Spanish ambassadors were little more than bagmen for their princes, deputed to put as many ministers as possible on the payroll. Royal navies were indistinguishable from pirates; the fleets of trading companies behaved no differently from invading forces. The European powers formed and broke alliances with such regularity that the diplomatic marriages they made were as worthless as counterfeit coin. Monarchs lived openly with their mistresses as if to traduce the kings and princes whose daughters they married. The world was like a playground filled with bullies spoiling for a fight. Every imagined slight was interpreted as a provocation – a matter of personal dignity for the monarch and of national pride for his people.<sup>38</sup>

Edward Adams was a London merchant who lost a ship to the Dutch, and was one of the signatories on a complaint read to Parliament in 1664. Far from calling for war, Adams wrote:

To me it seems not rational for any intelligent Merchants to be forward to that War, the maine dispute and decision whereof must be argued at Sea, the place where he is most concerned, and to the inconveniencies and hazards attending such a War the Merchant of all others is most obnoxious. If any such Merchants there be, that are so Warlike, and promise to themselves great gain by Trading in troubled waters; I do declare my self to be none of them.<sup>39</sup>

Simply put, the war was disastrous to English trade, and was never supported by the majority of the mercantile community. By 1665 a labor shortage had developed because of merchant seamen being pressed into men-of-war; because Charles had no ships to spare, he could not offer convoy protection to traders that did choose to sail. As a result many were captured by

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<sup>38</sup> Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed : Britain, 1603-1714* (London: Allen Lane, 1996), 237.

<sup>39</sup> *Brief Relation* (1664), 12-13. Quoted in Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 119.



Dutch privateers.<sup>40</sup> Following the fire, preachers warned their congregations that apocalyptic ruin was an angry god's response to urban luxury and excess.

Sophie Gee examines the meaningful anxieties over consumption and waste in poetry written after the fire. She notes fears that "London's trade and industry, improperly regulated, might quite literally turn the city into a wasteland. Robert Elborough seems to have had that very thought in mind when he asked his congregation: 'What are become of your Houses, Shops, Goods, Estates and Warehouses, when you could not keep them from being destroyed, and they could not keep your houses from being consumed?'"<sup>41</sup> While the poem ends with a vision of a stable empire and profitable flow of goods to London and commercial power out to the world, the destruction of London also destroyed financial centers and markets, further hindering commercial trade that was already suffering; the war itself had greatly disrupted commercial shipping. Given the actual resistance to the war among both merchants and common people, the disastrous results of the war to English trade and to England's naval fleet, and the fact that at the time of composition even calling the war a draw was wishful thinking, the poem offers at best conditional support for the war, and looks instead to the rebuilding of the fleet and the city of London as parallel events and the hopes for a future founded on rational principles and commerce as the true subject of the poem.

Dryden's chronicle is fiercely public and performative, subsuming the population of England under the figure of the King, and melding the King and the British ocean into one corporate body. In the last stanzas the omniscient journalistic narration disappears to bring the reader aboard the ship of state with the speaker and the collective identity of the nation.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 119-21.

<sup>41</sup> Sophie Gee, "The Invention of the Wasteland: Civic Narrative and Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis*," *Eighteenth-Century Life* 29, no. 1 (2005): 85. Gee quotes Robert Elborough, *London's Calamity by Fire bewailed and improved in a Sermon preached at St. James Dukes-Place wherein the judgments of God are asserted* (London: Dorman Newman, 1666), 23.

Already we have conquer'd half the War,  
And the less dang'rous part is left behind:  
Our trouble now is but to make them dare,  
And not so great to vanquish as to find

Thus to the Eastern wealth through storms we go;  
But now, the Cape once doubled, fear no more:  
A constant Trade-wind will securely blow,  
And gently lay us on the Spicy shore. (St. 303-04)

Once doubling the Cape—the Cape of Good Hope, which ships had to pass before beginning the long journey to India and the “east,” the imaginary region of storms and threat is left behind. The speaker projects into the future and the past, telling a story of struggle and triumph which ends as a long, safe and constant voyage.

Annus Mirabilis is a crux between pre-modern and modern worlds. England cannot allow the United Provinces to retain the upper hand in the new commercial order, nor can the honor of King and country accept real or imagined Dutch insults. War is the traditional response of the aristocratic government, yet reason dictates that an expensive fight will cost ships and men, and disrupt the very trade that is at stake. The Royal Society signals a dedication to rational, scientific thought and in the poem Dryden predicts that through the discoveries of the Society England will seize control of the seas and of the future. However, the war will be fought. A renewed City and merchant fleet is what moves England into the utopian vision that closes the poem.

The ambiguity and ironic stance of the poem powerfully registers the terror of defining one's-self by relation to the sea: individually and collectively, the terror of drowning, of disintegration, of fluidity. Such contradictions find their way into content and form; the a-b-a-b interlocking couplets of the “Gondibert” stanza superimpose closed heroic couplets over one another like two dissenting theses in a state of tension. The solidity of consecutive heroic

couplets is thereby broken although the discrete stanzas retain a sense of controlled action. The past and future cannot fit: “Annus Mirabilis thus celebrates a contradictory equation of neofeudal absolutism and bourgeois imperialism, providential order and economic individualism, monarchy and empiricist science, the values of the past and the ideals of the future.”<sup>42</sup> I agree with Laura Brown’s identification of the “contradictory equation” in *Annus Mirabilis* but I differ from saying that the poem celebrates its contradictions; rather, in ways similar to the romantic-era poems of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth that I will take up later, I think that Dryden’s poetic form is irrepressibly resistant to ideological coherence.<sup>43</sup> Elsewhere Brown writes that Dryden’s poetry “offers no reconciliation of past and future, nor even an explanation of their divergence. [...] these lines open a space between incompatible meanings.”<sup>44</sup> In British culture of the eighteenth century this imaginary plenum is at all times filled with water; crossing, owning or even knowing that space comes with material and moral risks for nation and for the individual.

The ocean appears to be an active participant in international affairs and a force in the sea battles that make up the first half of the poem, but the loyalty of the sea is never quite settled; the quality of oceanic agency is contradictory: offering assistance, and yet harboring deadly dangers for both the Dutch and English fleets. Within the first few stanzas, the Dutch are accused of perverting nature by stagnating the free flow of goods and hoarding the riches of African and Indian colonies. Commerce, human blood, and sea water are pulled together in the first line of the second stanza, indicating the essentiality of trade to life, and of the sea to trade:

Trade, which like bloud should circularly flow,  
 Stop’d in their Channels, found its freedom lost:  
 Thither the wealth of all the world did go,

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<sup>42</sup> Laura Brown, “The Ideology of Restoration Poetic Form: John Dryden,” *PMLA* 97, no. 3 (May 1982): 399.

<sup>43</sup> Trying to theorize this resistance to ideological coherence as the “oceanic” in British poetry.

<sup>44</sup> “The Ideology of Restoration Poetic Form,” 396.

And seem'd but shipwrack'd on so base a Coast.

For them alone the Heav'ns had kindly heat,  
In Eastern Quarries ripening precious Dew:  
For them the Idumæan balm did sweat,  
And in hot Celion Spicy Forests grew. (St. 2-3)

Trade flows “like blood” in a liquid simile that references the tides, the heart, and human life. The sea is the blood on which oceanic trade circulates, and Dutch ambition has become like a strangulation preventing natural commercial circulation throughout the global body. London should be the heart-pump of free global trade, and the Dutch monopoly stops circulation, starving England of what, Dryden wants to say, should be the life-blood of Britain. Of course proper circulation here would mean a robust flow of economic blood to England rather than, not in addition to, the United Provinces: “What peace can be where both to one pretend?” (21).

On another level, commodities are imagined like political subjects stripped of liberty, long a crucial component of English self-definition against Europe and elsewhere. Trade itself is the life blood of Britain but trade “found its freedom lost,” while the Heavens, the Quarries, the Idumæan trees and Ceylon’s forests all are compelled to produce “wealth” for one nation: “For them alone” (11). “Freedom” would allow English trading companies to collect the precious objects and products that currently are the exclusive right of the Dutch. Curiously, the trees, mines, and forests of the East are all depicted as spontaneously productive; with no “Eastern” people to contend with, the question is left to the Dutch and English to decide.

The next stanza continues to characterize the Dutch monopoly on the oceans as an unnatural enslavement of the elements:

The Sun but seem'd the Lab'rer of their Year;  
Each waxing Moon suppli'd her watry store,  
To swell those Tides, which from the Line did bear  
Their brim-full Vessels to the Belg'an shore.” (St. 4)

In this strange picture of the sun, moon, and sea, with astounding hubris the United Provinces has made slaves of Phoebus and Diana. The sun labors through the zodiacal year, turning the seasonal wheel and in Ptolemaic cosmology, circling the earth regularly. Here, the sun is only the “Lab’rer of their Year” – as if time had stopped for the English with the circulation of trade. It seems as if the Dutch are moving ahead, into the future, while the English are stagnant. Labor and progress are crucial to the georgic theme of *Annus Mirabilis*, most notably in the “Apostrophe to the Royal Society” following stanza 145.

“Each waxing Moon”, another suggestion of the passage of time, supplies “her watry store” to increase the tidal depth necessary for the Dutch treasure fleet to navigate their market ports. This is another point at which the ocean appears to be serving the United Provinces rather than “everyone”—again, meaning England. The tidal theory current at the time was that sea water was “compressed” by lunar “pressure” (rather than gravitational attraction) and pushed toward the poles. Dryden’s complaint is that these natural benefits unfairly accrue only to the ships of the United Provinces. In his lunar metaphor the effect of the tidal pressure is also fortuitous for the Dutch in propelling their ships from “the Line” or the equator, which one can almost imagine “surfing” the tidal wave towards the Netherlands.

The moral result of all these “unnatural” natural advantages is that Dutch ships are excessively loaded, overstuffed: “brim-full,” requiring swollen tides to lift them across the shoals guarding the “Belg’an” (then the Netherlands’) market ports. The ships are gluttonous, luxuriously effeminate and suspiciously dependent on the work of sun and moon to get them home. “Brim-full vessels” are glasses of wine or tankards of ale in danger of spilling during a raucous orgy or feast – the kind of decadent scene that belongs to the fall of an empire, not its ascendancy. Worse, the Dutch are accused of squandering their wealth by keeping it to

themselves like misers; their imports “seem’d but shipwrack’d” while England, if she could, would promote the virtuous circulation of wealth and prosperity.

Here the ocean is clearly no longer the ultimate barrier, protecting England from invaders, nor a void space for individual adventure, but a contestable and contested zone with a political agency that can be swayed by the power of one nation or another. The atmospheric and oceanic elements are serving the Dutch side at the beginning, but when Charles II asserts England’s claim they will join him in the war to follow, suggesting that the heavens and waters can made to serve one power over another in a monopoly that could someday again exclude the British. At best, the capriciousness of the sea in *Annus Mirabilis* points to the real dangers for any – nation or individual – who ventures “t’assert the watery Ball” (53). In all events, the Dutch have the upper hand in claiming a modern maritime identity because they have possession of the tools and field of progress—technical, social, and commercial. The poem begins with the lines, “In thriving Arts long time had Holland grown, / Crouching at home, and cruel when abroad: / Scarce leaving us the means to claim our own” (1-3).

The Battle of Lowestoft, the first engagement of the war, fought on 13 June 1665,<sup>45</sup> is only briefly sketched; the poem relates the events of the day in just five stanzas. The early British victory allows the poem to introduce the “Actions and Actors,” in a conventionally heroic scene. The battle scene dramatizes the proper and natural state that a strong king and a powerful navy should ensure, with the ocean now answering the English call. Charles is monarch of his navy and the seas, and when after lengthy consideration he chose to enter the war:

At length resolv’d t’ assert the watery Ball,  
He in himself did whole Armado’s bring:

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<sup>45</sup> 3 June 1665 in the “old” style calendar; for simplicity, I use “new style” dates throughout.

Him, aged Sea-men might their Master call,  
And choose for General were he not their King. (St. 14)

A fleet in himself, Charles's charismatic presence draws ships and seamen to his aid. Here, Dryden is careful to imply the King's support among the population and especially the naval veterans who may have fought in Cromwell's Anglo-Dutch war a little more than a decade before. The poem affirms that Charles II is not a tyrant, and that his personal attraction draws men to him, "Him, aged Sea-men might their Master call, / And choose for General – were he not their King." "General" can be a synonym for "Admiral" and it probably is here, but it is interesting that both "Armado" and "General" are words that include a collective and a singular, or superlative in their meaning. An army has a "General" as its commander but the "general" good applies to all. Also, an "Armado" or "armada" can be either a fleet or a single ship. A major concern of the poem is fusing the interests of the King and the people in a progressive and reciprocal fashion; there's a sense in these lines that Charles is king and subjects at once, and by the assent of the people. For him to be recognized as such by "aged Sea-men" suggests that his legitimacy is recognized by the wise, by the careful, by the rational thinkers and not the enthusiasm of youth or the narrow interests of courtiers. It does not suggest a popular republican candidate, but the people's recognition of Charles as rightful King.

The war is for the British right to the sea against unfair encroachment: for the English, their historical destiny, which has been impeded by the Dutch. However, for England, destiny has to be earned; as discussed above, the Dutch come by their wealth too easily, it is unnatural, and unappreciated. The poem is careful to highlight performances of English virtue, often to undercut them later. Even heaven's blessing has to be solemnized by sacrifice:

But since it was decreed, Auspicious King,

In Britain's right that thou should'st wed the Main,  
Heav'n, as a gage, would cast some precious thing  
And therefore doom'd that Lawson should be slain. (St. 20)

"Britain's right" is the proper claim to the sea – Charles again acts as the body of his subjects and what he does fulfills the proper legal claim of Britain. Here is another assertion of both the legitimacy of Stuart rule, and of the legitimate claim to oceanic empire for England. Instead of the wedding ring dropped into the Mediterranean in the Venetian ceremonial marriage of city and sea, heaven takes Vice Admiral John Lawson, who died as a result of wounds suffered aboard the Royal Oak, as the sacrificial pledge joining the sea and the state, in the body of the King.

Lawson amongst the formost met his fate,  
Whom Sea-green Syrens from the Rocks lament:  
Thus as an offering for the Grecian state,  
He first was kill'd who first to Battel went. (St. 21)

Lawson's "fate" is linked to the "state" by his sacrifice and the rhyming pair makes that only more clear. The lines also reiterate the uncomfortable proximity of fate and state that lie beneath the surface of this "heroic" poem: again, the "contrastive structure of fear and hope, joy and frailty, glory and loss."<sup>46</sup>

Sir John Lawson's characterization as the "precious thing" sacrificed for the monarchy and the new empire is worth examining more closely. Lawson is remembered as a religious and political radical, friend of Leveller MP John Wildman, and lifelong champion of common seamen and soldiers. His audacity, skillful seamanship and popularity with the lower decks suggest a prototype of Horatio Nelson. He was master of a collier when the civil war broke out and he quickly offered his services to Parliament. He distinguished himself repeatedly during the Commonwealth and was appointed Vice-Admiral of the Red during the first Anglo-Dutch

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<sup>46</sup> Brown, *Fables of Modernity*, 56.



war in 1652. In 1660 he reluctantly accepted the Restoration, “By April Lawson at last realized that the republic was bankrupt and that of the choices facing the country—anarchy, military dictatorship, or monarchy—the last was the least worst. Still, his reluctant acceptance of the Restoration was a necessary condition of its smooth achievement; he alone commanded the loyalty of the Channel Fleet” (DNB). Lawson was fighting in the Mediterranean when the second Anglo-Dutch war began, and was recalled to England by James, duke of York. He was promoted to Vice Admiral and in the Lowestoft battle, he was hit in the knee by a musket ball and died of gangrene on the 29<sup>th</sup> of June, at Greenwich. In his will he left £100 “to the poor of Scarborough which was eventually used to buy a site for a hospital for superannuated seamen and the widows of seamen” (DNB).<sup>47</sup>

Lawson’s popularity among the officers and sailors of the fleet ensured his survival after the return and restoration of Charles II. The Cavalier Parliament sought his imprisonment, but the King and Duke of York recognized that Lawson alone could deliver the fleet. In Dryden’s poem, among all the casualties of the war, only Lawson is mourned by the “Sea-green Syrens” (82), inhabitants of the deep and personifications of the ocean and its dangers. “Precious” as a seaman and commander but also as a popular leader among a fleet that was constantly on the verge of mutiny—and whose cause he often supported—Lawson was an invaluable asset, but also an ambiguous character. He is connected with the sea in ways that the other admirals, mostly generals of the army who went late to sea, are not, and he possessed a history of individual heroism in service to conflicting masters. To Charles, Lawson may have not have been an enemy, but he must have been a friend one wanted to keep very close. He

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<sup>47</sup> “Oxford DNB article: Lawson, Sir John,” n.d., <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16202>. Accessed 10 July 2009.

personifies the danger, opportunity, and indeterminacy of the ocean, and his loss so early in the war cannot bode well for England.

The stanzas describing the fight between the Duke of York's flagship Royal Charles and the Eendracht further connect Lawson to the sea, distinguishing between his fate and that of the Dutch commander Van Obdam. Lawson's ship was nearby when the Eendracht exploded, killing Admiral Van Obdam and all but five of the crew. At that point the battle of Lowestoft turned decisively for the English. Referring to the unfortunate Dutch Admiral,

Their Chief blown up, in air, not waves expir'd,  
To which his pride presum'd to give the Law.  
The Dutch confess'd Heav'n present and retir'd,  
And all was Britain the wide Ocean saw.

To nearest Ports their shatter'd Ships repair,  
Where by our dreadful Canon they lay aw'd:  
So reverently men quit the open air  
When thunder speaks the angry Gods abroad. (St. 22-23)

Hubristic Van Obdam, representative of his nation and presuming to give the law to the waves, in a weird grotesque image, dies aloft after the explosion, while Lawson is taken by the sea. The Dutch withdrew after they "confess'd Heav'n present." Heaven supports the British and heaven supports the king. The distinction is clear: although Charles is supported by Parliament, his absolute rule is ratified by Divine Right, rather than by "Law." Similarly, England wishes to rule the waves absolutely, not negotiate laws.

Dryden used the Lowestoft battle in the *Essay of Dramatick Poesie* (1668) to create the frame narrative for his floating literary debate. In that instance, "that memorable day, in the first Summer of the late War,"<sup>48</sup> the victory at sea bolsters the victory both for Dryden and for English literature over ancient and European competitors, and the sound of guns heard by the

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<sup>48</sup> *The Works of John Dryden: Prose, 1668-1691: An Essay of Dramatick Poesie and Shorter Works*, ed. Samuel Holt Monk and A. E. Wallace Maurer (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), 8.

four friends on the Thames reinforces the argument. When it seems that the battle has ended, the gentlemen remark on the quieting of the guns: "Eugenius lifting up his head, and taking notice of it, was the first who congratulated to the rest that happy Omen of our Nations Victory"<sup>49</sup> The happy omen of victory for the nation is a dark one for literature, as Crites complains that now the battle is over, there would undoubtedly follow "so many ill verses as he was sure would be made on that Subject,"<sup>50</sup> a flood of "ill verse" or poetasters' hastily written accounts of the battle.

Dryden notes the attraction, and perhaps the temptation, of writing verse glorifying war in the letter to Sir Robert Howard: "I found myself so warm in celebrating the praises of military men, two such especially as the Prince and General, that it is no wonder if they inspir'd me with thoughts above my ordinary level."<sup>51</sup> The panegyrics that actually were produced immediately after the Lowestoft battle were unequivocal in declaring victory, yet Dryden waited to produce a war poem for seventeen months before he completed *Annus Mirabilis*.<sup>52</sup> Also, although Lowestoft was an immediate naval victory for England, the failure to pursue and destroy the Dutch allowed their fleet to reach friendly ports, refit, and return in much greater numbers the next year: "To nearest Ports their shatter'd Ships repair" (89). It was, as Daniel Ennis argues, a "tactical" and not a "strategic" victory for England. By the time Dryden was working on this poem that sad fact would have been known. Tellingly, in the Essay, the end of the battle is called a "Happy Omen" but not a sure triumph for England. Quoting James Winn's *John Dryden and his World* (New Haven, Yale UP: 1987), Ennis writes,

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<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> "An account of the ensuing Poem," Dryden, *Works*, I, 52.

<sup>52</sup> Several examples of early poems celebrating the English "victory" are cited in Daniel J. Ennis, "Tactical Victory: Dryden's Essay of Dramatic Poesy and the Battle of Lowestoft," *Restoration and 18th Century Theatre Research* 14, no. 2 (Winter 1999): 49-50.

unlike his poetic rivals, ‘Dryden sensed the incompleteness of the naval victory; he shrewdly avoided rushing into print with a large-scale panegyric, and the literary and military events of the next year justified his caution’ (162). The panegyricists whom Crites skewers in the Essay turned the Battle of Lowestoft—whatever it was, pyrrhic victory, perhaps—into a watershed for English national identity. Dryden himself, however, is more circumspect.<sup>53</sup>

Following the battle of Lowestoft, the British fleet tried, but failed, to intercept the seemingly providentially returning Dutch merchant fleet. These ships, sailing for months since making their way around the Cape of Good Hope from the East Indies had no way of knowing what was happening in their home seas.<sup>54</sup> As the poem sketches the action, again tactically simplifying the events, after bad weather disrupted an attack on Admiral De Ruyter’s ships and the treasure fleet in Bergen, the English were forced to withdraw, allowing the Dutch to escape.

And though by Tempests of the prize bereft,  
In Heavens inclemency some ease we find:  
Our foes we vanquished by our valour left,  
And onely yielded to the seas and wind.

Nor wholly lost we so deserv’d a prey;  
For storms, repenting, part of it restor’d:  
Which, as a tribute from the Balthick Sea,  
The British Ocean sent her mighty Lord. (St. 30-31)

New storms from the Baltic Sea scattered the escaping Dutch fleet, allowing the Earl of Sandwich’s force to take several vessels as prizes. The intimacy of the partnership between England and the ocean is evident in these stanzas. It was the storms in the harbor of Bergen that allowed the “prey” to escape, hence the “storms, repenting” later delivered part of the fleet to the British, giving them a second chance at the prize. However, it is also important that the “tribute” represented by “Which” in the third line of the stanza could refer to either “storms” or

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 50.

<sup>54</sup> Frank L Fox, *A Distant Storm: The Four Days' Battle of 1666: The Greatest Sea Fight of the Age of Sail* (Rotherfield: Press of Sail Publications, 1996); Gijs Rommelse, *The Second Anglo-Dutch War (1665-1667) : raison d'état, mercantilism and maritime strife* (Hilversum: Verloren, 2006).

“it” (itself referring to “prey”) in the second line. Dryden must mean the Baltic storms (and not the prey) to be the tribute that the British Ocean paid to her “mighty Lord,” however. First of all, because storm is elementally congruent with Ocean it is more easily understood to be within the ocean’s power to give. Secondly, and more crucially for the valor of British naval power, to suggest that the Dutch ships were given to the English by the Ocean and not won in battle would detract from the glory of the scene. The Ocean, recognizing Charles’s authority, acts for the British side, but Englishmen never rely on such elemental largesse, as did the Dutch in getting their overloaded ships into harbor. So the ocean’s tribute to its mighty lord is a storm, which assists the English who after all, vanquish their foes by valour.

Annus Mirabilis, like the Essay, is careful about turning incomplete victories into absolute statements about English national identity. In this poem the longest and most detailed description of warfare is reserved for the Four Day’s Battle a year later, which ended inconclusively.

“The Duke of Albemarl’s Battel, First Day” is the first of four sections describing what has become known as the “Four Day’s Battle,” fought from 11 to 14 June, 1666, and which is still among the longest naval engagements in history. The battle that ended in a political stalemate, but at greater cost in ships and men for the English, occupies the most significant part of the poem devoted to the naval war, 87 stanzas, compared to the description of the London Fire, which takes 78. The actual length of the battle does not fully explain this; the expansive chronicle and lush descriptions of martial valor are hardly supported by the actual outcome. If this is the centerpiece of the heroic “historical poem” it barely holds water. What is unequivocal in these stanzas is the historical importance of English valor in the war, and the increasingly determinant role the ocean will play in Britain’s destiny, but not the ocean as a

field of naval conquest. Halfway though the second day of battle, the narrative pauses to reflect on the importance of the event:

Never had valour, no not ours before,  
Done ought like this upon the Land or Main:  
Where not to be o'rcome was to do more  
Then all the Conquests former Kings did gain. (St. 80)

Simple survival at sea is a victory greater than “all the Conquests former Kings did gain.” In one sense, to remain at sea, occupying the ocean is to successfully “assert th’ watery Ball.” But also, recognizing that “not to be o’rcome” is in itself valorous is reminiscent of Milton’s “They also serve who stand and wait.” “O’rcome” is the center of the line and the chiasmus: (not to be) o’rcome (was to do). Bracketing these words are “Where” and “more.” The center of the line is balanced between “not to be” and “was to do [more]” or between the possibility of extinction and achievement. The sense of being “half way” between the poles of probable outcomes, and that one is always in such a position—especially at sea—defines the crux of *Annus Mirabilis*.

“O’rcome” is a kind of Janus word; to be overcome, of course is to be defeated, overtaken, or to lose one’s self in passion or grief. It also signifies a point of completion, of victory: as Dryden translates Virgil from *Georgics* III, “Thus, under heavy Arms, the Youth of Rome Their long laborious Marches overcome.” Or, a line from Virgil’s *Pastorals* that he will use later in *Annus Mirabilis*: “Already we have half our way o’recome.” It is both to drown and to survive drowning. For now, the possibility of achievement is achievement enough.

The poem is subtitled “The Year of Wonders,” and a solar eclipse was observed in London in 1666, in addition to the other phenomena mentioned by the poem. As Albemarle’s ships are beaten down by the superior numbers of the Dutch, the poem again reflects on itself:

Let other Muses write his prosp’rous fate

Of conquer'd Nations tell, and Kings restor'd:  
But mine shall sing of his eclips'd estate,  
Which, like the Sun's, more wonders does afford. (St. 90)

But the wonders revealed by Albemarle's "eclips'd estate" are of a different order. Dryden's poem, distinct from the many other poems on the war—and the pamphlets on the "wonders" and portents of the year—is less interested in journalism or in eschatology than in thinking seriously on the unpredictability of fate. Recording the Duke of Albemarle's fate in the Four Day's Battle is only part of the object. Telling this story, promoting the great national cause, *Annus Mirabilis* offers an image of glory in one hand and then in a kind of dialectical palimpsest, eclipses it with another. Holding both thoughts together, the poem progresses: it is not transfixed, but it moves in the movement of the crux.

Despite the near-stasis of the battle, the sea seems to act on its own as England's agent, and expresses its joy in the loss of a Dutch ship. As Albemarle's fleet limps away in retreat, further engagement by the Dutch is treated as an act of blasphemy:

The foe approach'd: and one, for his bold sin,  
Was sunk, (as he that touched the Ark was slain;)   
The wild waves master'd him, and suck'd him in,  
And smiling Eddies dimpled on the Main. (St. 94)

"Wild waves" mastering and sucking the ship under and "smiling Eddies" grinning gleefully at its demise sound like the ocean's expressions of righteous vengeance in support of the English. Connecting the British vessel to the double pun "Ark," refers primarily to the Ark of the Covenant, carrying the destiny of Yahweh's people and the receptacle as well as the symbol of divine authority and power. It is in 2 Samuel 6, verses 6-7 that Uzzah takes hold of the ark and "God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." But Ark also suggests Noah's ship, carrying a double freight of destiny for the English. Noah's Ark carried

the only survivors of the punishing biblical flood, and was therefore the hope for a new civilization.

Late in the poem, speaking of the renewed city of London after the fire, Dryden writes:

Now, like a Maiden Queen, she will behold,  
From her high Turrets, hourly Sutors come:  
The East with Incense, and the West with Gold,  
Will stand, like Suppliants, to receive her doom. (1185-1188)

London receives cargoes from East and West, but stands as a lawgiver to the hemispheres.

Annus Mirabilis envisions a marketplace enforced by virtue and trade and not naval power. He is very clear that the English empire is after more than plunder: it will be “The beauty of this Town” that is, her virtue recognized by all, and not her naval fleet, that “From all the world shall vindicate [defend] her Trade” (1203-04). Once the wars are fought, the English merchant and not the Admiral will hold power. Dryden closes with a vision of an empire that spreads worldwide, is administered by England and reduces current rivals to petty criminals, forced to the margins of commerce:

And, while this fam’d Emporium we prepare,  
The British Ocean shall such triumphs boast,  
That those who now disdain our Trade to share,  
Shall rob like Pyrats on our wealthy Coast. (1205-08)

Dryden’s poem looks to a future commercial empire with exuberance and optimism, even though in 1667 it was far from clear that such would be the case. The poem ends, “fear no more: / A constant Trade-wind will securely blow, / And gently lay us on the Spicy shore” (1214-16).

By the end of the poem, London is reborn as the poem strains to imagine the great city rebuilt, the naval victories won, and the riches of the world flowing to her along the great arms of England’s rivers. The Thames reaches out and joins the ocean as commerce floods in, but



the final stanzas are strangely incoherent; the poem so far has been clear about its speaker and its actors, and has even made an effort to point out apostrophe and digression. Yet here collective pronouns (we, us) are used to describe the merchant voyages of the immediate future. In the last few stanzas, the poem shifts from depicting events that have or will happened, to placing the “ship of state” trope front and center. No longer is the reader’s perspective that of a Londoner marveling at goods flowing in and rich profits to be made, but “to the Eastern wealth through storms we go” (1215). Where this poem ends, as I show in the next chapter, is where Coleridge’s *Mariner* begins, and it is far from the ideal of Young’s poet-speaker in *Ocean, An Ode*. Dryden offers a historical perspective that generates a collective voyage for the nation, but stops as the ship gets underway. However, even though he ends confidently, “A constant Trade-wind will securely blow, / And gently lay us on the Spicy shore” he’s already set out the dangers of voyaging at all. It is an uncertain and ambiguous farewell.

By 1728, the “British Ocean” was largely taken to be a manifest fact. The end of the War of the Spanish Succession and the Treaty of Utrecht in 1713 gave Britain broad access to markets and trade routes as well as a brief peace on the high seas. The South Sea Company began building South American trade routes and took over the slave trade from the Spanish in 1714. Commerce and stock speculation seemed to be making everyone rich when George I came to the throne in 1714. When James Kirkpatrick, the Irish-born doctor and author of *The Sea-Piece; A Narrative, Philosophical and Descriptive Poem* landed in Charles Town, South Carolina in 1717, he never for a moment felt as though he had left Britain. In *Oracles of Empire*, David Shields writes, “the sea was not for Kirkpatrick the arena of God’s providential interventions; rather it seemed the arena of British imperial destiny. While on the Atlantic,

Kirkpatrick deemed himself still in Britain”<sup>55</sup> (*Oracles of Empire* 26). But where early eighteenth century poems strain to allegorize the ocean as a productive space circumscribed by British rule, early Romantic-era poets such as Edward Young reveal a densely problematic national engagement with the sea. Although it may have been nearly shattered by the burst of the South Sea “bubble” in 1720, many still saw the Whig empire as a limitless field for acquiring wealth, national and artistic glory—for which the ocean was both medium and symbol. The excessive greed of some, it was said, and not the nature of the trade, was the cause of the economic catastrophe.

George II acceded to the throne in June, 1727. In January 1728, he delivered a speech praising the sea service:

I should look upon it as a great happiness if, at the beginning of my reign, I could see the foundation laid of so great and necessary a work, as the increase and encouragement of our seamen in general; that they may be invited, rather than compelled by force and violence, to enter into the service of their country [as] the representatives of a people great and flourishing in trade and navigation.<sup>56</sup>

The King’s speech was to encourage donations to a fund to continue to support Greenwich Hospital, which since 1692 had been providing care and “maintenance” to injured and retired seamen. The king’s support of the sailor’s hospital was both popular and practical, since the “sea service” was the prime mover in the economic engine of trade that structured his growing empire. The laudatory speech must have helped to maintain the loyalty of the fleet as well as recognize, through them, the contributions of influential merchants. Praising the seamen of the merchant fleet George shows himself, though foreign-born, sharing in the same patriotic

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<sup>55</sup> *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 26.

<sup>56</sup> Quoted in Edward Young, *The Poetical Works of Edward Young*, ed. John Mitford (London: Bell and Daldy, 1866), 141.

rhetoric as his subjects, while also consolidating support among Whiggish mercantile interests.

Through the influence of the Whig minister Robert Walpole, Edward Young was granted £100 per annum as a pension; George II was persuaded to increase it to £200.<sup>57</sup> Later, he was appointed chaplain to the Princess of Wales. When Princess Caroline became Queen, Young dedicated a popular sermon to her and became chaplain to the king in April 1728.<sup>58</sup> In a gesture of gratitude, and perhaps still hoping that George would make him a bishop, in June Young published *Ocean: An Ode, Occasion'd by his Majesty's Royal Encouragement of the Sea Service. To which is prefixed an Ode to the King; and a Discourse on Ode.*

By choosing to adopt the “Pindaric” ode Young participates in what was a uniquely civic poetic form – thought of as representing an inspired musical voice “inciting the people to valor”<sup>59</sup> – although writing to impress the court. In this, Young was no different than most of his contemporaries; “that he was an avid solicitor of the patrons of the day is undeniable. But it is too hastily assumed that he was unusual in his obsequiousness. In fact Young’s practice as a dedicator is consistent with the standards of his day.”<sup>60</sup> Beholden to the Walpole government, hopeful for preferment, anxious to draw positive royal attention to himself, Young was well involved in the political machine of the late 1720’s. His poems of this period carefully promote government agenda while equally carefully avoiding insult to powerful members of the opposition.<sup>61</sup>

Young’s lyrics have not fared well with critics, either in his day or since. Sadly for Young, both *Ocean* and his 1730 “naval lyric” *Imperium Pelagi* seem to have been ignored by

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<sup>57</sup> Tone Urstad, *Sir Robert Walpole's Poets : The Use of Literature as Pro-Government Propaganda, 1721-1742* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1999), 67.

<sup>58</sup> Dustin Griffin, *Literary Patronage in England, 1650-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 156-57.

<sup>59</sup> Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry*, 173.

<sup>60</sup> Griffin, *Literary Patronage*, 155.

<sup>61</sup> Urstad, *Sir Robert Walpole's Poets*, 79.

the court and by most readers. His only modern biographer wrote, “No one, even in his own day, commended Young’s odes and therefore, perhaps, they took no notice of the preface to *Ocean*. In it the poet made a plea for originality which, when repeated thirty years later in his *Conjectures on Original Composition*, was to have a profound influence on the European Romantic movement. But in 1728 he was a voice crying in the wilderness”<sup>62</sup> *Ocean* is similar to many poems about commerce, mercantile heroism, and the sublimity of merchant shipping and would probably be forgotten if not for the poet’s later works, especially the *Night Thoughts*. So many works of this kind were written during the first decades of the eighteenth century that they constitute a sub-genre of the “Whig Panegyric” delineated in 1926 by C. A. Moore.<sup>63</sup> In his essay “Whig Panegyric Verse 1700-1760: A Phase of Sentimentalism.

The first lines of *Ocean: An Ode*, open in a classically pastoral setting: “Sweet rural scene! / Of flocks and green! / At careless ease my limbs are spread” (1-3). The conventional opening emphasizes the sea’s “prospect wide,” and “boundless tide!” (7,8), then turns to the ocean as “Vast field of commerce and big war, / Where wonders dwell! / Where terrors swell!” (15-17). The potential for trade is already naturalized as an aspect of the ocean itself. However, indolent pastimes are not heroic: unsung, the ocean becomes strangely silent. While the lyric poet rests, “Waves cease to foam, and winds to roar; / Without a breeze, / The curling seas / dance on, in measure to the shore” (9-12). Realizing that a need or an opportunity exists, the poet-as-hero – asking “Who sings the source / Of wealth and force?” (13-14) – takes to the sea: “What? none aspire? / I snatch the lyre, / And plunge into the foaming wave” (22-24).

More than just celebrating overseas trade, Young’s speaker mirrors the innovative entrepreneur (or personified English capital) who leaves the safety of England to risk death or

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<sup>62</sup> Harold Forster, *Edward Young : Poet of the Night Thoughts, 1683-1765* (Alburgh Norfolk: Erskine Press, 1986), 123.

<sup>63</sup> Moore, “Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760.”

ruin in the hope of returning with wealth and glory.<sup>64</sup> Once immersed in his theme, the poet leads a chorus of Nereids while all nature joins the song:

The main! the main!  
Is Britain's reign;  
Her strength, her glory, is her fleet:  
The main! the main!  
Be Britain's strain;  
As Triton's strong, As Syrens sweet. (43-48)

The ocean is taken as sovereign territory, held under the sway of the British crown by her fleet, and so the ocean should become Britain's "strain." "Strain" is a interestingly complicated word; while Young's sense of it would seem to be "song" or "poem" that definition is listed in the OED thirteenth. The first meaning is more like "lineage" or "ancestry" or "inherited trait" with another strong sense of "responsibility" or "difficulty" (OED). The rest of the poem will show that the ambiguity of "strain" is borne out in the ideal British character that Young proposes.<sup>65</sup>

Next follows a comparison of calm and stormy seas and a set-piece describing a ship caught in a tempest. The calm sea is alluring yet dangerous; in another equation of the poet's imagination with the far-seeing merchant, the very distance of the horizon entrances the poet's eye as the sea tempts the voyager to venture forth:

With what a trance,  
The level glance,  
Unbroken, shoots along the seas!  
Which tempt from shore  
The painted oar;  
And every canvass courts the breeze!

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<sup>64</sup> Suvir Kaul (*Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire*) mentions the identity in poetry of the poet and merchant/entrepreneur, as both, by virtue of imagination develop possibilities for imbuing raw materials of nature with cultural or economic value.

<sup>65</sup> It's also interesting that Britain's "strain" should be sweet like a "Syren." Syrens, or sirens, while (as mermaids, for instance) the logical companion to Tritons, are also maritime *femmes fatales*, famously luring men to their deaths.

When rushes forth  
The frowning north  
On black'ning billows, with what dread  
My shuddering soul  
Beholds them roll,  
And hears their roarings o'er my head! (67-78)

The tempest continues through subsequent stanzas as the poet, now awash in the waves and observing from sea level, watches the ship rise and fall “now whelm'd; now pendent near the clouds” (87) finally culminating in a terrifying breakdown of the distinction between elements as heaven and sea come together in a biblical figure reminding the reader of the universe before creation. However disorienting and horrifying this may be, the consequences of a storm at sea are not feared by Britain. “The Northern blast, / The shatter'd mast” (97-98), and all the other hazards of the deep may daunt some but:

Let others fear;  
To Britain dear  
Whate'er promotes her daring claim;  
Those terrors charm,  
Which keep her warm  
In chase of honest gain, or fame. (93-108)

In Young's economy of risk and reward, of test and virtue, tempest and crisis at sea are the necessary conditions from which Britain and British trade will arise stronger and with greater virtue than before. Storms wreck some ships, but a sea without wind moves nothing – better to risk tempest than to perish in the doldrums or never leave shore. Britain fearlessly pursues her goal: the hazards of the ocean are “dear” to her, familiar and surely overcome. What terrifies others merely keeps her “warm” – fires her enthusiasm – for honest wealth and fame.

The merchant and son serve as a good example of the problem of “honest gain.”

Following six stanzas describing the beauty of the sea – the reflections of stars and sunbeams on the water, of clouds and sky and the rainbow – characterized as a rivalry between Thetis and

Phoebus,<sup>66</sup> Young turns to the treasures hidden beneath the waters. Rows of pearls and immense wealth must lie on the ocean floor, but all are unreachable because devoured by storm. Against the naturalized image of unattainable wealth, Young introduces the bad merchant.<sup>67</sup>

From Indian mines,  
With proud designs,  
The merchant, swoln, digs golden ore;  
The tempests rise,  
And seize the prize,  
And toss him breathless on the shore. (45-50)

“Indian mines” hints at Spanish colonial projects in the Americas, always characterized by British writers as greedy, ruthless and cruel. The merchant is “swoln,” reminiscent of the “brim-full” Dutch ships in Dryden’s poem. The stanza indicts excess and gluttony: the swollen merchant is proud, over-enthusiastic about accumulating wealth, and physically corpulent as well. The sea is justified then, in wrecking his plans and taking his life. His corpse, washed up “breathless” on the shore is the silent judgment of the sea on his greed. His son seems to read the signs, but still follows the father:

His son complains  
In pious strains,  
“Ah, cruel thirst of gold!” he cries;  
Then ploughs the main,  
In zeal for gain,  
The tears yet swelling in his eyes. (51-56)

The scene aims at pathos; trying to combine a site of sublime terror with a moral lesson and a hint of the tragedy of fate – it is too much the straw man for the allegory of virtue though, and

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<sup>66</sup> In which the poet reassures Thetis (making reference to fairly recent discoveries in optics) that even the rainbow is only beautiful because water vapor in the air splits the sunlight: “To Phoebus’ ray, / Which paints so gay / By thee the wat’ry woof was lent” (36-38).

<sup>67</sup> Another thought is the way in which the poem offers a means to ethically enjoy wealth that can never be physically obtained. The reader has access to treasures far beyond those imagined by the merchant: the poem contrasts the virtuous contemplation of beauty with the greedy acquisitiveness of urban markets, while helpfully standing between the reader and the ocean’s “siren” call.

Young makes the sense of it clear: “Gold pleasure buys; / But pleasure dies, [...] The sense is short; / but virtue kindles living joys” (63-64, 67-68). Against the picture of the drowned merchant and his ill-fated son, the poem offers Virtue, “an unprecarious, endless bliss!” (74):

The virtuous mind,  
Nor wave, nor wind,  
Nor civil rage, nor tyrant’s frown,  
The shaken ball,  
Nor planet’s fall,  
From its firm basis can dethrone.

This Britain knows,  
And therefore glows  
With gen’rous passions, and expends  
Her wealth and zeal  
On public weal,  
And brightens both by god-like ends. (81-92)

The poem fully recognizes the dangers of what it proposes as the most exalted activity – the merchant who goes to sea may very well be tempted to overreach. The seamen who make the journeys are almost doomed to disaster, never knowing the benefits of refinement and virtue. Their best hope is to find a comfortable institution in which to rest. It falls then to the class of traders and merchants ashore, led by the king, to expend their wealth for the “public weal.” Of course this both serves an opportunity for such men to demonstrate their virtue as well as bolstering the institution of aristocratic patronage itself.

In the wreckage of the South Sea bubble, overreaching schemes must have seemed very precarious indeed. Young’s poem has to walk a thin line between virtuous exuberance and the excessive speculation that fueled the run-up of South Sea Company stock and led to its downfall. For a moment the poet seems to lose himself in a section of the poem celebrating the British merchant fleet and naval power: “As long as stars / Guide mariners [...] the British flag shall sweep the seas” (259-60, 264) is followed immediately by:



Peculiar both!  
 Our soil's strong growth,  
 And our bold natives' hardy mind;  
 Sure heaven bespoke  
 Our hearts and oak,  
 To give a master to mankind. (265-270)

The poem has returned to ground well covered by broadside writers as well as Pope, Dryden and Thomson: the British land itself, its oaks become ships built and manned by Britons – and managed by British trading companies: “hearts of oak.” British trade, he goes on to say, will weigh other kingdoms and kings and decide for life or death, as the ocean fills tributary rivers or, ebbing, drains them dry. Britain becomes the power of the sea – of water – itself.

This may be the destiny for Britain, but for the poet it is too much to imagine. In the final turn of the poem, he admits, “A damp destroys / My blooming joys, / While Britain's glory fires my mind. / For who can gaze / On restless seas, / Unstruck with life's more restless state?” (298-303). Not only has Arion's harper returned to shore, he now recognizes that the dangers of “restless seas” exist on land as well:

The world's the main,  
 How vex't! how vain!  
 Ambition swells, and anger foams;  
 May good men find,  
 Beneath the wind,  
 A noiseless shore, unruffled homes! (307-312)

Virtue and happiness turn out to be found at home, in the sylvan recreations of pastoral poetry and not by risking all in foreign adventure: “These scenes untried / Seduc'd my pride, / To fortune's arrows bar'd my breast” (330-332). The poem is strangely brought to a close by the appearance of “wisdom,” here personified as a “hoary dame” who confirms the poet's resolution to retire from the world of commerce and urban activity: she “told me pleasure was in rest.” (335).

It seems by the ending the poem has completely unraveled. Indeed, where the poet once called for unbridled expansiveness and far-reaching vision, in his own person he recoils from the immorality and falseness of the cities: “O teach me to despise / the world few know / But to their woe, / Our crimes with our experience rise” (315-318). What the poem is really promoting is developing the disinterestedness that aesthetic reflection requires – and the idea that men who achieve wealth and leisure are in fact “patriots.” What the poem is suggesting is that the class of gentleman fit for such contemplation is raised and nourished by the growth of wealth and trade – of worldwide British influence – but that such commercial activity is not the end of gentlemen in itself. No more than the king would get his hands dirty on shipboard would the gentleman that Young envisions want to be actively involved in stock speculation, commodity trading or vessel management. The kind of heroic gentlemen who clamored to sail against Holland belong to the poetry of another age. This poem celebrates dominance in maritime commerce as the means by which a class of gentlemen arose who now have the opportunity to develop an aesthetic sensibility previously available only to the upper classes of the aristocracy.<sup>68</sup> Young’s poet turns away from dirtying himself in speculation or jobbing as unsuitable activities for a man of feeling – he does not suggest that commerce cease altogether! Some must literally and materially engage in that activity, it is true, and while such men are heroic in the abstract, they are not of the same class of man who has leisure and refinement to appreciate poetry, painting and landscapes.

The maritime empire and Britain’s control of trade on the ocean can produce such gentlemen, and the existence of such gentlemen is unquestionably to the benefit of the kingdom – as evidenced by the subscription to build a hospital for retired seamen and other charitable

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<sup>68</sup> Tensions between the rising Whig merchant class and the landed Tory aristocracy provide much of the interest in later-eighteenth and nineteenth century fiction, notably Jane Austen.

projects. Publishing *Winter*, the first part of *The Seasons* in 1726, James Thompson can still count on such a reader, although by the time he stopped revising it in 1746, *The Seasons* had become wildly popular with men and women of all classes of English society – and continued to be well into the next century. The popularity of the poem was partly due to its recognizable scenes of English rural life, but the advent of “popular” literature at all was also a result of increasing literacy and market-driven publishing: another troubling and unexpected product of the prosperity that England’s commercial empire provided.

## CHAPTER 3

### The 'British Ocean' Unmanned: Coleridge, the Traffic and Pure Imagination

The natural element for industry, animating its outward movement, is the sea. Since the passion for gain involves risk, industry though bent on gain yet lifts itself above it; instead of remaining rooted to the soil and the limited circle of civil life with its pleasures and desires, it embraces the element of flux, danger, and destruction.

– G.W.F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*<sup>69</sup>

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge's literary ballad *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere*, in *Seven Parts* the ocean is more than a medium, less than an antagonist. It is a space and a condition where chronological and oceanic currents circulate, where archaic narrative form and modern enterprise condense into a single interrupted voyage. The poem exists as series of commentaries that never produce a single picture of deep perspective, although each iteration promises greater clarity. As a "sea story" representing the career of the British ship of state in its flowering as a global maritime empire, the poem retains and re-presents traces of three hundred years of journeys of discovery, commerce and conquest. While the nearly invisible balladeer frames the Mariner convulsively telling his story within the boundaries of form, the poem cannot contain the English oceanic unconscious, freighted with the ethical burden of the empire given its dominance in the slave trade, global war, colonial adventuring and the suppression of political dissent.

The *Rime* is both ancient and contemporary, first "written in imitation of the style as

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<sup>69</sup> I'm borrowing the epigraph from Margaret Cohen, "Fluid States," *Cabinet* 16 (2004): 75-82.

well as the spirit of the elder poets”<sup>70</sup> during the turbulent end of the 1790’s, then almost immediately revised and reworked through subsequent editions of *Lyrical Ballads*, glossed in 1817’s *Sibylline Leaves*, and discussed and theorized until Coleridge’s death in 1834. To make matters worse, Coleridge’s lifelong revisions and retractions only further occlude the “original” meanings of the poem, confounding critics and readers who search for a single comprehensive interpretation. The interrupted voyage and the ship’s mysterious return to England work forcefully against the colonizing telos of European expansion evoked in eighteenth century mercantilist panegyric.<sup>71</sup> Christopher Connery notes, “the conquest of the world ocean being coterminous with the rise of Western capitalism, it is natural that the ocean has long functioned as capital’s myth element.”<sup>72</sup> Margaret Cohen describes the ocean-space of sea narratives, where “space is experienced as movement, as a vector conjoining spatial and temporal coordinates.”<sup>73</sup> Indeed, the ship – as a transportation technology – can be thought of as a machine which produces movement, and without moving loses coherence as symbol or as technology. Cohen goes on to write that “narratives set on shipboard dwell in the in-between space of passage, rather than on the goal.”<sup>74</sup> Cohen writes about novels in a period in which the sea narrative had developed into a species of Bildungsroman. However, in this lyric sea-story, the teleology of the imperial voyage inscribed in its ballad form is confounded by the tropical mid-ocean stasis that forms the central crisis of the poem. The Rime’s “in-between space” is

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<sup>70</sup> "Advertisement," William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, ed. W. J. B. Owen (London: Oxford U.P., 1967), 4.

<sup>71</sup> My previous chapter discusses examples of this myth in Dryden and Young and notes frequent sites of instability in mercantile capitalist poetry from its beginnings. The interrupted voyage, whether caused by storms or by the utter destruction of shipwreck, is a constant threat, although usually deployed as a warning to the greedy merchant, and not as critique of the imperial project.

<sup>72</sup> "The Oceanic Feeling and the Regional Imaginary," in *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imaginary*, ed. Wimal Dissanayake and Rob Wilson (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1996), 289.

<sup>73</sup> "The Chronotopes of the Sea," in *The Novel*, ed. Franco Moretti, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 648.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 664.

not a privileged site for character development but an oneiric convergence of terrestrial and oceanic anxieties.

Writing about John Hearne's *The Sure Salvation* (1981), a novel set late in the era of both sailing ships and the slave trade, Elizabeth DeLoughrey challenges the heroic ocean of expansionist colonial mythology. An English slave ship is becalmed in mid-Atlantic doldrums for much of the text. As the crew and captive human cargo begin to succumb to heat and disorienting immobility, an ever-growing pool of waste from the motionless ship rings the vessel.<sup>75</sup> In the last pages of the novel, a slave revolt breaks out resulting in the death of many captives as well as the captain and mate. DeLoughrey argues that this sea story "flatly refuses the chronotope of masculine spatial motility so evident in maritime narratives and studies."<sup>76</sup> She goes on, "Unlike the maritime discourses of empire that construct a homogeneous, universal, and expanding plane as a template for (expanding) human space and time, Hearne refuses to render the ocean as a transparent metaphor for human desire. Nor does he support the empire's conflation of a universalized sea with homogenized human history."<sup>77</sup> The first movement of the Rime, the voyage south and the passage through the Antarctic ice field, mimes the traditional mythologizing of the sea as a space for empire. However, immediately on leaving the "Atlantic" (mythic oceanic spaces are not named, nor are the characters) the voyage drifts to a halt. The "strange things" that happen in the tropical doldrums depict a transformation of ship and crew from their heroic representation in the ballad of national

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<sup>75</sup> The recent explosion and loss of the *Deepwater Horizon* oil platform with its ensuing spill, the grounding of the crude oil tanker *Exxon Valdez* in 1989 and the *Amoco Cadiz*, which split in two and sank in 1978, are three of the most well-known modern points of reference for the image of a ring of waste spreading outward from a stricken vessel. I have argued in another context that all three of these disasters might have been prevented had proper inspection, crewing and training schemes been in place, giving modern resonance to the notion of ships and oceans "unmanned."

<sup>76</sup> *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 67.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

origins (much later, Coleridge would refer to Jason and the Argonauts when discussing the early English seafarers on whom the Rime is based)<sup>78</sup> to undead automatons, the ship a floating wreck that only survives long enough to deliver them, propelled by un-Natural winds and seas, to their home port. The stasis of the Mariner's ship during the "middle passage" of the Rime – like Hearne's – provides an "opportunity to capture the illusiveness of the narrative present even though the spatial movement required to produce time is entirely lacking."<sup>79</sup> A ship full of dying men, fixed in place "As idle as a painted Ship / Upon a painted ocean" (113-14), who hopelessly mark time passing "Day after day, day after day" (111), likewise captures the illusiveness of the teleological imperial narrative and invokes its tragic costs in human suffering.

The final stroke of the Rime's uncanny evocation of the voyage narrative is the return of undead seamen to England's shores. Although many trades are implicated in the Mariner's voyage, and the Atlantic slave trade looms largest of all, the track is emphatically circular, and cargo gives up importance to the interrupted voyage and the transformed symbolic significance of the ship and men. Such a shift in focus depletes the narrative of the *jouissance* that accompanies the joyful trope of the returning treasure ship, the climax of earlier eighteenth century mercantile panegyric.<sup>80</sup> In its place, in the earliest published version of the Rime, in their final port the undead sailors join together in apparent solidarity, perhaps challenging the living Mariner. Although they voice no demands, each sailor's right arm burns "like a torch, / A torch that's borne upright" (495-96). This band of sailors recalls the seaman's strikes and

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<sup>78</sup> *Table Talk I*, vol. 14, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969), 268.

<sup>79</sup> DeLoughrey, *Routes and Roots*, 68.

<sup>80</sup> For poetic imagery in the C18 mercantile panegyric, see Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire*; and Shields, *Oracles of Empire*; the classic article on the subject, though not exclusively maritime, is Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760."

riots that had beset port cities throughout the Atlantic since the 1770's. Several critics have argued that the absence of cargo and the apparent specificity of the ship's route into the Pacific Ocean links the poem to contemporary voyages of "exploration" such as those led by Captain Cook (and Bligh, among whose objectives was transplanting breadfruit from Tahiti to Jamaica as cheap food for slaves ).<sup>81</sup> However, while I agree that late eighteenth century scientific expeditions were of interest, Coleridge's most important navigational sources were the narratives of Captain George Shelvocke (1726)<sup>82</sup> and Captain William Dampier (1697-8).<sup>83</sup> These privateering voyages helped open the seas to English shipping, yet the risky ventures that established colonial trade routes and territories for the crown were, according to Peter Hayes, "a global gamble for enormous rewards." Far from later romanticized patriotic accounts, "these predatory voyages are the roots of modern venture capitalism" that set the stage for the Caribbean plantocracy and the slave trade by which it prospered.<sup>84</sup> The return of the ship and its crew in this condition represents a revolutionary threat to the nation; the ghosts of Shelvocke and Dampier invoke the culpability of the long history of British maritime empire.

In a letter to Thomas Clarkson written in 1808, Coleridge told the famous abolitionist, "I may add, that [in 1798] I preached a Sermon of an hour's length & a few minutes against the Trade at Taunton."<sup>85</sup> Coleridge, though a committed abolitionist, was by the late 1790's rapidly revising his earlier republican democratic philosophy. Marilyn Butler writes, "English

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<sup>81</sup> Sarah Moss, "Class War and the Albatross: The Politics of Ships as Social Space and The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," in *Fictions of the Sea: Critical Perspectives on the Ocean in British Literature and Culture*, ed. Bernhard Klein (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2002), 77-88.

<sup>82</sup> *A Voyage Round the World By the Way of the Great South Sea, Performed in the Years 1719, etc.*, (London: J. Senex, 1726), (New York: Facsimile Ed. Da Capo, 1971).

<sup>83</sup> William Dampier, *A New Voyage Round the World., &c*, 2 vols., The third edition corrected. (London: Printed for James Knapton, 1698); William Dampier, *The Voyages and Adventures of Capt. William Dampier: etc.* (London: s.n., 1776).

<sup>84</sup> Peter Hayes, "Did Pirates Create The Credit Crunch?," *Science Daily*, October 15, 2008, <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/10/081015110751.htm>.

<sup>85</sup> *Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion, The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol 1, Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969), 232.



radicalism began to move away from the connection with Dissent, to become instead identified with the French challenge to all forms of Christianity. [...] By 1798 Coleridge had publicly protested his loyalty to home, hearth, and church, and even his qualified support for Pitt's war-waging administration."<sup>86</sup> Godwinian atheism and the real or imagined torch-bearing mobs of Jamaica, Saint Domingue, and Paris were all far too close to home.

Closer still, in Liverpool, sailors had removed, or "struck," the sails of ships moored in the harbor, giving a name to workers' practice of withholding their labor in disputes with employers. In the ports of London and Bristol, mobs of seamen rioted, demanding back pay and improved working conditions.<sup>87</sup> Early in the spring of 1797, only months before Coleridge began composing the Rime, sailors aboard dozens of ships at the main naval anchorages mutinied, elected a president and a representative government, demanded back-pay and better provisions as well as a hearing of their grievances by the Lords of the Admiralty. Newspapers reported that the naval strikers were inspired, if not directly instigated, by French Republicans. The fear that the noble "hearts of oak" of British seamen could be turned against their commanders shook the Admiralty and the public.<sup>88</sup>

At the end of his voyage, as he tells it, the Mariner is the only living person onboard the nameless ship, which arrives from sea looking as if it had been gone for generations. The English harbor pilot, first to see the vessel, cries: "The planks look warp'd, and see those sails / How thin they are and sere!" (562-63). When the ship at last drifts "o'er the harbor bar" (473),

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<sup>86</sup> *Romantics, Rebels and Reactionaries: English Literature and Its Background, 1760-1830* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78-79..

<sup>87</sup> John Stevenson, *Popular Disturbances in England, 1700-1832*, 2nd ed., Themes in British social history (London: Longman, 1992), 156-57.

<sup>88</sup> G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée, *The Floating Republic: An Account of the Mutinies at Spithead and the Nore in 1797* (London: G. Bles, 1935)..

and into the bay, the Mariner stands at the bow. Now that the ship is in home waters, in sight of land, the Mariner is a lookout, as he gazes out ahead of the drifting vessel.<sup>89</sup> As the gentle “sweet” wind (462) dies and the vessel comes to rest, the Mariner exclaims, “O dream of joy! is this indeed / The light-house top I see? [...] Is this mine own countrée?” (469-70,72).

Typically, the homeward bound crew would be looking forward to dissolving their contract with the vessel, known as “breaking” ship’s articles, and they would be paid off and dismissed before the cargo is unloaded.

In a significant passage, deleted from all editions of the poem after 1798, the Mariner stares forward, captivated by the moonlight reflected on the ripples of water, as the corpses of the other seamen, supernaturally animated while driving the ship home, leave their work and congregate behind him in the space forward of the mast. The Mariner lingers a moment in a strangely illuminated reverie:

The moonlight bay was white all o’er,  
Till rising from the same,  
Full many shapes, that shadows were,  
Like as of torches came.

A little distance from the prow  
Those dark-red shadows were;  
But soon I saw that my own flesh  
Was red as in a glare.

I turned my head in fear and dread,  
And by the holy rood,  
The bodies had advanc’d and now  
Before the mast they stood.

(481-92)

“Forth looking” (500) on the rippled surface of the bay, Mariner sees “many shapes” like

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<sup>89</sup> The lookout, or watchman, is supposed to warn the vessel of danger, but as the speaker in a ballad, the Mariner can only tell what has already happened.

“shadows” of torches rise into his view. The new “shadows” on the water are the reflections of “dark-red” lights shining from behind him. The Mariner is transfixed between the red and white light producing two sets of shimmering shapes on the water. For a brief moment, his imagination abstracts the lights from their two opposing sources, and he gazes on the spectacle of dark-red and white before him. The poem also lingers, for two and a half stanzas, in the illumination of the moon and the “torches” before turning to explain.

When he does turn, the Mariner is shocked to see that his own skin is “red as in a glare” in his comrades’ “torchlight” and then to find himself standing between the bodies of his menacingly organized shipmates and the bay. In 1809, in *The Friend*, Coleridge writes of the danger of authors being misread in “the glare of prejudice and passion.”<sup>90</sup> Here, in his own harbor, the Mariner is speaking as a man tinted by the lurid glare projected by the soulless men. The bodies of his fellow mariners are the source of the torchlight; he watches as they lift their arms together:

They lifted up their stiff right arms,  
They held them strait and tight;  
And each right-arm burnt like a torch,  
A torch that’s borne upright.  
Their stony eye-balls glitter’d on  
In the red and smoky light. (493-98)

Beginning with the second edition of 1800, five stanzas, including this one, are deleted and the men with the burning right-arms become seraphs, the crew unambiguously dead.<sup>91</sup>

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat;

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<sup>90</sup> *The Friend*, 3, August 10, 1809. Online transcription <<http://inamidst.com/coleridge/friend/03>> accessed 25 March 2009.

<sup>91</sup> The lines from 481-502, comprising five stanzas, were deleted for the 1800 second edition of *Lyrical Ballads*. This is the largest and most significant deletion between editions, often explained as an effort to rid the poem of elements of Gothic horror, or to change the emphasis from “fear and dread” (489) to Christian joy: “Oh Christ! What saw I there!” (1834 487).

And by the Holy rood  
A man all light, a seraph-man,  
On every corse there stood.

(LB 1800, v1 p189)

These seraphs have none of the threatening menace of 1798's torch-bearing crew, and to make it even more clear, later editions of the poem gloss the band of sailors as angelic spirits simply animating empty men's bodies: "The angelic spirits leave the dead bodies, / And appear in their own forms of light" (1834 482-85). This emendation effaces the last trace of the crew from the deck of their vessel. Whatever agency that their abject bodies may have retained after maneuvering the ship to port is removed and the poem turns away from the unsavory materiality of dead seamen and towards the safer, cleaner, and politically more comfortable angels.

In the first text, however, the Mariner is the one survivor of a wrecked crew whose glittering eyes and mute solidarity challenge him, whose fiery right arms color his living flesh. Skin and eyes link the Mariner and the dead seamen.<sup>92</sup> Early in the poem, the Mariner's "glittering eye" unmans the wedding guest, fixing him in place when he tries to escape the old seaman's "skinny hand:"

He holds him with his glittering eye –  
He cannot chuse but hear:  
And listens like a three year's child;  
The Marinere hath his will.

(17-20)

The gang of undead sailors warn of a compelling power in the human form even in the absence of a Christian spirit. The ballad need not specify the threat that a band of torch-bearing men might signify to an audience well familiar with unrest in England and the French Revolution now spreading into Europe. Literary sources for such figures are available both in Europe and

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<sup>92</sup> Seamen were often identified by their weathered appearance and burnt skin. In Jane Austen's *Persuasion* an Admiral's skin is called "mahogany." Skin color was one of several attributes of seafarers thought to render their bodies both readily identifiable and suspiciously (here, racially) ambiguous.

in the West Indian colonies. Gothic novels, such as *The Monk* (1796) sensationalized horrors such as live burial and mob violence.<sup>93</sup> “The Three Graves” (1797), begun by Wordsworth and continued by Coleridge, “was partly inspired (according to Coleridge’s note) by Bryan Edwards’ account of ‘the Oby witchcraft’ in his well-known *History ... of the British Colonies in the West Indies* (1793).”<sup>94</sup> Although “voodoo” and the term “zombi” had not yet entered common English, the idea of a reanimated human corpse put to work at the behest of a practitioner of Obeah were well known in the 1790’s.<sup>95</sup> “The romantic concern with obeah which De Quincey calls ‘a dark collusion with human fears’ grows out of British anxieties regarding power: the fluctuations of imperial power, the power of slaves to determine their own fate, the power of democratic movements in France, England, and the Caribbean.”<sup>96</sup>

The Mariner, who had escaped the fate of the “ghastly crew” at sea, tries to effect salvation in a decisive break from his fellow seamen when he turns his eyes toward England:

I pray’d and turned my head away  
 Forth looking as before.  
 There was no breeze upon the bay,  
 No wave upon the shore. (499-502)

Rejecting the scene within the ship, the Mariner searches the horizon – now comfortingly filled with familiar landmarks – for deliverance, nor is he disappointed. The moonlight, which had been partly usurped by the red burning arms of the seamen, bathes “the rock” and “the kirk” in silent, steady light (503-06). When the crimson shadows seem to return, in a stanza that “revises” the first moonlight stanzas (507-14), it is easy now for the Mariner to read them (as

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<sup>93</sup> David Collings’s politicizing argument about the Gothic and mob violence is very interesting but I became aware of it too late to incorporate it here. *Monstrous Society: Reciprocity, Discipline, and the Political Uncanny, C. 1780-1848* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2009).

<sup>94</sup> Alan Richardson, “Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807,” *Studies in Romanticism* 32 (1993): 4.

<sup>95</sup> The word “zombi” enters the English language in 1819 with Southey’s *History of Brazil* (OED), though it occurs as early as 1697 in French. The West Indian *zombi* is discussed in 1797 in *Description topographique et politique de la partie espagnole de l’isle Saint-Domingue* by Moreau de Saint-Méry.

<sup>96</sup> Richardson, “Romantic Voodoo,” 5.

Coleridge's "glosses" will in emphasize in later editions) as benevolent "seraph-men" hovering above the prone corpses. The "dark-red shadows" (486) are now "shadows [...] / In crimson colours" (509-10). The Mariner's naive re-vision of the scene is based on faith in the ancient icons—the rock, the church, the land—as ancient forms:

Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat;  
And by the Holy rood  
A man all light, a seraph-man,  
On every corse there stood. (515-18)

The Pilot and his boy, all business, approaching in their skiff with the Hermit, are wary of the decrepit silent ship. The Pilot cries, "Dear Lord! it has a fiendish look—" (571). In another four stanzas, the ship suddenly sinks "like lead" taking the remains of the crew and their wooden world to the bottom of the harbor. A moment later, the senseless Mariner is in the Pilot's boat, presumed dead by all:

I mov'd my lips: the Pilot shriek'd  
And fell down in a fit  
The Holy Hermit rais'd his eyes  
And pray'd where he did sit.  
  
I took the oars: the Pilot's boy,  
Who now doth crazy go,  
Laugh'd loud and long, and all the while  
His eyes went to and fro,  
"Ha! ha! quoth he – "full plain I see,  
"The Devil knows how to row." (593-602)

The voyage has not been a successful one; the crew of men has become a zombified mob, except one surviving Mariner who cannot escape the deep transformation that the passage has wrought. The Pilot's boy, though "crazy", is the one to articulate what the others fear: that the returning ship has brought the Devil himself to their shore, and that the Devil is a sailor.

In spring 1798, while walking with William and Dorothy Wordsworth, Coleridge began composing the “Rime.” It was meant to be a collaboration between himself and Wordsworth, a ballad written and quickly published to raise money for the two poets to embark on an extended walking tour. Although their collaboration on the individual ballad quickly failed, their partnership succeeded in writing the poems contained in *Lyrical Ballads, With a Few Other Poems*, published anonymously that September by Joseph Cottle. The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere, in Seven Parts was the first poem in the collection. The “Advertisement” to the volume, written by Wordsworth, contains a succinct explanation of the Rime’s form: “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere was professedly written in imitation of the style as well as of the spirit of the elder poets.”<sup>97</sup> The ballad was the democratic poetic form par excellence, utilized by radical and conservative writers alike in the discursive struggles that raged in the periodical press. The ballad form was distinctly British, lower class, and if not seditious, then at least suspect as an especially persuasive poetic genre.<sup>98</sup> The 1797 *Encyclopedia Britannica* defined the ballad as:

a kind of song, adapted to the capacities of the lower class of people; who, being mightily taken with this species of poetry, are thereby not a little influenced in the conduct of their lives. Hence we find, that seditious and designing men never fail to spread ballads among the people, with a view to win them over to their side.<sup>99</sup>

Thomas Percy’s *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry* (1765) had well established the ballads of England and Scotland as politically acceptable, and with the blessings of Burns and Scott, the diction of “the middle and lower classes of society” was ratified for contemporary

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<sup>97</sup> *Lyrical Ballads*, 1798, 4.

<sup>98</sup> Bennett, 47. Also see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class*, (New York: Pantheon), 1964.

<sup>99</sup> Qtd. in Charles Ryskamp, “Wordsworth’s *Lyrical Ballads* in their Time,” *From Sensibility to Romanticism*, Ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom, (New York: Oxford University Press) 1965, 357-372. 358.

poets. “As a popular form of verse,” writes Betty T. Bennett, “the diction of the ballad is close to common speech”; however, the antiquarian ballads collected by Percy are “the simple speech of an earlier age.”<sup>100</sup>

Duncan Wu argues that “themes of betrayal and guilt”<sup>101</sup> drove Wordsworth’s poetry, and in the 1843 Isabella Fenwick note, Wordsworth recalled that he had suggested some of the Rime’s most familiar plot elements.<sup>102</sup>

in the course of this walk was planned the Poem of The Ancient Mariner, founded on a dream, as Mr. Coleridge said, of his friend Mr. Cruickshank. Much the greatest part of the story was Mr. Coleridge’s invention; but certain parts I myself suggested, for example, some crime was to be committed which should bring upon the Old Navigator, as Coleridge afterwards delighted to call him, the spectral persecution, as a consequence of that crime and his own wanderings. I had been reading in Shelvocke’s Voyages a day or two before that while doubling Cape Horn they frequently saw albatrosses, in that latitude the largest sort of sea-fowl, some extending their wings 12 or 13 feet. “Suppose,” said I, “you represent him as having killed one of these birds on entering the South Sea, and that the tutelary Spirits of these regions take upon them to avenge the crime.” I also suggested the navigation of the ship by the dead men, but do not recollect that I had anything more to do with the scheme of the poem.<sup>103</sup>

Captain George Shelvocke sailed in 1719 under letters of marque from England’s George I, charged with “warring against the Spaniards and any subjects of the Possessor of that Crown.”<sup>104</sup> Shelvocke’s 1726 *A Voyage Around the World* relates the captain’s troubles with his near-mutinous flotilla of small ships during their stormy passage around Cape Horn. During the worst of it, the captain of one of Shelvocke’s ships, in a fit of melancholy, shot an

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<sup>100</sup> Betty T. Bennett, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism: 1793-1815*, (New York: Garland) 1976, 53.

<sup>101</sup> Duncan Wu, *Wordsworth: An Inner Life* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 133.

<sup>102</sup> Duncan Wu discusses the troubled collaboration between Wordsworth and Coleridge on *Lyrical Ballads* in detail in *Wordsworth: An Inner Life*.

<sup>103</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, ed. Jared R Curtis (London: Bristol Classical Press, 1993), 2-3.

<sup>104</sup> Shelvocke, *Voyage*, xx.



albatross (dark in color, and much smaller than Wordsworth's bird with a 12 foot wingspan).<sup>105</sup> Coleridge spoke earlier about writing a poem with a character called the "Old Navigator;" Mr. Cruickshank's dream suggested the death-ship, itself already a familiar motif in Dutch and German folklore.<sup>106</sup>

It must have been galling to Wordsworth that the poem that opened the first Lyrical Ballads, and which he accused of diminishing sales with its archaisms and supernatural air, would remain the most well-known and most popular poem of the volume. In the Fenwick note he seems, retrospectively, to claim credit for suggesting the Rime's best loved thematic elements, and the revisions he insisted upon more greatly emphasize those elements. However, Charles Lamb, an astute reader of Coleridge since his Bristol days, objected to changes which only obscured what he saw as the poem's "Truth."

In 1801, Lamb wrote to Wordsworth, "I am sorry that Coleridge has christened his Ancient Marinere 'a poet's reverie'" — complaining about the subtitle appended in the second edition of Lyrical Ballads. Lamb went on, "What new idea is gained by this Title, but one subversive of all credit, which the Tale should force upon us, of its Truth?" As if anticipating the critical tradition that continues to the present of identifying the Mariner as a poorly delineated individual subject whose sin and penance propel the narrative, or the voyage as belonging to a distinct trade, Lamb's letter continues, "I totally differ with your idea that the Marinere should have had a character and a profession [...] the Ancient Marinere undergoes such Trials, as overwhelm and bury all individuality or memory of what he was.—Like the state of a man in a Bad dream, one terrible peculiarity of which is, that all consciousness of

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>106</sup> The most exhaustive study of the genesis of the poem, its probable sources and the various claims made by Coleridge and Wordsworth is John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin), 1927. 250, 530-31 n18.

personality is gone.”<sup>107</sup>

Coleridge was already thinking about ships and the sea before the famous walking tour of 1798. Beginning in late January 1795, Coleridge and Robert Southey lectured on the slave trade, contemporary politics, religion and history in coffee houses and taverns within sight of the cargo ships docked in Bristol. The lectures dramatize colonial trade as a circulating oceanic “traffic” that devoured human beings and spread the taint of moral and physical disease through home and colonial islands alike. Coleridge gave lectures attacking the “Treason Bill” and the “Convention Bill” in November; after the passage of the bills, which became known as “The Two Acts,” outspoken dissent became dangerous, but he continued his political journal *The Watchman* into 1796. He habitually employed maritime imagery to discuss the moral and ethical condition of Britain. The “Moral and Political Lecture” begins by offering the metaphor of the contemporary State as a tempest-tossed vessel:

When the wind is fair and the Planks of the Vessel sound, we may safely trust every thing to the management of professional Mariners; but in a Tempest and on board a crazy Bark, all must contribute their Quota of Exertion [...] Even so, in the present agitations of the public mind, everyone ought to consider his intellectual faculties as in a state of immediate requisition.<sup>108</sup>

Coleridge’s ship image emphasizes collectivity: both the rewards of individual valor and the danger of losing all if the mariners are unable to manage the craft and the public are unable or unwilling to assist. Although the ship of state appears throughout seventeenth and eighteenth century English literature, Coleridge may have also had in mind an even older use of the “ship

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<sup>107</sup> Letter to William Wordsworth of January 30, 1801. Rpt. in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004), 648.

<sup>108</sup> “A Moral and Political Lecture,” *Lectures 1795*, 5.

of state” trope.<sup>109</sup> In 1697, Edward Ward had approvingly called the British merchant ship “the Sovereign of the Aquatic Globe, giving despotic laws to all the meaner Fry, that live upon that Shining Empire.”<sup>110</sup> The eighteenth century sailing ship was a marvel of technology and social organization: both “a machine too big and unmanageable [...] to be run by novices” and what Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker call a “setting in which large numbers of workers cooperated in complex and synchronized tasks, under slavish, hierarchical discipline in which human will was subordinated to mechanical equipment, all for a money wage.”<sup>111</sup> As a precursor to the industrial factory, and as a site of social organization that concentrated centralized executive power in the captain and his mates, the ship became the ideal model of orderly modern society, literally the machine of empire even as it heralded an age of specialization and bureaucracy – skilled and semi-skilled labor functioning according to hierarchical discipline, and serving distant, corporate interests.

A hundred years later, The Rev. James Stanier Clarke, preaching to sailors of the Royal Navy, spoke of the ship as the ideal symbol for the British state:

A Ship, in which so much of your life is past, is a just emblem of the Social State; or in other words, of a political government. Here every one has his appointed station. The various gradations of command and obedience are clearly marked: and it is a truth, as evident to your understandings, as the meridian sun is to your sight: that by a joint cooperation of all in their respective departments; of all those who command, and all those who obey; the vessel is conducted through the waves in safety, appears to

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<sup>109</sup> A translation of Machiavelli’s *Il Principe* (*The Prince*) published in England in 1680 and reprinted in 1720 is similar to Coleridge’s construction. The translated text reads, “but when times are tempestuous, and the ship of the State has need of the help and assistance of the Subject, there are but few will expose themselves.” Interestingly, the English translator adds “the ship of” to Machiavelli’s Italian “*lo Stato*.” Prince IX Niccolò Machiavelli, *Works of the Famous Nicholas Machiavel, Citizen and Secretary of Florence. Written Originally in Italian, and From Thence Newly and Faithfully Translated into English* (London: John Starkey, 1680), 212.. Machiavelli’s Italian text, “*ma ne’ tempi avversi, quando lo Stato ha bisogno de’ cittadini, allora se ne truova pochi*” does not employ the ship metaphor.

<sup>110</sup> Quoted in Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, Commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 150.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

defy the tempest; and often returns, rich in victory and honour.<sup>112</sup>

In 100 years, from a social and technological innovation to an abstract symbol of the projection of economic power across the ocean, the ship had become a fully functioning metaphor for British culture that included everyone from King to common laborer, and in which everyone, if they understood correctly, had an individual place and a collective reward: “victory and honour.”<sup>113</sup>

Rev. Clarke preached aboard HMS *Impetueux* only weeks after strikes aboard naval vessels paralyzed the Royal Navy at its most important bases, Spithead and the Nore. Although Clarke’s sermon was performed before a “captive” audience of seamen and officers aboard a naval vessel, it was hurriedly printed and distributed widely as part of a campaign to defuse the crisis and reassure the British public of the loyalty of the fleet and the stability of the state. The “ship of the social state” was more than a metaphor for political organization in the eighteenth century. Almost everyone in England had a family member or relative at sea;<sup>114</sup> Wordsworth’s brother John was an officer sailing with the East India Company; Coleridge’s brother Francis had been a midshipman. Coleridge knew the rowdy liberty<sup>115</sup> of seamen as he saw them come

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<sup>112</sup> James Stanier Clarke, *Naval Sermons, Preached On Board His Majesty’s Ship ‘Impetueux’ in The Western Squadron During its Services Off Brest*, London: T. Payne, B. White, 1798. 70-71.

<sup>113</sup> Steven Conway argues that the myth of the iron grip of the British empire *at sea* is largely a Victorian idea and the Royal Navy’s strongest influence was confined close to home. See Stephen Conway, “Empire, Europe, and British Naval Power,” *Empire, the Sea and Global History: Britain’s Maritime World, c.1760-1840*, David Cannadine, ed. (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave), 2007, 22-40.

<sup>114</sup> In 1801, when the first census of Great Britain (as a result of the 1801 Act of Union, Great Britain meant England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland) was performed, the population was around 8.9 million; at that time an estimated 3%-4% served in seagoing professions: 126,279 in the navy and marines and 144,558 men sailing in merchant service, not including many thousands of sailors employed in unregulated coastwise and inland trades and smuggling. By comparison (2008), there are over 340,000 persons on active duty in the U.S. Navy and 80,000 employed in ocean-going merchant marine trades: still only 0.14% of the current U.S. population. Sources: U.S. Census, AFL-CIO Maritime Trades Department, U.S. Navy Office of Personnel. Figures from 1801 census qtd. in Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman: 1200-1860, A Social Survey*, (London: Collins, 1968). 115.

<sup>115</sup> The sailor’s freedom to go ashore after a voyage following a payoff is called “liberty” and in any port, would typically be expressed and enjoyed with fervent gusto, much drinking, swearing, and sexual activity.

ashore in Bristol, second only to Liverpool as a homeport for ships in the “Guinea” slave trade and a major sugar importing center into the nineteenth century. Bristol ships served all the colonial markets in the Atlantic, ferrying manufactures and supplies directly to the West Indies and the American colonies. Bristol also served as an embarkation port for troop transports, and had a long history of successful privateering ventures when other cargo was slow. Naval press-gangs were common in Bristol, as were recruiters for the Army and Marines. “Recruitment” methods in the 1790’s were often indistinguishable from the unscrupulous practices of “crimps,” and “shanghai’ers,” though the latter term for abducting seamen was still unknown.<sup>116</sup>

The British Ocean of the mid 1790’s, as observed by Coleridge through the thicket of masts along the Bristol waterfront, or echoed by the voices of seamen, was both vast and compressed. In literary and oral tales, ghosts of privateers mingled with the living dead who had survived the triangle trade and the happier “Jacks” quickly and boisterously spending voyage payoffs. The ships in the harbor comprised a mixed fleet of British and foreign vessels, both worn out decaying hulks and the newest, examples of rapidly developing shipbuilding technology. Far from the objects of romantic nostalgia that they are today, these complex machines brought distant colonial plantations close to hand as their products spilled out onto English wharves. To an eighteenth-century landsman, as to the consumer today, the products were perceptibly real, but the phenomenal reality of the distances involved was purely imaginary; ships arrived, ships departed: another tide, another fleet. Once over the horizon, ships become part of an epistemological space populated by their crews alone. To a landsman

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See Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* (1987), J. Lemisch, “Jack Tar in the Streets,” (1968), Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront* (2004).

<sup>116</sup> Archie Green writes, “Crimps added seduction, entrapment, kidnapping, decoying, intimidation and confinement to press-gang techniques.” In “Crimping: Scourge of the Waterfront.” *Harry Lundeberg’s Stetson and Other Nautical Treasures*, 1st ed. (Crockett, California: Carquinez Press, 2006), 35-40, 36.

like Coleridge, the phenomenal deep sea existed only at second-hand: through voyage narratives and travelers' reports, sailors' sea stories, folklore and ballads. Ocean-going vessels, whose passages gave shape to the space of empire, were crowded, dirty and brutal social spaces. Throughout the eighteenth century, ballads and theatricals celebrated the sailor as a trusty "Heart of Oak" and a "True Son of Britannia." Known by a "stout heart and strong hands," popular songs spoke of his faithfulness to "Molly" or "Poll" as well as his profound love for England. In 1778, Jonas Hanway's Rules of the Maritime School at Chelsea calls the seaman "Britannia's steady champion and filial friend"<sup>117</sup> Despite their patriotic iconography, however, seamen remained notoriously unstable as actual historical actors. Patriotic images competed with sensational tales of "rum, sodomy and the lash," and the sexually charged unruly spectacle of a libertine "Jack Tar" ashore. Geoff Quilley writes:

If the ideological significance of the ship operated simultaneously at allegorical and functional levels, that is as the symbol of the nation – the ship of state – and the material provider of the state's economic prosperity, the persona of the sailor was articulated similarly. In his ideal evocation, apparent particularly at time of war, he was the 'pillar of the nation,' the 'heart of oak,' and a national hero. By contrast, his more vulgar stereotype was that of an oversexed drunkard, blasphemer, reveler and brawler.<sup>118</sup>

The historical ambiguity of seamen and seafaring during the 1790's exposes a dangerous ambiguity within the apparatus of the maritime empire itself: in order to expand and to function, it was necessary to employ sailors, but culturally and economically they represented – both to their employers and their advocates – a dangerous "other."<sup>119</sup> This split role linked them and their work with the empire, which they served and to which they at least partly

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<sup>117</sup> Qtd. Geoff Quilley, "Duty and Mutiny: the Aesthetics of Loyalty and the Representation of the British Sailor c.1789-1800," in *Romantic Wars: Studies in Culture and Conflict, 1793-1822*, ed. Philip Shaw (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2000), 82, 106 n4.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 82.

<sup>119</sup> See Paul A. Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront: American Maritime Culture in the Age of Revolution*, (Philadelphia: U of Penn Press), 2004, 195-227.

belonged, but also with the lascivious Oriental, the slave, revolutionary, the Other which the empire defined itself against. In this way, unruly seafarers in the 1790's represented a threat at the very heart of the imperial apparatus, and a conflict at the heart of the imperial project.

In the Lecture on the Slave-Trade, delivered in Bristol on 16 June 1795, Coleridge drew heavily from Thomas Clarkson's *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade* (1788) as well as C.B. Wadström's *An Essay on Colonization* (1794-5), both of which he had borrowed from the Bristol Library.<sup>120</sup> Besides giving "proof of the detestation in which he holds that infamous traffic,"<sup>121</sup> Coleridge used his lecture to discuss the toxic effect of slaving voyages on the officers and seamen who performed them as well as the unfortunate captives. Of all the dangers faced by Bristol's sailors the triangle trade was especially deadly; by some estimates 21 percent died before the end of the voyages.<sup>122</sup> Coleridge asked his listeners to estimate the cost of the luxury goods the plantation system provided: "to estimate the price, we pay for it, it will be well to give a brief History of a slave-vessel and its contents."<sup>123</sup> The details of the treatment of the seamen and the slaves, taken largely unaltered from Clarkson, were deleted from the version of the lecture published later in *The Watchman*; in print, Coleridge substituted, "I will not mangle the feelings of my readers by detailing enormities, which the gloomy Imagination of Dante would scarcely have dared attribute to the Inhabitants of Hell."<sup>124</sup>

The Slave-Trade lecture links the consumers of luxury goods: sugar, rum, cotton, log-

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<sup>120</sup> *Lectures 1795*, 232.

<sup>121</sup> *Bristol Observer* 1795, 14-15, Qtd. Coleridge, *Lectures 1795*, 233.

<sup>122</sup> Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007), 244.

<sup>123</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures 1795*, 237.

<sup>124</sup> *The Watchman*, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol 2, The Watchman* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969), 133..

wood, cocoa, coffee, pimento, and ginger to atrocities perpetrated by continuing the trade.<sup>125</sup>

Just as the “Moral and Political Lecture” emphasized the collectivity of the Ship of State,

Coleridge was here explicit in assigning collective guilt:

In all reasonings [...] we must attribute the final effect to the first Cause and what is the first and constantly acting cause of the Slave Trade – that cause by which it exists and without which it would immediately die? Is it not self-evidently the consumption of its Products! and does not then the Guilt rest on the Consumers? and is it not an allowed axiom in Morality That Wickedness may be multiplied but cannot be divided and that the Guilt of all attaches to each one who is knowingly an accomplice?<sup>126</sup>

Although the kind of shipboard violence made public by abolitionist texts was inflicted and suffered by seamen throughout the merchant and naval fleets, it was through the explicit descriptions of the slave ships that the sensibilities of readers were inflamed. Coleridge told his audience in Bristol that while the pay promised aboard slave ships was among the highest, and even “the most profligate character” was acceptable to the slave merchant, seamen still avoided the Guinea trade “so long as ships of any other description are fitting out.” This being the case, crews were procured “by the most infamous allurements”:

There are certain Landlords, who [...] having a general knowledge of the Ships and Seamen in the Port and being on always on the look out entice such as are more unwary or in greater distress than the rest into their houses. They entertain them with Music and Dancing, and keep them in an intoxicated state for some Time. In the interim the Slave-merchant comes and makes his application – the unfortunate men are singled out – their Bill is immediately brought them – they are said to be more in debt than even two months’ advance money will discharge. They have therefore the alternative made of them of a Slave-

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<sup>125</sup> Timothy Morton, “Blood Sugar,” in *Romanticism and Colonialism: Writing and Empire, 1780-1830*, ed. Tim Fulford and Peter J. Kitson (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 88.

<sup>126</sup> “Lecture on the Slave Trade,” Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Vol. 11, *Shorter Works and Fragments* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969), 247..



vessel or a Gaol.<sup>127</sup>

The trade ran on violence and terror. At sea, the slave ship's officers thought "themselves authorised in inflicting the most savage Punishments" and, because they were "employed as the immediate Instrument of buying, selling and torturing human Flesh, [they] must from the moral necessity of circumstances become dead to every feeling of [compassion]."<sup>128</sup>

In ports throughout the Atlantic, the slave trade became colloquially known as "the Traffic." The etymology of "traffic" is in question, but it is generally agreed that the first element, *tra*, is from the regular Italian rendering of Latin *trans* – "across" (OED). Some scholars believe that the second element of the word derives from the Latin verb *facere*, "to do, to make," which it shares with "factory." Traffic, as "trans-facere" can mean to make-(or do)-across – a crossing – but also "to make" during a crossing. As an intransitive verb, to be "trafficked" is "to be made the subject of traffic; dealt in as merchandise" (OED).<sup>129</sup>

Slave ships did more than simply transport captive human cargo to the new world. During the voyage across the Atlantic, captives were "trafficked," fashioned into sellable products through psychological and physical violence. At the same time, the men who were brought aboard – whether by force, trickery, or choice – to sail the vessels, were converted into what their masters thought of as a more or less homogenous, disposable labor commodity. The survivors frequently returned "rather shadows [...] then men."

From the brutality of their Captain and the unwholesomeness of the Climate through which they pass, it has been calculated that every Slave Vessel from the Port of Bristol loses on average almost a fourth of the whole Crew – and so far is this Trade from being a nursery for Seamen, that the Survivors are rather shadows in their appearance than men and frequently perish in Hospitals

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<sup>127</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures* 1795, 237.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

<sup>129</sup> "Some have suggested for the word an origin in Arabic, referring it to the verb *taraffaqa*, which sometimes means 'to seek profit'." (OED).

after the completion of the Voyage – many die in consequence of the excesses, with which [they indulge] themselves on Shore as compensation for the intolerable severities they undergo. In Jamaica many rather than re-embark for their native Country beg from door to door, and many are seen in the streets dying daily in an ulcerated state – and they who return home are generally incapacitated for future service by a complication of Disorder[s] contracted from the very nature of the Voyage [...] Thus were the objects of the Trade perfectly innocent, yet the means which it is carried on are so destructive and iniquitous as to brand with ignominy every nation that tolerates it.<sup>130</sup>

Coleridge echoes Samuel Johnson's rhetorical move in the text now known as the Brief to Free a Slave<sup>131</sup> suggesting that even if it were true that one man could own another, in this case it would still be wrong. He also engages a moderate reform position that held neither abolition of the Trade, nor emancipation of held slaves as its goal, but a humanitarian reform of the excesses of the practice. Coleridge is willing to allow that even if the slave Trade were morally just, the means by which it was then exercised were enough to condemn it.

Seamen were violently compelled to manufacture slaves from the captives they loaded aboard in Guinea: the raw materials at the beginning of the voyage. If they survived the voyage, the sailors themselves, having no value as cargo and in fact reducing voyage profits due to their maintenance costs, often reported being treated "worse than slaves."<sup>132</sup> The Traffic transformed sailors and captives both, and by no means equally: Africans transported as cargo were physically and psychologically broken down and cosmetically enhanced to become an attractive commodity to colonial buyers. The vessels were truly factory ships, engaged in the systematic manufacture of slaves. By making their appearances uniform and appealing to buyers, by dyeing gray hair, covering sores and injuries and oiling dry skin, the traders literally converted individuals into uniform products for sale. As a seaman both inflicting and suffering

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<sup>130</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures* 1795, 239.

<sup>131</sup> M Abrams, ed., *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, 7th ed. (New York: Norton, 2000), 2849.

<sup>132</sup> Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, 261.

traumatic violence, the disease and hardship, “the “Disorder[s] contracted from the very nature of the Voyage”<sup>133</sup> metaphorically “fabricated” him into something other than the man who began the voyage, often to be discarded abroad as a used-up byproduct of the Atlantic trade.

As “The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere” begins, the three wedding guests walking together encounter a bedraggled seaman on the road. All three immediately recognize the man’s trade: “It is an Ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three” (1-2). The detained wedding-guest protests: “By thy long grey beard and they glittering eye / Now wherefore stoppest me?” (3-4). However, in 1798 he still invites the seafarer to join them: “if thous’t got a laughsome tale, / Marinere! come with me” (11-12). Later editions of the poem delete this stanza and marginal glosses identify the wedding guests as “three gallants” rather than simply “three.” The effect of this identification is to emphasize a social or class division between the Mariner and his auditor that does not necessarily exist in the 1798 text. A “gallant” is a gentleman; a young, handsome, wealthy man who is everything that the Mariner is not. The object of the critique shifts whether the Mariner’s interlocutor is a social peer or a superior. In the 1798 text, the wedding-guests are familiar with real seamen or the ballads celebrating the adventures of jolly tars, and they may expect that a bawdy story or joke will follow; they are eager to have “happy Jack” join the fun.

The ship and the voyage that give shape to the Rime mythologize three centuries of maritime traffic in one deadly voyage. The Mariner’s story begins with a declaration: “There was a Ship, quoth he—” (10), and then the voyage is underway; the ship sails – virtuous, lighthearted, determined. As the journey begins, Captain Shelvocke’s and Dampier’s passion for documenting navigational detail is left behind. The ship is headed South:

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<sup>133</sup> Coleridge, *Lectures 1795*, 239.

The Ship was cheer'd, the Harbour clear'd—  
 Merrily did we drop  
 Below the Kirk, below the Hill,  
 Below the Light-house top. (25-28)

“Merrily” means both “happily” and unawares;<sup>134</sup> ominously, “Merrily did we drop” both suggests the hope of the crew and foreshadows their end. Sailing from England and heading south leaves Church, country, and familiar landmarks hidden behind the watery wall of the horizon; as it appears to rise, obscuring the crew’s sight of land, they “drop” below it, just as later, dying, the crew drop “down one by one” (219). The Mariner’s ship, and any ship at sea with nothing in sight but sea and sky, inhabits an [epistemological] condition as well as a space demarcated by the surrounding horizon: “the company sails for regions where the physical architecture and established institutions of order, the church, the family, property boundaries, ‘the butcher and the policeman’ are gone.”<sup>135</sup> However, vessels maintain a version of their cultural hierarchy, history and traditions within their hulls, often as a brutally exaggerated performance of social order. The Mariner’s ship carries the myth of Britain triumphantly entering a modern mercantile age as the imperial head of nations. Sailing south from England, the Mariner’s tale marks the point at which his ship crosses the equator, the “Line” between the northern and southern hemispheres, imprecisely described as the point at which the sun would pass directly overhead as it moved from east to west.

The Sun came up upon the Left,  
 Out of the Sea came he:  
 And he shone bright, and on the right  
 Went down into the Sea.

Higher and higher every day,  
 Till over the mast at noon—  
 The wedding-guest here beat his breast,

<sup>134</sup> As in the expression “he went on his merry way,” but also in the etymological history of the word (*OED*).

<sup>135</sup> Peter Hayes, “Pirates, Privateers and the Contract Theories of Hobbes and Locke,” *History of Political Thought* XXIX, no. 3 (Autumn 2008): 465 Hayes quotes Conrad’s “Heart of Darkness.”

For he heard the loud bassoon. (29-36)

At sea, “noon” does not refer to a universal moment or measure of time, but to the direct observation of the vessel’s relationship to the sun – immediate, ever changing, and unique. Once out of sight of land, ships are more than ever a “wooden world” – self-sufficient and self-referential. The ship constitutes its own “time zone” and marks its own noon daily, as it moves across a “timeless” ocean. The ship and the voyage make history by movement through space, just as the telos of European colonial expansion, in its own myth, creates history by crossing seas and continents in the grip of expanding markets.

The allusion to the “line” is the last familiar mark that the text offers before the ship is driven along through stormy seas towards the pole. North and South were imaginary regions heavily coded with ideological significance. For an English reader, to travel “south of the line” was to enter James Thomson’s exotic and deserted “realms unknown, and blooming wilds, / And fruitful deserts – worlds of solitude / Where the sun smiles and seasons teem in vain, / Unseen and unenjoyed.”<sup>136</sup> In John Dryden’s *Annus Mirabilis*, “precious Sand from Southern Climates brought”<sup>137</sup> refers explicitly to gold from Guinea (his footnote ensures the correct identification), yet the specific site is subsumed in the exotic region to the south.

For all the exoticism of the imaginary South, the equator crosses the West African coast near the Bight of Biafra, and it was largely in this area that slave ships waited to load captive Africans for transport to the plantations of the West Indies and the Americas. The wedding guest, torn between the feast and the Mariner, beats his breast in anguish. “Listen, stranger!” (45) – the Mariner must shout to regain his attention. Why the wedding guest’s penitent gesture? He must be distraught over missing the bride’s entrance and the beginning of the

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<sup>136</sup> “Summer” ll 848-50. James Thomson, *The Seasons*, ed. James Sambrook (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980).

<sup>137</sup> “Annus Mirabilis” Dryden, *Works*, I, 95.

ceremony, surely, but he is face to face with the Mariner; at his back lie the products of colonial trade. Earlier, the wedding guest protested:

“The Bridegroom’s doors are open’d wide  
“And I am next of kin;  
“The Guests are met, the Feast is set,—  
“May’st hear the merry din. (5-8)

Within the “Bridegroom’s doors” lies the wedding feast – the site of the festive consumption of commodities produced and imported by colonial commerce. For a wedding, rum punch, sweet cake, French and Spanish wine would mix with English fare at the feast table. The wedding guest’s growing apprehension, emphasized by the “loud bassoon” (36), reflects the dark realities of the British Ocean, but it is the last time he interrupts the storyteller; the complicit dyad of seaman and consumer remain locked together by economic necessity as much as by the Mariner’s eye.<sup>138</sup>

Just as ships that did not actually carry African captives to market in the West Indies were haunted by the trade, so were the consumers of their cargoes. The goods produced by the plantation system that filled merchant ships were only profitable because of plantation labor in the Americas and the Caribbean islands. These plantations could only be maintained by violent force; the violence of capturing and transporting labor to the islands and the violence of suppressing insurrection. Acts of violent ideological suppression were necessary as the knowledge of the particular methods of production on plantation islands became part of the rhetoric of abolition and reform in England. As the Mariner insists on drawing the wedding guest away from the feast and towards himself, his gaze (for he has seen and lived the deadly voyage) partially undoes the deferral of guilt that repressing the real costs of colonial

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<sup>138</sup> Sarah Moss is correct to disapprove of “the critical tendency to convict the Ancient Mariner of participation in the slave trade,” although, as she continues, “all late 18<sup>th</sup>-century voyaging takes place against the background of the slave trade and other forms of colonial exploitation.” “Class War and the Albatross,” 79.

commerce allowed. An older Coleridge may have wished to exclude the “old naval heroes of Elizabeth’s age”<sup>139</sup> from the taint of the later merchants and the slave system, but the Rime’s dark origin myth for the maritime empire recognizes the real stakes of the privateer’s “global gamble.”

Approaching a dangerous passage reminiscent of Cape Horn and the South Sea, the myth emerges from the historical imaginary of England’s past into a contemporary oceanic imaginary already weirdly populated by spectral figures of resistance. The Antarctic continent remained terra incognita well into the nineteenth century despite Cook’s passage below the Antarctic circle in 1775. The fabled landmass was not seen by western eyes until 1820, but the fierce weather and hazards of ice in the gap south of Tierra del Fuego were reported by English voyagers as early as Drake. Cape Horn was named by the captain of the Dutch East Indiaman *Eendracht* in January, 1616, for Hoorne, his home town in the Netherlands. “The Horn” challenges mariners in what has almost become a set piece of the voyage narrative. The Rime exploits the Cape Horn set piece without naming it, embellishing the stormy passage with images of Antarctic sublime:

Listen Stranger! Mist and Snow,  
And it grew wond’rous cauld:  
And Ice mast-high came floating by  
As green as Emerauld. (49-53)

Coleridge was meticulous in adapting his source material; although generalized, details of the voyage such as wind direction and course are accurate. Therefore, as Sarah Moss argues, “it seems perverse to ignore Coleridge’s very precise account of exactly where the Mariner

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<sup>139</sup> Table Talk, *Works*, v14, 14:268.

goes, especially as the navigational precision is marked in an otherwise unearthly poem.”<sup>140</sup>

Shelvocke’s narrative shadows the poem; attending carefully to the poem and source texts to determine “where the Mariner goes” also illuminates the poem’s strategic revisions. In *A Voyage Around the World*, Captain Shelvocke includes great detail of his approach to Drake’s Passage, the ferocious strait south of Tierra del Fuego. On September 23, 1719 he writes: “The fog clearing up, we saw some mountains of a stupendous height on Tierra del Fuego, entirely cover’d with snow. [The next morning, we] had a full but melancholy prospect of the most desolate country (to all appearance) that can be conceiv’d, seeming to be no other than a continued chain of mountains, one within another, perpetually hid by the snow.”<sup>141</sup> The Rime emphasizes the ice, not the coastline – the forlorn snowy cliffs barely visible and passing away:

And thro’ the drifts the snowy clifts  
Did send a dismal sheen;  
Ne shapes of men ne beasts we ken—  
The Ice was all between. (53-56)

Whether the “clifts” are the cliffs of Shelvocke’s “desolate country” or ridges of ice on drifting icebergs is unclear; when the poem recedes from Shelvocke the ambiguity of the land/sea-scape increases the sense that the Mariner is passing out of an historical setting and into an increasingly oneiric ocean. The ghostly southernmost point of land (if land it is) gives way to a terrifying, cacophonous field of ice:

The Ice was here, the Ice was there,  
The Ice was all around:  
It crack’d and growl’d, and roar’d and howl’d—  
Like noises of a swound. (57-60)

In any version of the Cape Horn story, “doubling” the Cape is a remarkable feat; in historical voyages, sailors and vessels emerge exhausted and battered after weeks battling fierce

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<sup>140</sup> Moss, “Class War and the Albatross,” 79.

<sup>141</sup> Shelvocke, *Voyage*, 67-68.



headwinds and mountainous waves. As a narrative trope, the passage around Cape Horn is a rite of initiation: a trial or baptism not by fire, but by the unbridled fury of the most southern ocean: “The Ice did split with a Thunder-fit; / The Helmsman steer’d us thro’. / And a good south wind sprung up behind” (67-69).<sup>142</sup> The sudden emergence into the Pacific comes as a welcome balm to historical and fictional sailors alike; in the *Rime*, the passage becomes a reflection of the voyage south, for the major turn in the poem is the ship’s turn to the north and into the “silent Sea” (102). Picking up a “good south wind” (71) while still in the ice, the ship sails north. The Mariner’s narrative is a near-reciprocal of the southbound stanzas:

The Sun came up upon the right,  
 Out of the Sea came he;  
 And broad as a weft upon the left  
 Went down into the Sea. (83-86)

Carrying the southerly breeze away from the ice and snow, and where all the features of the seascape emit a frightening cacophonous din, the Mariner’s ship “bursts” into a still and silent ocean:

The breezes blew; the white foam flew,  
 The furrow follow’d free:  
 We were the first that ever burst  
 Into that silent Sea. (99-102)

With the ship’s “first burst” into the silent sea the progress of the voyage, in every sense, comes to a stop. Chiasmatic lines reflect on themselves like concentric ripples around the becalmed ship: “Down dropt the breeze, the Sails dropt down” (107), “Day after day, day after day” (115). Such calms in these latitudes are a common, even cruelly ironic hazard. Following the freezing maelstrom of Cape Horn, many sailors perished in the still and silent heat of the southern tropics. Moreover, the ship has ceased to function as a viable symbol: no more the

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<sup>142</sup> See especially, Dennis Berthold, “Cape Horn Passages: Literary Conventions and Nautical Realities” in Patricia Ann Carlson, ed., *Literature and Lore of the Sea* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1986).

“Sovereign of the Aquatic Globe.”<sup>143</sup>

The Mariner mistakenly attributes the calm to his thoughtless act during the Antarctic passage. In that stanzaic passage, the Mariner, without explanation or consideration, shot and killed an albatross that had been following the ship for “vespers nine” (74). The crew had adopted the animal as a sort of pet; in the ice, the bird “every day for food or play / Came to the Marinere’s hollo!” (71-72). The crew is split; in one moment they blame the Mariner for killing the bird, thinking that it has “made the Breeze to blow” (92), but in the following stanza, as the sky clears and the ship enters fair weather again, they applaud the senseless act for “‘Twas right, said they, such birds to slay / That bring the fog and mist” (97-98).

Neither opinion has merit. Dampier and Shelvocke’s narratives were only the most prominent among many that Coleridge knew that meticulously related the navigational and meteorological conditions of their own passages. One of Shelvocke’s subordinate officers shot an albatross on their passage around the Cape, which Wordsworth reportedly offered to Coleridge as a suggested plot device. Coleridge knew that the winds of Cape Horn, while fickle, were not unpredictable, even if his Mariner did not, and the poem’s description fits the actual conditions well enough. The poem reflects a routine rounding of the Cape and nowhere suggests supernatural agency affecting the wind. The crew, on the other hand, do not know this and so they suggest the mistaken interpretation of events: the albatross had “made the Breeze to blow” (92).

The Mariner is swayed by the conflicting opinions of his shipmates, but ultimately accepts their reading, even though the poem is clear that the crew remain undecided until moments before their death:

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<sup>143</sup> Edward Ward, qtd in Linebaugh and Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra*, 150.

And some in dreams assured were  
Of the Spirit that plagued us so:  
Nine fathom deep he had followed us  
From the Land of Mist and Snow. (127-30)

Generations of criticism, beginning with Coleridge's own editorial "glosses," have further compounded the misreading initially perpetrated by the ship's crew. Without Coleridge's 1834 gloss to the preceding stanza, it is easily conceivable that, closely read, the lines repeat the crew's late anxieties concerning their predicament. Some of the men have dreamed that there is a "Spirit" to blame for the doldrums. The second half of the stanza, following the colon, is not the poet or the Mariner speaking directly to the reader, but the unquoted (but not unattributed) conclusion of the dreamers' reverie that the plaguing underwater Spirit had followed the ship to their current location from the "region of mist and snow."<sup>144</sup>

Day after day, day after day,  
We stuck, ne breath ne motion,  
As idle as a painted Ship  
Upon a painted Ocean

Water, water, every where  
And all the boards did shrink;  
Water, water, every where,  
Ne any drop to drink.

The very deeps did rot: O Christ!  
That ever this should be!  
Yea, slimy things did crawl with legs  
Upon the slimy Sea. (111-122)

In the Pacific doldrums near "the line," the crew begins to experience the deadly heat and pestilence that decimated Britain's colonial forces on land and sea alike.

And every tongue thro' utter drouth  
Was wither'd at the root;

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<sup>144</sup> The gloss reads: "A spirit had followed them; one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet, neither departed souls nor angels; concerning whom the learned Jew; Josephus, and the Platonic Constantinopolitan, Michael Psellus, may be consulted. They are very numerous, and there is no climate or element without one or more" (1834, 131-34).

We could not speak no more than if  
We had been choked with soot. (131-134)

No “supernatural” explanation was needed for this description of service in the tropics. Hector McLean, a doctor serving with the British Royal Marines in Saint Domingue, wrote about attending to the dying in the General Hospital in Port au Prince in a pamphlet published in 1797. The hospital was packed with victims of yellow fever; among the late symptoms of yellow fever were disgorging large amounts of digested blood, which gave the disease its slang name, “the black vomit;” the victim’s lips and gums might blacken from hemorrhage and ooze fetid secretions. New arrivals to the island fared worst of all, as yellow fever ravaged those with no resistance to the virus. In 10 days in July 1796, the York Hussars lost 23 percent of its men; the 82<sup>nd</sup> Foot lost 2/3 of its force in three months.<sup>145</sup> Most troubling to the English was that the fever apparently ravaged Britons while Africans and slaves seemed immune: “Dr. Thomas Trotter, a naval doctor [...] claimed that ‘African negroes’ appeared immune to ‘contagious fever[s],’ while the poet Robert Southey explicitly stated that ‘yellow fever will not take root in a negro’”<sup>146</sup> McLean was an empirical scientist, averse to therapeutic bleeding and dedicated to medical research. Still, he describes the fear of the men around him “hemmed in by an unseen enemy and haunted by the daily spectacle of death.”<sup>147</sup>

What McLean does not discuss is the suspicion among some that white soldiers died in overwhelmingly larger numbers than local slaves and black soldiers because of the spells of Obi priests. To the British in the West Indies and at home, “Obeah,” “Obi” or “voodoo” was simply and frighteningly black witchcraft. Its practitioners were thought to have the power,

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<sup>145</sup> David Patrick Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue, 1793-1798* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 360.

<sup>146</sup> Trotter & Southey qtd. in Debbie Lee, “Yellow Fever and the Slave Trade: Coleridge’s “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner,”” *ELH* 65, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 675.

<sup>147</sup> Qtd in Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution*, 368, 370.

through ritual magic and the control of spirits, to cure or to curse, to cause death and disease, and even to transform corpses into soulless zombies. To the common soldier, the “unseen enemy” Dr. McLean mentioned was more than a theory about disease.

In March 1797 Bryan Edwards’s *An Historical Survey of the French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo*, appeared in London.<sup>148</sup> Edwards included sensationalistic descriptions of the followers of voodoo massacring whites and directly connected “obeiah-men” to revolts of slaves or maroons.<sup>149</sup> Edwards’s earlier *History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West Indies* contains a chapter on “Obeah” and narratives of “Obeah Trials.” Edwards’s books were part of a small industry in “Obi” poems, plays, and novels in England in the 1790’s. *Obi: or Three-Fingered Jack* had successful runs as a melo-drama, as a pantomime, and as a novel. Fears of obeah and fears of disease, while partly predicated on fears of black resistance, are linked to anxieties at home. Having neatly projected a British national character against the abject body of the African slave, the prospects for abolition, even emancipation, raised concerns that the status of Africans would suddenly change “—from foreigners to citizens— [and] would not only infect Europeans but deplete any differences between the races.”<sup>150</sup> Abolition supporters and planters alike worried that with “the imminent death of the slave system [...] British culture faced the possibility of a social system that no longer divided itself neatly into masters and slaves.”<sup>151</sup>

When the Mariner sees a mysterious “something in the Sky” (148.1), which becomes a sail, then a ship coming towards him, there is hope for rescue. For a moment, the crew breathes

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<sup>148</sup> Full title: *An Historical Survey of The French Colony in the Island of St. Domingo: Comprehending A Short Account of Its Ancient Government, Political State, Population, Productions, and Exports; A Narrative of the Calamities Which Have Desolated the Country Ever Since The Year 1789 ... And a Detail of the Military Transactions of the British Army in That Island To The End of 1794.* (London: J. Stockdale), 1797.

<sup>149</sup> Richardson 7, 8.

<sup>150</sup> Lee, “Yellow Fever and the Slave Trade,” 681.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 680.

“As they were drinking all” (166). A line later, the recognition arises that the ship approaches  
“Withouten wind, withouten tide / She steddies with upright keel” (170-71). Another moment  
and the second ship is alongside. The crew of the “Spectral” ship are phantoms with  
connections to all kinds of seafaring and country folklore, in addition to which, the female  
skeleton and her black “Pheere” suggest imagery of Bryan Edwards and other West Indian  
colonial sources.

His bones were black with many a crack,  
All black and bare, I ween;  
Jet-black and bare, save where with rust  
Of mouldy damp and charnel crust  
They’re patched with purple and green.

Her lips are red, her looks are free,  
Her locks are yellow as gold:  
Her skin is as white as leprosy,  
And she is far liker Death than he;  
Her flesh makes the still air cold. (181-190)

The phantom vessel and deathly crew is the sister-ship to the Mariner’s ship-of-state. In  
fact there are only these two ships. The work of the death-ship is the work of the slave voyage,  
of the press gang, and of the routine mistreatment of sailors: to transform living men into  
products, machines, tools for the benefit of the voyage. Now, though, the consequences of the  
British Ocean are enacted in vengeance.

The jet-black skeletal figure, whose bones are cracked, and his partner, a debased and  
sexually ravenous Anglo-European woman bring the violence of the plantation and the violent  
appetites of the English face-to-face with the men whose labor, in fact, did efface the distance  
between producer and consumer. Coleridge knew both the atrocities of the middle passage and  
plantation discipline and at least until 1798 had spoken publicly in criticism of the consumers  
of sugar, indigo, tobacco -- all luxury products that plantations produced. The fact that the

characters all come together as one ship passes another in a weirdly oneiric ocean dramatizes the role the sea has in allowing vastly different and perhaps incommensurable events, and people, and substances to mingle dangerously. No identification can be precise where there are so many complicated levels of signification. To make matters worse, Coleridge's lifelong revisions and retractions only further occlude the "original" meanings of the poem, confounding critics and readers who search for a single comprehensive interpretation. Nonetheless, the fate of the crew is decided by this nightmarish mid-ocean "gam."

The naked Hulk alongside came  
And the Twain were playing dice;  
"The Game is done! I've won, I've won!"  
Quoth she, and whistled thrice. (191-194)

After prolonged suffering, the Mariner's shipmates die, "With never a sigh or groan, / With heavy thump, a lifeless lump / They dropp'd down one by one" (217-19). But as they die, they turn to the strangely surviving Mariner and look at him: how – pleadingly, angrily, accusingly? As the crew died, the Mariner tells the wedding-guest, "Each turn'd his face with a ghastly pang / And curs'd me with his ee" (214-15). These moments of dying eye contact are important enough that the Mariner pauses to recapture the wedding-guest's (and the reader's) attention, repeating again, albeit parenthetically, "(Listen, O Stranger! To me)" (213). Slowly turning, adrift in the silent ocean, the ship of state has come to ruin, and one survivor to tell the tale.

A week and more passes with the Mariner alone on the ship surrounded by the corpses of his comrades, and in another extended stanza the Mariner again recalls the dying men's eyes:

An orphan's curse would drag to Hell  
A spirit from on high  
But O! more horrible than that  
Is the curse in a dead man's eye!  
Seven days, seven nights I saw that curse,

And yet I could not die.

(257-262)

As if to make certain the distinction between the living Mariner and the dead crew, at the wedding-guest's "I fear Thee, ancient Marinere!" (224), the Mariner assures him, "Fear not, fear not, [...] This body dropt not down" (230-31, emphasis mine).

In Edwards's *History*, he writes: "[Obi], is now become the general term in Jamaica to denote [those who] practice witchcraft or sorcery, comprehending also [those who] endeavor to convince the deluded spectators of their power to re-animate dead bodies."<sup>152</sup> The "zombi" is a reanimated body without a soul, flesh without spirit. Setting aside the Mariner's explanations of how the ship began moving again, eerily like the Spectre ship without wind; whether spirits, or daemons or the later additions, "angels," are invisibly responsible, the ship required the bodies of sailors to return the Mariner to his "own Countree." The bodies work without inspiration, they mouth no words but turn to their positions with an inarticulate "groan":

They groan'd, they stirr'd, they all uprose,  
Ne spake, ne mov'd their eyes:  
It had been strange, even in a dream  
To have seen those dead men rise.

The helmsman steered, the ship mov'd on;  
Yet never a breeze up-blew;  
The Mariners all 'gan work the ropes,  
Where they were wont to do:  
They raised their limbs like lifeless tools –  
We were a ghastly crew.

(331-340)

The crew of the Mariner's ship work silently, with a curious collective autonomy. In Haitian folklore, the zombi becomes a slave of the person who made it so, working silently, deprived of will, memory and consciousness.<sup>153</sup> It's hard to see whom the sailors serve, if not the ship

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<sup>152</sup> Edwards, *History*, Vol 2,iv,84. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group.  
<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>, accessed February 13, 2008.

<sup>153</sup> Hans-W. Ackermann and Jeanine Gauthier, "The Ways and Nature of the Zombi," *The Journal of American Folklore*, Vol. 104, No. 414. (Autumn, 1991), 466-494.



itself. Expensive and troublesome parts of the ship's gear at best, the voyage and the spectral encounter in the silent sea have transformed the "merry" crew into soulless but efficient undead. The Mariner is an out-of-place spectator as the crew silently works the ship while the poem fast-forwards to the home port. As the ship hurtles across a windless ocean, the wedding guest begins to fear that the zombification that overtook the crew is contagious; thinking that the source of the "infection" is the Mariner himself, he exclaims:

"Marinere! Thou hast thy will:  
For that, which comes out of thine eye, doth make  
"My body and soul to be still." (372.1.2-1.4)

The fear of domestic contamination from overseas, from the "Other," as the agents of demonic slave revolt and transformed sailors blend together in the Mariner's tale terrifies the wedding guest. The zombie crew that sails the ship home to England exploits the fascination with exotic terror, as it represents the more concrete fears that war, slave revolts and mutinies raise, as well as the moral costs to individuals and to the nation of global traffic.

What of the "hearts of oak" who man the ships and sail them out and home again? In the scene of the Rime analogous to the final scene of Alfred, the Mariner, following his rescue from the catastrophic earthquake and sinking of his worn-out ship begs the hermit:

"O Shrieve me, shrieve me, holy Man!  
The Hermit cross'd his brow—  
"Say quick," quoth he, "I bid thee say  
"What manner man art thou? (574-77)

In answer, the Mariner began telling his tale for the first time. The inversion of Alfred that this scene enacts is clear. Alfred founded a nation by defeating an invading enemy, and then received his "name" as King from the hermit. The Mariner meets the hermit and is asked by him "What manner man art thou?" The holy hermit in Alfred delivers his prophesy beneath the symbol of a strong and virtuous nation, the mighty Oak. In Coleridge's Rime, Mariner and

crew go forth to “grasp the world” but return ruined; nonetheless, hero meets hermit, but not beneath a mighty oak: for “This Hermit” (514), “hath a cushion plump: / It is the moss, that wholly hides / The rotted old Oak-stump” (520-22).

## CHAPTER 4

### ‘The Sea, the Real Sea’: Nature and the Oceanic Gaze

Not for a moment could I now behold  
A smiling sea and be what I have been  
“Elegiac Stanzas” (37-8)

William Wordsworth’s sailors and his “Female Vagrant” have all been transformed, “trafficked,” during traumatic voyages. For Wordsworth, redemption and restoration comes with homecoming and the sounds of rural water, each characterized according to his domestic pantheon; to be at sea – or to be lost at sea, drowned, marooned, cast away, enslaved, transported, shipwrecked, even as rivers lose themselves by dissolving into the ocean – is to be lost beyond redemption. Wordsworth’s Nature is imbued with transcendental meaning – whether in his almost pantheist early One Life formulation or the increasingly conventional Trinitarian view after 1805 – but Wordsworth’s God and Nature hold fast to the shoreline as the ocean becomes something beyond the “border” zone that his characters and poetry walk.

The often unacknowledged relationship of the sea to an uncomfortable, even dangerous category of sublime experience for Wordsworth began very early. Watery images abound in Wordsworth’s work. Kenneth MacLean catalogues and categorizes watery images in the *Prelude* and concludes,

It would indeed seem obvious that there are enough qualities in the element of water to support all the suggestion Wordsworth would have it bear when we remember that here is something which has the power to move and sound; to freshen and make float; to wash and to cleanse; the power to reflect; to distort, to sparkle magically; the power to be free; and finally, the power to create that rhythm, which, however it comes into life, can

moderate, soothe, and give pleasure.<sup>154</sup>

MacLean does not distinguish between kinds of water images, and discusses the similarities between the sounds and appearances of rivers, streams, rills, lakes and the usually distant prospect of the sea. Reading the *Prelude*, he marks Wordsworth's association of watery scenes with happy youth, even in scenes otherwise linked to sublime terror: "Terror was a frequent experience in his childhood, [although Nature,] Wordsworth says in *The Prelude*, draws us to her always in the ways of pleasure."<sup>155</sup> MacLean's article, misses considering Wordsworth's early experiments and anxieties that, by the time the *Prelude* was in composition, had been controlled to a large extent—dangerous flood plains reclaimed by careful if beautiful canals and aqueducts.

Duncan Wu's extensive biographical work reveals much about the psychological precursors to Wordsworth's mature writing. The loss of both parents at a young age and the scattering of his siblings created anxieties, but also opportunities to exert a formidable artistic will on the literary and natural impressions young Wordsworth recorded. Wu stops short of claiming the expertise or intention to psychoanalyze Wordsworth through surviving texts, and I stop shorter still.<sup>156</sup> However, it is worth considering as evidence that certain images and "lines of reasoning" are either welcomed or rejected, developed or repressed, based on features of Wordsworth's internal life that are available to informed conjecture. Writing about Wordsworth in 1787, Wu says, "from an early age he understood the tension between memories and apparently unrelated emotions. Such details as the whistling wind, the naked rock and solitary sheep are ingredients in the mysterious alchemy that will resolve grief into

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<sup>154</sup> Kenneth MacLean, "The Water Symbol in *The Prelude* (1805-6)," *The University of Toronto Quarterly* XVII, no. 4 (July 1948): 387. MacLean also notes Gray's roughly contemporary association of water and poetry in that poet's "Progress of Poesy." 386n5.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>156</sup> *Inner Life*, 15.

imaginative energy.”<sup>157</sup>

Wordsworth’s maritime knowledge, even at an early age, was more acute than many critics recognize. His first cousin, John Wordsworth, was captain of the *Earl of Abergavenny* (the first of two ships by that name to be commanded by a Wordsworth). William would later write a letter to the editor of the *Weekly Entertainer* defending the character of Fletcher Christian against the claims of a book comprised of letters supposedly written by Christian. Without naming names, Wordsworth writes “I have the best authority for saying this publication is spurious.”<sup>158</sup> Although the *Bounty* mutiny took place in 1789 and the letter is dated 1796, the Wordsworth and the Christian families may have been acquainted since William’s early youth. The Christians were from Cumberland, near Cockermouth and Fletcher’s older brother, Edward, was a Fellow of St. John’s when William went up to Cambridge.<sup>159</sup> During his first year at Cambridge in the summer of 1788, Wordsworth read Thomas Clarkson’s prize-winning *An Essay on the Slavery and Commerce of the Human Species*. Clarkson’s Latin essay had been translated into English and published in 1786, and by 1788 he had brought out *An Essay on the Impolicy of the African Slave Trade*. Part of the momentum propelling the young abolition movement was the *Zong* trial of 1783, which featured now-infamous reports of living people thrown overboard at sea. As I argued in the previous chapter, fully 4% of the male population of Britain in 1790 was employed in legitimate naval or merchant shipping. This excludes both smugglers and “wreckers” and lawful trades that relied on shipping such as shipwrights and sailmakers. Everyone had a family member at sea or knew someone who did. Wordsworth’s family associations with

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<sup>157</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>158</sup> *Weekly Entertainer*, (vol. xxviii, p. 377), 7 November 1796, quoted in J.R. MacGillivray, “An Early Poem and Letter by Wordsworth,” *The Review of English Studies* 5, no. 17 (January 1954): 62-66.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

seafaring were deep, even by the standards of the late-eighteenth-century.

Part journalism, part sentimental sensationalism, but always profit-driven, the “shipwreck narrative” had developed as a popular nonfiction genre—almost a sub-genre of Gothic—and pamphlets dripping with lurid details of wrecks and maritime disasters were rushed into print as soon as the details could be gathered, or created. Some of Wordsworth’s early experiments included similar allegorical scenes of shipwreck and storm, also likely influenced by Ossian and Thomson as well as contemporary sentimental and Gothic narratives in prose and verse.<sup>160</sup> By the 1780’s, Young’s *Night Thoughts* (1742), had been popular for decades. Landon and Curtis, editors of the *Cornell Wordsworth’s Early Poems and Fragments*, 1785-1797, as well as Duncan Wu suggest that Wordsworth probably knew Helen Maria Williams’s *Irregular Fragment*, the Aikins’ *Sir Bertrand*, Walpole’s *The Castle of Otranto*, and Parnell’s *Night Piece on Death*,<sup>161</sup> all popular eighteenth-century works renowned for Gothic settings and scenes of supernatural horror. What Wordsworth took away from works in these modes is an attentiveness to characters in extreme emotional states expressed through extreme physical actions.

The *Shipwreck of the Soul* may draw on the loss of the East Indiaman *Halsewell* in January 1786, in which Captain Pierce was lost along with his daughters and several other young women. The extreme pathos of the story of virginal maidens perishing with their heroic father ensured that the wreck was widely reported; witnesses claimed the captain bravely drowned surrounded by seven young women, all of them praying, and it became the occasion of poems published in several newspapers as well as a number of journalistic pamphlets of widely varying quality. Among the poetic treatments of the disaster was a “highly charged

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<sup>160</sup> William Wordsworth, *Early Poems and Fragments, 1785-1797*, ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1997), 589.

<sup>161</sup> Wordsworth, *Early Poems*, 588-89; Wu, *Inner Life*, 23.

account” in Erasmus Darwin’s *Botanic Garden* (1791).<sup>162</sup> A later account, published to raise money for survivors, is Charlotte Smith’s *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catherine, Venus, and Piedmont* (1796).<sup>163</sup> The Wordsworth family faced compounded grief after the loss of their brother John with his East Indiaman *Earl of Abergavenny* in 1805, when an inaccurate and possibly slanderous pamphlet (again, one of several printed hastily after the incident) raised suggestions of negligence on the part of the Captain and officers.

Wordsworth’s early poetry manipulates current literary modes to develop a sophisticated method of psychological exploration. These early fragments are often allegorical characterizations of Horror, Suicide, Despair and Terror. Wordsworth seems especially drawn to Terror: “One senses that he is feeling his way towards a fuller understanding, and that as a step [...] he had first to establish his closeness to the Burkean quality of Terror.”<sup>164</sup>

Wordsworth’s personifications seem to indicate that he is imagining concepts external to himself; but it’s not external at all: “[t]he literary modes dictate that the clumsy personification manifest itself as a distinct entity; in fact, he’s talking about his inner world. [...] Gothicism was useful to him primarily as a means of discussing psychological process.”<sup>165</sup>

The *Shipwreck of the Soul* fragment and the contemporary *Storm Fragments* share with *The Vale of Esthwaite* a careful attention to writing contrasting verses of sublimity and beauty, showing the skillful young Wordsworth adeptly working within eighteenth-century aesthetic practice. *The Vale of Esthwaite* alternates between Gothic and pastoral modes, “the sublime

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<sup>162</sup> *Early Poems*, 582-83, 583 n4. Over a couple of hours, I easily counted over a dozen accounts of the *Halsewell* disaster in one online archive of pamphlets and ephemera, including several conflicting reports of the incident and a lengthy sentimental narrative poem.

<sup>163</sup> *A Narrative of the Loss of the Catherine, Venus, and Piedmont Transports, and the Thomas, Golden Grove, and Æolus, Merchant Ships Near Weymouth, On Wednesday the 18<sup>th</sup> of November Last. Drawn up from Information taken on the Spot, by Charlotte Smith, And published for the benefit of an unfortunate Survivor from one of the Wrecks and her Infant Child.* (London: Sampson Low, 1796).

<sup>164</sup> Wu, *Inner Life*, 24.

<sup>165</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

and the beautiful—partly in imitation of those models whose meter it adopts, L'Allegro and Il Penseroso,” as Duncan Wu notes.<sup>166</sup> But more than slavishly imitating preceding works, Wu claims, even as a schoolboy Wordsworth displayed an “assured handling of couplet and metre [extending] to providing a wide range of formal variation [...] Technically, this fourteen-year-old is as technically competent, if not more so, as most of his adult contemporaries.”<sup>167</sup>

The fragmentary Shipwreck of the Soul, dated the summer of 1788 by Landon and Curtis, reveals an early fear of dissolution into madness and even bodilessness linked with ocean waters, in which “Reason, confronted by the imminent loss of Religion and the prime virtues, proves powerless to save the soul.”<sup>168</sup> The ocean threatens “Truth Religion Charity and Joy / Pity and Hope” in this image of absolute negation. Wordsworth’s treatment submerges an actual event in the epic simile of the “shipwreck of his Soul” (2) and shows the beginnings of an oceanic sublime at work. The first fragment reads:

Then did dire forms and ghastly faces float  
On the dreadful shipwreck of his Soul  
While Truth Religion Charity and Joy  
Pity and Hope, with wild imploring eyes  
Rack'd with anguish  
Frantic with Despair  
Like those sad Daughters late on Albion's coast  
Clung round their Parent Reason, while he heard  
Their dismal shrieks nor could relieve their pain  
For lo the Storm howls onward—he did mind  
Two dreadful giants storm and Danger stalk  
Viewless and [...]<sup>169</sup>

“Viewless” is a typically Wordsworthian word which may mean “blind” or “unseen.”<sup>170</sup> The

<sup>166</sup> *The Earliest Wordsworth: Poems, 1785-1790*, ed. Duncan Wu (Manchester: Carcanet, 2002), 95.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 83.

<sup>168</sup> *Early Poems*, 582.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid.*, 584. Landon and Curtis note that the last two lines here also appear in drafts of *Storm Fragments*, roughly contemporaneous with the *Shipwreck* fragment. *Early Poems*, 584, n 10-12.

<sup>170</sup> In a letter of February 1793, Dorothy complains to Jane Pollard that William's poems are "exquisitely beautiful, but they also contain many faults, the chief of which are Obscurity, and a too frequent use of some particular expressions and uncommon words" [...] "The word *viewless* is introduced far too often, this,



personification of Storm from a natural phenomenon into one of the two giants: “Two dreadful giants storm and Danger stalk Viewless,” takes both meanings. The Storm howls, drowning the dismal shrieks of the Christian principles that derive from “Parent Reason.” “He” who “did mind” is the same consciousness whose Soul is in danger at the beginning of the fragment; significantly, the action is entirely internal, contained within the simile of the wreck of the Halsewell. The “ghastly faces” float on the soul and are not seen, the dismal shrieks are heard as the inner voice of crisis, and the dreadful giants presence and threat is known: “he did mind” but not by the external eye. The giants are “Viewless”—unseen, but also blind to the destruction they cause: sublime terror is arbitrary, overwhelming and as unprovoked as an alpine avalanche or a storm at sea. By splitting the phenomenal “Storm” of the shipwreck simile into two groping giants, “storm and Danger,” at the moment of the long dash, they emerge from the simile as new characters. Wordsworth unleashes the potential of the Halsewell vehicle in the “space” of the tenor. He accomplishes this by condensing the storm – the cause of the Halsewell’s grounding and loss – into the blind giants, storm and Danger, who belong to the fragment’s controlling metaphor of the subject’s crisis when Reason proves unequal to the oceanic Storm and the resulting loss of Religion and her sisters. Duncan Wu, in a passage I quoted above, claims that Wordsworth’s “clumsy personifications” were the result of his efforts to adopt current literary examples to his needs, but: “in fact, he’s talking about his inner world. [...] Gothicism was useful to him primarily as a means of discussing psychological process.”<sup>171</sup> While this is true in the context in which it was meant, Wordsworth does not entirely abandon his personifications of internal dynamics. As we shall see, these early experiments with

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though not so uncommon a word [as *moveless*] ought not to have been used more than once or twice.” “Viewless” appeared in *The Evening Walk* of 1793 and five times in *Descriptive Sketches*. All were subsequently removed. *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth: The Early Years 1787-1805*, ed. Ernest De Selincourt, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), 89.

<sup>171</sup> *Inner Life*, 25.

personification will lay the groundwork for the deeply resonant characterizations of the Female Vagrant and the Leech Gatherer in later poems.

“Dire forms and ghastly faces” belongs to a cluster of images each linking the watery apparitions with the condition, not the event, of shipwreck. This is an early effort to bring narrative resonance to a lyric moment. The line here has a precedent in the couplet “What dire and ghastly faces roull / Round the black shipwreck of my soul,” part of a slightly earlier MS fragment describing a moment of terrestrial horror just after the speaker falls to the ground, overcome by terror, and reflexively grasps the cold dead hand of a corpse, perhaps a murderer.<sup>172</sup> Another similar image appears in an allegorical personification of a suicide at the very moment of letting-go, prior to falling into the sea: “And Suicide in act to leap / Hung from the tall crown of the sable steep.” This short fragment concludes with the dreadful visions of eyes and faces: “fiery eyes and dreadful faces / Dim in the stream below.” The Suicide fragment is related to yet another jotting, “And starting at the gulf below.” Both have a figure “hanging” pendant above waters in which faces appear: as apparitions or reflections. The recurring image of faces flickering and receding on the water recalls, in another register, Narcissus and the dangers of reflection. Again separating the active moment from the result, Wordsworth is exploring the potentially dangerous plunge into self-knowledge.

For Wordsworth, remembering brings an overwhelming experience of himself encountering himself. In Wordsworth’s Revisionary Aesthetics, Theresa Kelley writes “Like the older Freud, Wordsworth seems to have been as much interested in how the mind defends itself against the sublime as he was in the sublime itself.”<sup>173</sup> Hence Suicide, “in act to leap /

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<sup>172</sup> *The Vale of Esthwaite*, Extract XVI, MS. 5 2<sup>v</sup> lines 8-9. *Early Poems*, 528.

<sup>173</sup> *Wordsworth's Revisionary Aesthetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10. On the next page, Kelley writes, about the “Crossing the Alps” portion of *Prelude*, “All [the quasi-human features of the Ravine of Arve] are likened to “features” on a monumental “face,” to “characters of the great apocalypse.”

Hung from the tall crown of the sable steep” hanging, “in act” but inactive – frozen, while dim faces pass in the stream below. All these early watery images are behind the Shipwreck of the Soul, which crucially employs the trope of the anguished Soul as a shipwreck, a maritime scene, where the narrative action is not important; not a “seascape” properly, but a “sea-piece.” Peele Castle in a Storm by Sir George Beaumont (1805) will be another such sea-piece with profound meaning for Wordsworth.

The Shipwreck of the Soul relies on historical reference and is related to a “chronotope” of shipwreck – or close to Margaret Cohen’s “white water” chronotope. In the chronotope (chronos + topos), Mikhail Bakhtin highlights his insight that “the representation of space always entails the representation of time and that time and space are intrinsically connected, both as literary and conceptual structures.”<sup>174</sup> As she defines it, “chronotopes of the sea” are watery literary spaces that are “at once geographies and topoi; their contours are shaped by historical reference, and they are rhetorical structures with poetic function and imaginative resonance.”<sup>175</sup> In the Shipwreck fragment, imagery implies a narrative, a temporality, in a scene that only offers the barest characterization.

This is a fragment of a piece that was never written, and it is tempting to extrapolate too much from the flickering image it provides. But Wordsworth is a poet for whom the single image holds deeper and more complicated meanings as he returns and rereads and remembers. Wordsworth’s working idea of the sublime is inherited from eighteenth century poetics, but the cluster of images that form this scene of storm and destruction at sea overreach contemporary

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These figures are doubly bound: they represent natural phenomena without fully humanizing them and yet they do so by giving them human attributes. The synecdochic effect of this pattern of figuration is both to recognize the alien, other, or sublime aspect of the scene and to encase it in quasi-human figures which limit this otherness” (11).

<sup>174</sup> Cohen, “The Chronotopes of the Sea,” 647.

<sup>175</sup> Ibid.

efforts at sublime affect, and approach his concept of imagination.

Duncan Wu discusses Wordsworth's continuing fascination with the Orpheus and Eurydice tale, and the hope that the dead "may be revisited if not reclaimed" by poetry.<sup>176</sup> Storm and shipwreck reappear as memory tries to return a lost sailor to his lover in the Address to the Ocean (1796). The poem owes something to Lycidas and to traditional elegy as well as to Ossianic dirges. The first line "How long will ye round me be roaring" is taken from Coleridge's Ossianic imitation The Complaint of Ninathóma. When published in the Weekly Entertainer (November 21, 1796), the line was set off by quotation marks and an asterisk to alert readers to a footnote: "From Mr. Coleridge."<sup>177</sup> But calling attention to the quoted first line gives the impression that the speaker, a bereft woman outside her thatch cottage on the English coast, is herself (mis)quoting, but referring to the earlier poem.<sup>178</sup>

"How long will ye round me be roaring,\*"  
Once terrible waves of the sea?  
While I at my door sit deploring  
The treasure ye ravish'd from me.  
When shipwreck the white surf is strewing,  
This spray-beaten thatch will ye spare?  
Come—let me exult in the ruin  
Your smiles are put on to prepare.  
Oh! Thus that your voice had still thunder'd!  
Your arms for destruction been spread!  
My Charles and I ne'er had been sunder'd;  
But now had I pillow'd his head,  
The love which the waves must dissever,  
The hope which the winds might deceive,  
Why these, my sole stay, could I ever  
Permit him this bosom to leave?

Oh! Where are thy beauties, my lover?  
And where is thy dark flowing hair?

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<sup>176</sup> *Inner Life*, 22-25.

<sup>177</sup> This poem was discovered by James R. MacGillivray and printed in his 1954 *RES* article "An Early Poem and Letter by Wordsworth" cited above.

<sup>178</sup> Coleridge's first couplet reads, "How long will ye round me be swelling, / O ye blue tumbling waves of the sea?"

Oh God! That this storm would uncover  
Thy body that once was so fair!  
Thro' regions of darkness appalling  
It sunk as the hurricane whirl'd  
By monsters beset in its falling  
The brood of the bottomless world.

Then ocean! Thou canst not uncover  
The body that once was so fair;  
And lost are they beauties, my lover!  
And gone is thy dark-flowing hair!  
Ye waters! I hear in your roaring  
A voice from your deepest abode;  
New victims in anger imploring—  
My hope be the mercy of God.<sup>179</sup>

The “Once terrible waves” have lost their original immediate danger, yet the sense of loss lingers, accentuated, or prolonged by the sea. Time and memory are layered; the speaker has been mourning her lost Charles for some time—as she recognizes that each calm only disguises the storm to come. “Once terrible waves” [...] “While I sit” is a stormy sea whose terror is gone; her sailor is lost, and the sea has nothing more to take. It is a storm remembered during a period of calm, when she thinks of her Charles. In the next lines she asks whether, during the next storm, the sea will pass over her home and leave her safe: “When shipwreck the white surf is strewing, / This spray-beaten thatch will ye spare?” She recognizes that the quiet sea is only seductively calm; perhaps men like Charles who ventured out in the fair weather and never returned should have remembered better that the storms are inevitable.

She prefaces her keening song with “Come—let me exult in the ruin / Your smiles are put on to prepare.”<sup>180</sup> The seductively smiling ocean echoes Milton’s “Old ocean smiles” (PL iv.165) and it is an image that Wordsworth will return to in *Elegiac Stanzas* (1806) as he remembers his own brother’s death at sea and fantasizes about the ocean that he would have

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<sup>179</sup> *Early Poems*, 832.

<sup>180</sup> Also, Pope, *Iliad* XIII. 47 “The sea...Exults, and owns the monarch of the main.” [OED]

drawn in the “fond delusion” of his heart: “a sea that could not cease to smile; On tranquil land, beneath a sky of bliss” (29, 19-20). The mourner in *Address to the Ocean* has no such delusion, in fact she wishes that the storm had continued unabated, and Charles had remained home: “Oh! thus that your voice had still thundered!” [...] My Charles and I ne’er had been sundered.”

But the sea cannot restore what the sea has taken; only memory can replace the beloved, and then unsatisfyingly. “Oh! where are thy beauties, my lover? / And where is thy dark flowing hair? / Oh God! that this storm would uncover / Thy body that once was so fair!” She is asking that the sea and the storm do the work of memory, and here is where the ocean and imagination cross in a way that will become important for Wordsworth’s iconology. “Then ocean! Thou canst not uncover / The body” [...] “And lost are thy beauties” [...] “And gone is thy dark-flowing hair!” This impasse between imagining the beloved returned and recognition of the futility of mourning brings the poem to an oceanic Wordsworthian image that will constantly accompany his encounters with the sublime and with “spots of time.” “Ye waters! I hear in your roaring / A voice from your deepest abode; / New victims in anger imploring— / My hope be the mercy of God.” At this point the voice of waters is loosely linked to still-animate drowned persons crying out in anguish. But this isn’t fully explanatory; just a few lines above, the poem gave the impression that the body of the beloved Charles was lifeless, passively sinking—falling—“By monsters beset.” The victims may also be bereft survivors, like the speaker here, whose apostrophe in the body of the poem is certainly “in anger imploring.” The final line seems to hope for an apocalyptic reunion of living and dead, but is strangely out of place with the rest of this piece.

What survives from this poem is the “voice of waters” which is a further development

of the Gothic “dire and ghastly faces” and the “fiery eyes and dreadful faces / Dim in the stream below.” In the earlier sense of the image, as Wu noted, the external image, the visual is the most important—the allegorical presentation of the concept. By 1796, living in the cottage at Racedown with Dorothy, the sublime image of watery depth is starting to speak in a different way. Gaining some control of the rampant deluge of thought and adaptation of contemporary idioms that characterizes the earliest poems and fragments, the sea—although the depths now, and not the surface—is the potent source of an irresistible voice. The location of the waters’ “deepest abode” is unreachable, angry, and deadly. It is also filled with the dead of centuries of seafaring, naval war, and colonial adventure.

I have been arguing that the “British Ocean” is an space charted, traveled and imaginatively populated by British seamen and merchants. No sea without a ship. Even the “shipless sea” is evoked as a sea of despair, bereft of seafaring activity: in Salisbury Plain, “Twas dark and waste as ocean’s shipless flood” or in the later (1842) text of *The Borderers*, Marmaduke asks, “Why else have I been led to this bleak Waste? / Bare it is, without house or track, and destitute / Of obvious shelter, as a shipless sea” (III.iii.57-59).<sup>181</sup> The empty ocean is “waste” “desart” and “bare”. The strangeness of the “other world” of the deep sea to human society is described by historian and geographer Phil Steinberg:

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<sup>181</sup> Compare Charlotte Smith, *Sonnet XLIII: The Unhappy Exile*:  
 The unhappy exile, whom his fates confine  
 To the bleak coast of some unfriendly isle,  
 Cold, barren, desert, where no harvests smile,  
 But thirst and hunger on the rocks repine;  
 When, from some promontory’s fearful brow,  
 Sun after sun he hopeless sees decline  
 In the broad shipless sea—perhaps may know  
 Such heartless pain, such blank despair as mine;  
 And, if a flattering cloud appears to show  
 The fancied semblance of a distant sail,  
 Then melts away—anew his spirits fail,  
 While the lost hope but aggravates his woe!  
 Ah! so for me delusive Fancy toils,  
 Then, from contrasted truth—my feeble soul recoils.

The deep sea – the area distant from coastal lands – was idealized [...] as a great void outside society and insulated from social forces. It was constructed as the wild antithesis of society (or place), the space of anti-civilization. [T]he deep sea provided an ideal arena for Enlightenment society to test and affirm its own level of civilization, whether through annihilating the marine “other” or through scientifically analyzing it.<sup>182</sup>

The ocean left unsaid is present in the character and the landscape of *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. There are two main “adventures” on Salisbury Plain in the text identified by Stephen Gill as belonging to 1795-c.1799, that of the Traveller/Sailor, and the Female Vagrant.<sup>183</sup>

The “Traveller” who shows kindness to the aged soldier in the first Spenserian stanzas listens to the old Soldier tell his tale “how he with the Soldier’s life had striven / and Soldier’s wrongs” (20-21). Only after the Soldier is on his way with a passing post-boy does the poem identify the Traveller as a sailor. Like the “Ancient Mariner,” “It is an ancient Mariner,” a sailor, recognizable by clothing and by the condition of his body is also recognizable as a literary type. Even Jane Austen’s sailor/officers in *Persuasion* are thought to be identifiable by the condition of their skin and hair, an effect of long exposure to wind and sun. Sir Walter Eliot expresses the common opinion:

[In town, I met] a certain Admiral Baldwin, the most deplorable-looking personage you can imagine; his face the colour of mahogany, rough and rugged to the last degree; all lines and wrinkles, nine grey hairs of a side, and nothing but a dab of powder at top. 'In the name of heaven, who is that old fellow?' said I to a friend of mine who was standing near, (Sir Basil Morley). 'Old fellow!' cried Sir Basil, 'it is Admiral Baldwin. What do you take his age to be? 'Sixty,' said I, 'or perhaps sixty-two.' 'Forty,' replied Sir Basil, 'forty, and no more.' Picture to yourselves my amazement; I shall not easily forget Admiral Baldwin. I never saw quite so wretched an example of what a sea-faring life can do; but to a degree, I know it is the same with

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<sup>182</sup> Philip E Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 112.

<sup>183</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Salisbury Plain Poems of William Wordsworth*, ed. Stephen Gill, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1975).



them all: they are all knocked about, and exposed to every climate, and every weather, till they are not fit to be seen. It is a pity they are not knocked on the head at once, before they reach Admiral Baldwin's age.<sup>184</sup>

The Sailor on Salisbury Plain is unusual because he is not immediately recognized. He is not identified as such until stanza 9, well on his way across the Plain, while the Soldier's coat – even though worn almost to rags – still “showed the Soldier's faded red” (9). As a counterpart to the Soldier, the Sailor should be an easily recognizable character; however, idealized representations of soldiers and sailors are not equivalent. Marcus Rediker writes that the sailor is only redeemed from invisibility in cases of dispute or litigation.<sup>185</sup>

Although rarely seen away from coastal port cities, British seamen were anything but invisible in the 1790's. However, representations of seamen reflected symbolic and ideological ambivalence. Sailors' identities were and are largely a product of the imaginary, and as such he carries “a worryingly unfixed and unstable identity”<sup>186</sup> In representation, the British seaman shares in the ambiguities of his element, the sea, in ways that the soldier does not. Geoff Quilley identifies the binary nature of the eighteenth-century conception of the British seaman.<sup>187</sup> The first identity, the dutiful servant of the crown, the good subject, is imagined at sea: in his proper place and contributing his share so that “the vessel is conducted through the waves in safety.”<sup>188</sup> This is the sailor who guides the ship of state, the loyal Jack Tar of David Garrick's song “Hearts of Oak,” first made popular during the American revolution:<sup>189</sup>

Come cheer up my lads, 'tis to glory we steer,

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<sup>184</sup> Jane Austen, *Persuasion*, ed. Patricia Ann Meyer Spacks, 1st ed., A Norton critical edition (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995).

<sup>185</sup> *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987).

<sup>186</sup> Quilley, “Duty and Mutiny,” 84.

<sup>187</sup> *Ibid.*, 92-94.

<sup>188</sup> James Stanier Clarke, *Sermon Preached Onboard HMS Impetuous*, 1798, qtd in “Duty and Mutiny,” 80.

<sup>189</sup> David Garrick, *Hearts of Oak*. Edinburgh?, 1776. *Eighteenth Century Collections Online*. Gale Group. <<http://galenet.galegroup.com/servlet/ECCO>> Accessed 12 December, 2006.

To add something new to this wonderful year  
To honour we call you, not press you like slaves  
For who is so free as we sons of the waves?  
Hearts of oak are our ships, hearts of oak are our men  
We always are ready  
Steady boys, steady  
We'll fight and we'll conquer again and again. (1-8)

The song ends with lines stressing Britain's strength as a unity of human and arboreal bodies as all Britons from lowly Tar to monarch are joined:

Then cheer up my lads, with one heart let us sing  
Our soldiers, our sailors, our statesmen and king,  
Hearts of oak are our ships, &c.

The nation shares one heart – a “heart of oak” – but the reality was, as ever, that some are closer than others to the phenomenal English landscape. As “hearts of oak” sailors metaphorically became the material of their industry. Almost proverbially, a sailor's tools were “a pair of good hands and a stout heart,” so Jack Tar's Heart of Oak causes the seaman's body to disappear into the tools of his trade – he becomes a figure seamlessly integrated into the oaken fabric of the ship as well as the oak of the nation itself.<sup>190</sup> Wordsworth exploits this common synecdochic relationship in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*.

*Adventures on Salisbury Plain* developed from an account of Wordsworth's own experience in the summer of 1793. Having recently returned from France, William was on a tour of the country with his friend William Calvert. As Dorothy Wordsworth records it, the journey was cut short by Calvert's recalcitrant horse:

Calvert's horse was not much accustomed to draw in a whiskey (the carriage in which they travelled) and he began to caper one day in a most terrible manner, dragged them and their vehicle into a ditch and broke it into shivers. [...] Mr. C. mounted his horse and rode into the North and William's firm friends, a pair

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<sup>190</sup> Quilley, “Duty and Mutiny,” 84.

of stout legs, supported him from Salisbury, through South into North Wales, where he is now quietly sitting [.]<sup>191</sup>

After the accident, Wordsworth and Calvert parted ways; Wordsworth crossed the plain alone, eventually to stay in Wales with his friend Robert Jones, with whom he had made the earlier European tour. During his August sojourn on Salisbury Plain, Wordsworth later recalled, “overcome with heat and fatigue, I took my siesta among the Pillars of Stonehenge; but was not visited by the muse in my slumbers.”<sup>192</sup> Indeed, nowhere does his description of the two day ramble exceed the most mundane detail. Yet it is sure, Stephen Gill writes, “the encounter with the Plain provided a focusing image through which he could express much of what he had been feeling so impotently about the nature of man and society.”<sup>193</sup> The Plain was the “focusing image” for Wordsworth, and it provided more than just a setting for the action enacted there in Salisbury Plain and in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. In the 1838 letter quoted above, Wordsworth writes, “the solitude and solemnities of [Salisbury Plain] prompted me to write a poem of some length in the Spenserian Stanza.”<sup>194</sup> Even in the same letter, though years after the experience and the composition of the poem, Wordsworth remembers the day in two distinct registers. As a glibly frivolous young man, he was walking, become hot and tired, and so “took [his] siesta among the Pillars of Stonehenge.” Here is the picturesque image of a careless shepherd napping a summer’s day away in the shadows of a ruined temple. But at the same time, his solitude among the ancient monuments and the emptiness of the plain made him feel, if only in retrospect, like a castaway, or the hungry savage of the first version of

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<sup>191</sup> D.W. to Jane Pollard, 30 August 1793, Wordsworth, *EY*, 109.

<sup>192</sup> W.W. to John Kenyon, undated but c1838, Russell Noyes, “Wordsworth: An Unpublished Letter to John Kenyon,” *The Modern Language Review* 53, no. 4 (October 1958): 547.

<sup>193</sup> *Salisbury Plain*, 5.

<sup>194</sup> Noyes, “An Unpublished Letter,” 547.

Salisbury Plain.<sup>195</sup> It became a focusing image through which to enshrine and restore earlier attempts to work his experiences into Gothic themed poems and fragments: the boyhood memory of encountering “the spot where, as he believed, a wife-murderer had hung in chains”<sup>196</sup> on the road towards Penrith Beacon is clearly a part of the Salisbury Plain story. The pleasant afternoon spent slumbering on Salisbury Plain became, as a focusing image of his concerns then and, as he remembered in 1843, for years after,<sup>197</sup> an image of sublime solitude—of the solemnity of a single subject brought face to face with a decayed history.

Wordsworth’s landscapes can usurp the status of character, and his characters can appear as landscape; reading them together, in the light of their shifting roles within the formal and generic apparatus of his poetry can illuminate Wordsworth’s almost obsessive interest with liminal, “amphibious” states of being. In one of the “Analogy” passages deleted from the 1805 *Prelude* Book XIII, Wordsworth experiments with a catalogue of images meant to follow the climactic “sea of vapour” scene on the slope of Snowdon. In one instance he describes a horse, standing quietly, in moonlight. The horse was standing absolutely still without even evidence of breath:

Mane, ears, and tail as lifeless as the trunk  
That had no stir of breath. We paused awhile  
In pleasure of the sight, and left him there  
With all his functions silently sealed up,  
Like an amphibious work of Nature’s hand,  
A borderer dwelling betwixt life and death,  
A living statue, or a statued life. (67-73)<sup>198</sup>

Character and setting, or landscape, function on and across a border between modes of

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<sup>195</sup> It is also important to note that *The Borderers* belongs to this period of composition, and the genesis of the abandonment episode and motif that gives rise to the character of Rivers may belong to this journey as well.

<sup>196</sup> Stephen Gill, *William Wordsworth: A Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 16.

<sup>197</sup> “My ramble over many parts of Salisbury Plain [...] left upon my mind imaginative impressions the force of wh. I have felt to this day.” *The Fenwick Notes of William Wordsworth*, 63.

<sup>198</sup> *The Five-Book Prelude of William Wordsworth*, ed. Duncan Wu (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 201.

poetic expression. The horse, or statue of a horse, describes a chiastic relationship between describing the phenomenon and the potential slippage in interpretation: “A living statue, or a statued life” (73). Robert Langbaum’s term, “lyrical characterization” describes the relationship between character and landscape in Wordsworth’s narrative poems and ballads.<sup>199</sup> When Wordsworth writes narrative poems, especially those that are autobiographically based, or in which we take the poet to be the speaker, to what extent are they fictions, and to what extent may they be read as lyrics, as expressions of the immediate interiority of the poet/speaker? “Sometimes,” Langbaum writes, “it is difficult to decide whether the poem is narrative or lyrical. Such poems are narrative to the extent that we read them as dynamic or moving through time. They are lyrical to the extent that we read them as static, as organized around a moment of illumination[.]”<sup>200</sup>

The earlier version of *Salisbury Plain* (1793-94) opens with stanzas contrasting the “hungry savage” with refined moderns; while the savage fears for his life daily, it is all he knows and all his companions are, so to speak, in the same boat. The contrasting experience of “We,” a designation which implicates the reader and speaker together, “of comfort reft, by pain depressed” (*Salisbury Plain*, 26-27), is worse than that of the savage, for the knowledge that some still “on the couch of Affluence rest” (24). The savage is happier for he is both naturally suited to his environment and he knows no contrast between plenty and poverty. The early text suggests that the haunting thoughts of misfortune suffered by the moderns are as bad as, or worse, than the “sad reverse of fate” itself (22). These opening stanzas, not entirely discarded, are compressed into the revised text in *Adventures on Salisbury Plain*. From Stanza 6, when

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<sup>199</sup> “Wordsworth’s Lyrical Characterizations,” *Studies in Romanticism* 21, no. 3 (Fall 1982): 320.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid.*, 319.

night and storm come on, the Traveller makes his way across a waste of open land; the “inn he long had pass’d and wearily / Measured his lonesome way; the distant spire / That fix’d at every turn his backward eye / Was lost, though still he turn’d, in the blank sky” (47-50). Later lines celebrating the Ancient Mariner’s vessel and voyage as it gets underway from England echo this phenomenon, with inverted affect, as the lighthouse, the church, and home are lost below the horizon:

Merrily did we drop  
Below the Kirk, below the Hill,  
Below the Light-house top. (26-28)

Wordsworth’s earlier mariner has been using the church spire as a mark to guide his track across the plain. The loss of this reassuring landmark shows the distance he has traveled as well as signaling that he has crossed over into an “other world” as Steinberg describes the deep sea: “a great void outside society and insulated from social forces [...] constructed as the wild antithesis of society (or place), the space of anti-civilization.”<sup>201</sup> Significantly here, the “great void” exists near the geographic center of English space, not the political and traditional center, London. As a “space of anti-civilization” the plain absorbs the earlier “hungry savage” stanzas, and in the next section, blends landscape and character to represent the plain and the sailor as “oceanic”.

The Traveller moves quickly into void space away from the road, the post-boy and the Soldier—each standing for known, mapped, and serviced civilized land—only a moment after the Inn (though denied him) was still ahead. As the Traveller walks on, he swiftly passes out of sight of recognizable cultural and economic activity: “he gaz’d around / And scarce could any trace of man descry, / Save dreary corn-fields stretch’d as without bound; / But where the

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<sup>201</sup> Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean*, 112.

sower dwelt was nowhere to be found” (51-54). Deserted fields without evidence of a farmhand are, to the eighteenth-century British imagination the georgic equivalent of “shipless seas”—a vast space, essential to the nation yet missing the swain, the national subject who turns savage nature to productive use. The earlier Salisbury Plain includes these lines describing the stormy plain: “’Twas dark and waste as ocean’s shipless flood / Roaring with storms beneath night’s starless gloom” (109-110). “Shipless flood” and “starless gloom” imply both a desolate waste in the absence of navigational (commercial or naval) activity, and the absence of navigational guideposts, the stars. A night and a space that is not navigable is an image of chaos.

Passing even beyond the cornfields, “more wild, forlorn, / And vacant, the huge plain around him spread” (70-71). The Traveller is like the “hungry savage” in that, as he too hungers for shelter and for food, there is a sense that this is his habitual environment; and yet the heretofore transparent narrator is moved to exclaim: “Ah me! the wet cold ground must be his only bed” (72). The implied “We” between the reader and narrator is a stronger bond than was apparent between sufferers in the earlier poem (“We of comfort reft”); here the observer’s gaze reveals an admirable sensibility as the narrator insists upon the pathos of a British subject forced out of doors. The Traveller is one of “Us” but he is also not to the extent that he is characterized by landscape, to the extent that he belongs “in between” humanity and Nature.<sup>202</sup>

Exposure to the elements is part of the character and nature of a sailor, the experience that forms him; and the elements the Traveller encounters on Salisbury Plain are similar enough to the open ocean that he might as well be at sea as on open English land:

And be it so—for to the chill night shower  
And the sharp wind his head he oft has bared;

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<sup>202</sup> Cf: Jonathan Wordsworth, *William Wordsworth : the Borders of Vision* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982).

And he has counted many a wretched hour.  
—A Sailor he, the sailor's evils shared (72-76)

“And be it so—A Sailor he”; the poem waits to reveal this Traveller as a Sailor—waits until he is past civilized bounds. The sailors historical invisibility, asserted by Rediker, is redeemed in dispute or litigation because often only in records of litigation or of crime and punishment are the lives of working men and women preserved. The only way that some would come into the written record was through disputing pay or conditions at the courts of Admiralty.<sup>203</sup> Others, like Margaret of The Ruined Cottage, disappeared into the grass – or the maritime analogue, dropped beneath the waves.

Wordsworth's Sailor is shown first in an act of charity as he helps the old Soldier to a place of shelter by way of post-boy and cart. Calling out to the post-boy, he promises that showing mercy to the “broken Soldier” will not go unrewarded, in fact, that “Deed of such sort shall well itself requite” (40-41). This is an ominous endorsement of an economy of cause and effect that repays actions with like results, and the poem explicitly argues that in relationships between the state and individuals, such an economy is tragically disproportionate. The “sailor's evils” are not nature's discomforts of wind and chill night shower, which are part of the environment he partly embodies, not “rum, sodomy and the lash,” not even a winking reference to the lusty reputation of sailors in far away ports. For the “sailor's evils” are manifest in state apparatuses: the press gang and naval warfare:

—A Sailor he, the sailor's evils shared,  
For when from two full years of labour hard  
Home he return'd, enflamed with long desire,  
Even while in thought he took his rich reward  
From his wife's lips, the ruffian press gang dire  
Hurried him far away to rouze the battle's fire. (76-81)

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<sup>203</sup> In fact, though few other resources are available to the social historian, some of Rediker's critics accuse him of allowing the nature of the archive to overly direct his interpretation.



The next stanza: “the work of carnage did not cease / And Death’s worst aspect daily he survey’d” relates the Sailor’s experience at war, but, again having done his duty – betrayed first “by thought” as he remembers his wife’s arms around him, and then by the Admiralty – “the slaves of Office spurn’d / The unfriended claimant ; at their door he stood / In vain.” (91-93). The twice-pressed sailor is turned away without pay or prize money returning home “Bearing [...] nor warmth nor food.” (94). This, not uncommon, fate was shared by many English seafarers and serves to mark this sailor, but not in a mystical way nor yet by his own guilt, for he has been marked by the “needs of the service.” The poem reveals his personal guilt and tragedy later, not insisting on, but not denying, an equivalence between war and murder. The difference is that one man can suffer punishment by the state, but the state’s guilt is impossible to assuage. The lonely sailor, “with shuddering pain” (119) as he comes upon an ancient gibbet is brought to face the cruel punishment with which his own people will eventually reward him. Mute confirmation of this fact is given as the poem addresses the stones of the ruined monument:

Thou hoary Pile! Thou child of darkness deep  
 And unknown days, that lovest to stand and hear  
 The desert sounding to the whirlwind’s sweep,  
 Inmate of Nature’s endless year;  
 Even since thou sawest the giant Wicker rear  
 Its dismal chambers hung with living men,  
 Before thy face did ever wretch appear  
 Who in his heart had groan’d with deadlier pain  
 Than he who travels now along thy bleak domain? (154-162)

Stonehenge is given the voice and consciousness of deep time, pre-history, “unknown days.” Having stood for eons before even Wordsworth’s imagined Druidical cannibal rites of human sacrifice, the stones are called on to witness the sailor – castaway – who is called the “wretch” whose heart groans with the most deadly pain in “Nature’s endless year.” (157). The reason for

his deadly pain, his moment of violent action, was enacted by brother seamen on a national stage in the years following composition of Salisbury Plain.

In a poem published in the *Morning Post* in April of 1797, the spring following Wordsworth's *Address to the Ocean*, the "Genius of Britain" and "Goddess of Freedom" appear and receive sailors in a kind of divine royal audience, hear their complaints, and disperse blessings on the loyal fleet. This anonymous poem was supposedly written by "the Widow of a Seaman, / Who lost his Life in the Defence of his Country, / on board the *Intrepid*, in the present War."<sup>204</sup> In the poem, the "Genius of Britain" flies to Spithead, fearing that "fair Freedom was fled."

The Genius of Britain went hovering round,  
For she fear'd that fair Freedom was fled,  
But she found, to her joy that she was not quite gone,  
But remain'd with the Fleet at Spithead.

Rejoic'd at the news, to the Charlotte she flew,  
Where fair Freedom, she heard, sat enthron'd,  
They all manned the yards as the Goddess came in,  
For Britain and Freedom they owned.

The Fleet hail'd the Goddess with three hearty cheers,  
As she stood on the Charlotte's gangway,  
She dropped a sad tear as she look'd on her Sons,  
Who so long neglected had lay.

The title of the poem is "Mutiny at Portsmouth," and the occasion was the revolt aboard His Majesty's Ships anchored at Spithead Fleet Anchorage, between Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight. Outraged by restriction to anchored ships, some for years, lack of pay and decent food and with no confidence in their commanders, first at Spithead and then at the Nore, the navy mutinied. Lower-deck sailors took over hundreds of ships and thousands of cannon, "struck" the ensign and replaced it with a red flag; they elected delegates and a parliament, a president

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<sup>204</sup> Betty T. Bennett, *British War Poetry in the Age of Romanticism, 1793-1815* (New York: Garland, 1976), XXX.

and conducted the first industrial sit-down in history, as well as becoming, for a time, the first republic on earth extending the rights of universal suffrage to all its citizens.<sup>205</sup>

Mutiny at Portsmouth is one of only a very few surviving examples of popular support for the mutineers. Most engravings highlight suspicions of French support for the revolting seamen, portraying the seamen and their supposed supporters as traitorous thugs, in some overturning images of Britannia and crudely defacing portraits of their king and his ministers. The anonymous poem, however, speaks of the loyalty of the sailors, a point that they made themselves again and again. As the goddess Britain is led to the cabin, she finds her sister goddesses Loyalty and Freedom:

She was led to the Cabin, fair Freedom was there,  
True Loyalty sat by her side,  
Britannia sat down in a transport of joy,  
All hail to my Heroes, she cry'd.

Every ship of the line sent two Seamen so brave,  
Whom the Goddess receiv'd with a smile;  
They assure'd her that, if they were treated like men,  
They would still guard her favourite Isle. (13-20)

Freedom, lost to view, turns out to be among the mutinous sailors, not threatened by their actions. The poem speaks of the sailors as protectors of Freedom, Loyalty and Britannia herself who seek fair treatment "like men."

With the end of the mutinies in the summer of 1797 came the trials and executions of many seamen. Although some gains were made in pay and living conditions aboard naval vessels, most men went back to work out of exhaustion or fear of punishment. The victories against the Dutch at Camperdown distracted the public from the mutinies and Nelson's heroic return to England somewhat rehabilitated the loyalty of seamen in the public imagination.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>205</sup> James Dugan, *The Great Mutiny* (New York: Putnam, 1965), 278-79.

<sup>206</sup> Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*.

The sailor on Salisbury Plain struck out of frustration and anger and took the life of an innocent – more like the denouement of the “Terror” in France than the arguably well-organized and peaceful uprising in the fleet, nevertheless for the seamen the outcome was the same. The experience of the King’s Navy, the merchant service, of disappearing over the horizon, renders men changed, some dangerously, nearly all tragically. Some are strangers like the lounging sailor encountered amongst the “hubbub” of London in Prelude VII. Beside a begging man cut off at the waist, “In sailor’s garb / Another lies at length beside a range / Of written characters, with chalk inscribed / Upon the smooth flat stones” (cite) What the sailor’s inscribed stones might mean is left unsaid. It seems this brief glimpse of the mariner signifies less, or is understood less, than the encounter later in VII:

Amid the moving pageant, ‘twas my chance  
Abruptly to be smitten with the view  
Of a blind beggar, who, with upright face,  
Stood propped against a wall, upon his chest  
Wearing a written paper, to explain  
The story of the man, and who he was. (VII.610-15)

The blind man, upright, mutely proclaims his own history. Who wrote it? Is the narrative that the paper tells reliable? How does the subject of this brief biography interpret himself? Is he aware of his *histoire*? Overwhelmed by the sight and the thought that he too is already known, already written, or interpellated, Wordsworth recoils from the blind man: “My mind did at this spectacle turn round / As with the might of waters” (VII.616-17). The sailor, from whom no speech is reported, is also mute, but his chalked characters remain unread. The mystery of these silent stones, unlike the henge stones on Salisbury Plain, and the sailor point to the gaps in the poem where the sea rushes in “with the might of waters.” The silent mariner is so unlike Coleridge’s garrulous storyteller, yet the characters chalked on the flat stones signify. The blind man is wholly of Wordsworth’s London, familiar, and satisfactorily narrated by the poem.

The poet looks, “As if admonished from another world” on the blind man, but the admonishment must be in the difference between this man and what the sailor represents. The “other world” is the ocean.

A crew of men “sally” forth on an adventure by night.<sup>207</sup> Before they ever reach the summit of Snowdon the poet-speaker finds himself ahead of his fellows; like Nelson, he is impetuously ahead of the shepherd engaged to “pilot” the men to the peak. The speaker is surprised by bright moonlight suddenly illuminating the ground in front of his feet.

The Moon stood naked in the Heavens, at height  
Immense above my head, and on the shore  
I found myself of a huge sea of mist,  
Which meek and silent, rested at my feet:  
A hundred hills their dusky backs upheaved  
All over this still Ocean, and beyond,  
Far, far beyond, the vapours shot themselves,  
In headlands, tongues, and promontory shapes  
Into the Sea, the real Sea, that seem'd  
To dwindle and give up its majesty  
Usurp'd upon as far as sight could reach. (XIII.41-51)

The metaphorical language is sure – it is a sea of mist, it is a still Ocean; illuminated by the moon the poem presents a true oceanic picture. Standing on the shore of mist: but not the Sea, the real Sea, which “really” lies beneath. Separated from the other climbers, first to stand on the shoreline of this misty Ocean, the speaker is doubly illuminated. The flash of light comes twice (like the flashes of light that gave Nelson his calling, reported in Southey’s biography), at the beginning and at the end of the passage (36-59). Standing on the slope of Snowdon, (like Moses? Like Alfred?) the speaker can look down through the illusory, vaporous sea to where his knowledge tells him the sea lies. The eye, it seems, invents the “still Ocean”; empirical

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<sup>207</sup> *The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed, The Cornell Wordsworth (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991).

observation of mist and mountain can still be deceptive.

“The real Sea” from this height, from this perspective, is usurped upon – by the mist. The sea dwindles and “give[s] up his majesty, / Usurp’d upon” to the observing eye, but to the ear the invisible Ocean remains. The noise of the sea, the oceanic “homeless voice of waters” issues through the fracture in the mist. Here is the emblem of the sea for Wordsworth, and for Britain. The ocean is no home, but its voice, its noise, is everywhere.

By line 53, “and we stood, the mist / Touching our very feet” the experience has turned collective – his determines theirs. The climbers are standing on the farthest western shore of England (Wales) on a mountain with the intention of looking into the East to see the new day dawn, but rather than that, the poem is captivated by gazing into the West, into the misty Ocean that appears above the Real Sea.

The chasm does not open up in response to the speaker’s gaze, it is there already, it is part of the misty Ocean above the Real Sea. The poem says that there “Was a blue chasm, a fracture in the vapour” and through the opening, or mouth, was heard the voice of waters, torrents. A “fracture” is explicitly a break – noun and verb, moreso than a fissure, or an opening, it retains the trace of violence and cataclysm that attends the crack of ice and the yawning chasm that the Ancient Mariner’s helmsman steers his ship through. Whether it is a crevasse in a mountain or the crack in the iceberg a fracture is sudden and decisive — like a revolution or a shipwreck; a fracture in the vapor is counterintuitive, another aporia: ocean spray or mist blown up as water vapor is not an element of such cataclysmic rupture, but the image of an ocean of mist blowing over the sea does evoke the kind of slow careful movement of the pen across the page, the methodical revising and lengthy composing, the discursive surface hovering over the thunderous Imagination that gives *The Prelude* its sinuous and

riverine form. Controlling the Real Sea, the vapor implies form to the destructive and chaotic voice of waters below.





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