Annus Mirabilis to *The Ancient Mariner*: Oceanic Environments and the Romantic Literary Imagination. [i]

Colin Dewey

1. The "British Ocean"

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."[ii] But whereas early eighteenth century poems strain to allegorize the ocean as a productive space circumscribed by British rule, Romantic-era texts reveal a densely problematic national engagement with the sea.

Eighteenth century poetry links British commercial and political aspirations to the marine environment. Following Marjorie Hope Nicolson and John Barrell,[iii] 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 Kirkpatrick and more famously 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

Figure 1: Allegory, the Ship of State.
© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

the sylvan rural heart is seamlessly connected to the maritime empire."[iv] 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 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 Ancyent Marinere, in Seven Parts* (1798).[v] 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 (recently made legible by the technologies of cartography, navigation and seamanship) becomes opaque and resistant to the progress of the Mariner's vessel.

2. Aspirational History: Annus Mirabilis

John Dryden's *Annus Mirabilis* (1667) presents the poetic "British Ocean" near its literary beginnings.[vi] While poems whose titles and subjects include "commerce," "navigation," "trade," and "ocean" proliferate throughout the early eighteenth century,[vii] Dryden's poem expresses both the aspirations and anxieties of the nascent maritime empire. Over half the text is concerned with the naval war fought by England against the Netherlands in the summer of 1665, and the remainder relates the London fire of September 1666. Despite Dryden's heroic depiction, the war was a disaster for the English fleet; however, the 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 place in the new world.

The British trading fleet had expanded rapidly during the seventeenth century. Cromwell's 1652-54 war against the Dutch "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."[viii] The English were anxious to become major players in global trade, and even with the considerable losses from the 1655-60 war with Spain, by 1689 the merchant fleet had almost tripled over its 1629 level.[ix] The cargo ship, the naval ship of the line, and the voyage itself were rapidly assimilated into an iconography of commerce, trade, and England's emphatically *virtuous* domination of the seas.[x]

The first few stanzas of *Annus Mirabilis* accuse the Dutch of perverting nature by stagnating the free flow of goods and hoarding the riches of the East Indies and Africa. The first line of the second stanza pulls together commerce, human blood, and seawater, arguing for the importance 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,
> 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 bloud" in a liquid simile including the tides, the heart, and human life. The sea is the blood which moves oceanic trade; London should be the heart-pump of trade, but for England, Dutch ambition had become a strangulation preventing commercial circulation throughout the global body. Dryden makes it clear, however, that the circular flow desired would produce a robust supply of economic blood to England *rather than*, not in addition to, the Netherlands: "What peace can be where both to one pretend?" (21). On another level, commodities are imagined as if they were political subjects stripped of the liberty that had long been a crucial component of English identity. Trade "found its freedom lost," while the Heavens, the Quarries, the Idumaean trees and Ceylon's forests all produce "wealth" for one: "For them alone" (11). Curiously, the trees, mines, and forests of the East are all depicted as spontaneously productive; with no "Eastern" people to contend with, the poem leaves the question to the Dutch and English to decide.

The next stanza continues the rhetoric of the Dutch monopoly as unnatural enslavement, now of celestial and oceanic 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)

This strange picture of sun, moon, and sea makes slaves of Phoebus and Diana. In Ptolemaic cosmology, the sun labors through the zodiacal year circling the earth regularly. Here, the sun seems the "Lab'rer of *their* Year" (emphasis mine) – as if English time has stopped while the Dutch are progressing into the future. "Each waxing Moon", also suggests the passage of time, while the moon supplies "her watry store" to create the tidal depth necessary for the Dutch treasure fleet to navigate their market ports.

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 poem complains that these benefits unfairly accrue to the ships of the United Provinces. In his lunar metaphor, the effect of the tidal pressure is fortuitous for the Dutch by propelling their ships from "the Line," or the equator; a reader can imagine the fleet "surfing" the tidal wave north 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*" market ports. The ships are gluttonous, luxurious, and suspiciously dependent on the work of sun and moon to get them home. "Brim-full vessels" are like 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.[xi]

The ocean appears to be an active participant in the sea battles of the first half of the poem, but the loyalty of the sea is never quite settled. Oceanic agency is ambiguous: the wreckage of both fleets calls attention to the uncertainties of asserting an empire over "the wat'ry Ball" (53) of the world's oceans. Nonetheless, the poem's failure to sustain the rhetoric of military panegyric is calculated. Despite the historical narrative, the subject of *Annus Mirabilis* is Trade, and the war and fire were both "bad for business."

Figure 2: *The Four Days' Battle, 1-4 June 1666*, © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London

    The war was disastrous to English trade, and was never supported by the majority of the mercantile community. By 1665, a maritime labor shortage developed because of the numbers of merchant seamen impressed into men-of-war. Because Charles had no warships to spare, he could not offer convoy protection to the merchantmen that did choose to sail. As a result, many were captured by Dutch privateers.[xii] Edward Adams was a London merchant who lost a ship to the Dutch and joined 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 myself to be none of them.[xiii]

    Crucially, *Annus Mirabilis* envisions a marketplace enforced by the virtues of trade and not naval power. Once the wars are fought, the English merchant and not the Admiral will govern the seas: "The beauty of this Town, without a Fleet, / From all the world shall vindicate her Trade" (1203-04). Dryden closes with a vision of an empire that spreads worldwide, is administered by Britain and forces current rivals 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.   (St. 302)

The poem looks forward to commercial empire with exuberance and optimism, even though in 1667 it was far from clear that such would be the case:

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. 304)

By its final stanza, London is reborn as the poem strains to imagine the naval victories won, the great city rebuilt, and the riches of the world piling up on English docks. Dryden offers a historical perspective that generates a collective voyage for the nation, but the poem ends as the ship gets underway. Even though he ends confidently, it is an uncertain and ambiguous farewell.

3. The British Ocean "Unmanned": The Ancient Mariner

As an origin myth for the British Ocean composed at the turbulent end of the century, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* revisits the exuberant beginnings of English oceanic commerce. 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."[xiv] When the ship and voyage represent, as they often do, the progress of the state, shipwreck or stasis also marks social upheaval ashore. The ship and the ocean that give shape to the *Rime* encompass three centuries of maritime traffic in one deadly voyage. The critical history of the poem has, until recently, followed Coleridge's own revision and annotation strategy in focusing on the individual guilt and redemption of the Mariner. The oceanic perspective I am suggesting is an attempt to develop a historical reading that does not efface the crucial importance of British maritime and imperial enterprise throughout the Atlantic revolutionary period. From this perspective, the central crisis of the poem is not the fate of the unfortunate albatross but the becalmed "painted ship upon a painted ocean."

Margaret Cohen describes the ocean-space of sea narratives as space "experienced as movement, as a vector conjoining spatial and temporal coordinates."[xv] 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, "narratives set on shipboard dwell in the in-between space of passage, rather than on the goal."[xvi] Cohen writes about novels written during the nineteenth century, a period in which the sea narrative had developed into a species of *Bildungsroman*, and as such, she focuses on the nature of the ship as a special kind of social space, akin to Foucault's "heterotopia."[xvii] However, in this earlier lyric sea-story, the teleology of the voyage is confounded by a scene of mid-ocean stasis that forms the crux of the poem. The *Rime's* "in-between space" is not a privileged site for character development but an oneiric convergence of terrestrial and oceanic anxieties. The final stroke of the *Rime's* uncanny narrative is the return of the ship and undead seamen to their home port. The interrupted voyage and the ship's mysterious arrival in England work forcefully against the colonizing telos of European expansion. 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. In its place, in the earliest published version of the *Rime*, the returning sailors, rendered undead or *zombified* by the experience, join together in apparent solidarity, a challenge to the surviving Mariner. Although they voice no demands, each sailor's right arm burns "like a torch, / A torch that's borne upright" (495-96).

Although many trades are implicated in the Mariner's voyage, and the Atlantic slave trade looms largest of all, determining a particular cargo is less important than the symbolic significance of the mid-ocean transformation and return of the ship and men. 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 Captain Bligh, among whose objectives was transplanting breadfruit from Tahiti to Jamaica as cheap food for slaves).[xviii] However, while late eighteenth-century scientific expeditions are obliquely implicated, Coleridge's most important nautical sources were the narratives of Captain George Shelvocke (1726)[xix] and Captain William Dampier (1697-8).[xx] These and other, earlier, privateering voyages helped open the seas to English shipping, but the risky ventures that established colonial trade routes and territories for the crown were also, according to Peter Hayes, "a global gamble for enormous rewards." Far from later sentimentalized 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.[xxi] The return of the ship and its ghostly crew represents a revolutionary threat to the nation; the allusive presence of Shelvocke and Dampier invoke the culpability of the long history of British maritime empire.[xxii]

The *Rime* looks back over a long history of seafaring, but it also continues Coleridge's and fellow poet Robert Southey's critique of the moral and material effects of colonial commerce from their 1795 lectures delivered on the Bristol waterfront, themselves indebted to the works of abolitionist Thomas Clarkson. The lectures "On the Slave Trade" and "On the Present War" were sharply critical of William Pitt's government and enthusiastically supported the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade.[xxiii] Although the "Gagging Acts" of 1795 made open dissent dangerous, critique of Britain's colonial policy gained some force following the response to the 1791 revolution in the French colony of Saint Domingue, now the Republic of Haiti. Britain was successful in suppressing "Tacky's Rebellion" in Jamaica, but the revolt in Saint Domingue — reputedly sparked by voodoo priest Boukman Dutty – had, by 1797, become a quagmire of death and disease that staggered the public imagination. In 1795, Edmund Burke thundered in Parliament, "In these adventures it was not an enemy we had to vanquish, but a cemetery to conquer … Every advantage is but a new demand on England for recruits to the West Indian grave."[xxiv]

Delivered in a coffee house within sight of ships' masts in Bristol, "On the Slave Trade" detailed the suffering of British seamen in the "Guinea trade" and linked their treatment to the essential immorality of the "traffic." Since the 1770's, merchant and naval seamen had engaged in sometimes violent protest in ports throughout the Atlantic, which became much more difficult to call a "British" Ocean with the loss of the American colonies.

In Liverpool, London, and Bristol, seamen struck their ships and marched, demanding back pay, better food and less brutal treatment.[xxv] In the spring and summer of 1797, only months before Coleridge began composing the *Rime*, sailors aboard dozens of ships at Britain's largest naval anchorages stopped work, elected a president and a representative government, and sought a hearing of their grievances by the Lords of the Admiralty. While abolition and slave emancipation movements grew, the fear that the noble "hearts of oak" of British seamen could turn against their commanders shook the Admiralty and the public. The loyalty and the command of the ship of state had come into question.[xxvi]
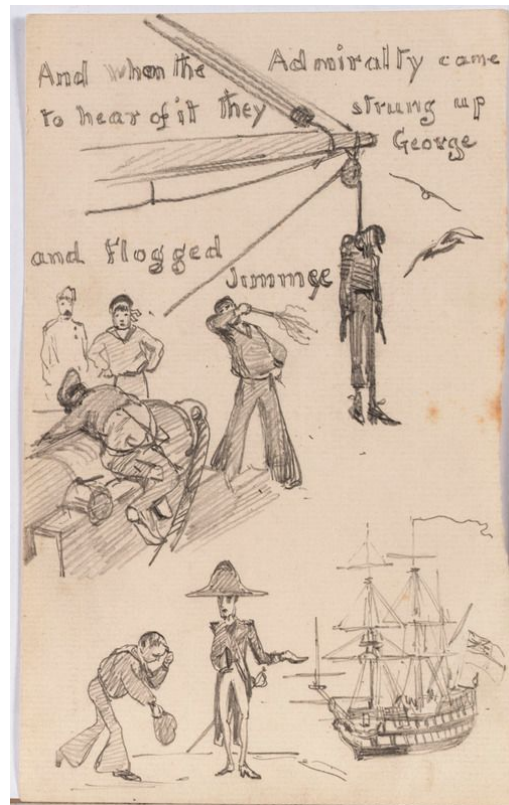

Figure 3: "Three Small Drawings Illustrating a Cautionary Tale About Three Sailors From Bristol." © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

4. Sailings

As *The Rime of the Ancyent Mariner* begins, three people walking together encounter a bedraggled seaman on the road. There is never any question as to the stranger's trade: "It is an Ancient Mariner, / And he stoppeth one of three" (1-2).[xxvii] The detained man protests: "By thy long grey beard and thy glittering eye / Now wherefore stoppest me?" (3-4). Yet in the earliest published edition, he then invites the seafarer to join their party: "if thous't got a laughsome tale, / Marinere! come with me" (11-12). Later editions of the poem delete this stanza and identify the friends as "three gallants." The effect of this identification is to emphasize a social or class division between the Mariner and his auditor. A "gallant" is a gentleman: a young, handsome, wealthy man who is everything that the Mariner is not. In the 1798 text, these working men are familiar with actual sailors, and they may expect that a bawdy story or joke will

follow; they are eager to have "happy Jack" join the fun. Instead, the Mariner's "glittering eye" holds one of them, who "listens like a three year's child; / The Marinere hath his will." (19-20).

The story begins simply: "There was a Ship, quoth he" (10), and then the ship is underway — virtuous, lighthearted, determined — headed south, "into the Sea" (32). This is the imaginary origin, the founding moment, of the British Ocean celebrated by Dryden and others. Sailing south from England and crossing the equator, the ship is venturing into the exotic southern ocean. The Mariner marks the point at which his ship crosses the equator, the "Line" between the northern and southern hemispheres, which the poem imprecisely describes as the point at which the midday sun passes directly overhead traveling 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,
>   For he heard the loud bassoon.   (29-36)

Why the wedding-guest's penitent gesture? He is surely distraught over missing the bride's entrance and the beginning of the ceremony, but while facing the Mariner, at the wedding-guest's back lies the hall containing wine, cake, sweets, tobacco: all the products of colonial trade. For all the mythical exoticism of sailing into the *imaginary* South in the old seaman's story, 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 captives for transport to plantations across the Atlantic. The wedding-guest, literally fixed in place between the feast and the Mariner, beats his breast in anguish. His interjection momentarily shifts the narrative from the mythic past to the immediate cultural "present." Just as the trade haunted even ships not actually carrying slaves to market in the West Indies, so, in Coleridge's lectures and reform rhetoric, were the consumers of their cargoes held accountable. The "Lecture on the Slave-Trade" links the consumers of luxury goods: sugar, rum, cotton, log-wood, cocoa, coffee, pimento, and ginger to atrocities perpetrated by continuing the trade.[xxviii] Coleridge was 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?[xxix]

Nevertheless, hurdling south ahead of storm winds, the Mariner's ship carries the myth of Britain entering a modern age as the imperial head of nations. "Listen, Stranger!" (45) – the Mariner's shout draws the wedding-guest's attention back to his tale as he emphasizes the characteristically sublime seascape of the voyage narrative. In this mode, the sea is a mighty

adversary, bested by superior shipbuilding and navigation. The wedding-guest's growing apprehension, as he beats his breast "here" – as the ship reaches the equator – emphasized by the "loud bassoon" (36), reflects the dark reality of the British Ocean, but shaken by the Mariner's sharp cry, he no longer interrupts the storyteller; the complicit dyad of seaman and consumer remain locked together by economic necessity as much as by the Mariner's eye.

> Listen, Stranger! Storm and Wind,
>   A Wind and Tempest strong!
> For weeks and days it play'd us freaks–
>   Like Chaff we drove along.   (45-48)

Approaching a dangerous passage drawn from voyagers' images of Cape Horn and the South Sea, the poem 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.

Figure 4: *HMS 'Erebus' Passing Through The Chain Of Bergs, 1842.* **(detail)**
© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London.

"The Horn" challenges mariners in what has 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. 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 headwinds and mountainous waves. As a narrative trope, the passage around Cape Horn is a rite of initiation: a trial or baptism by the 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).[xxx]

The sudden emergence into the Pacific is 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 ship carries the southerly breeze away from the ice and snow, and where all the features of the seascape emit a frightening cacophonous din, then "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 vessel: "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. In the Pacific doldrums near "the line," the crew feels the deadly heat and pestilence that decimated Britain's colonial forces on land and sea alike.

     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 texts – and critical readings – that perpetuate the heroic ocean of expansionist colonial mythology. In the novel, an English slave ship is becalmed in mid-Atlantic doldrums. As the crew and captives begin to succumb to boredom, heat and thirst, an ever-growing circle of human and animal waste from the motionless ship rings the vessel.[xxxi] 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 in its enforced stasis, this sea story "flatly refuses the chronotope of masculine spatial motility so evident in maritime narratives and studies."[xxxii] 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."[xxxiii]

     The first movement of the *Rime,* the voyage south and the passage through the Antarctic ice field, mimes such "maritime discourses of empire." The inevitable teleology of the successful ocean passage is a metaphor around which eighteenth-century understandings of time and history condensed. However, immediately on leaving the politically and cartographically familiar "British Ocean," the voyage drifts to a halt and the ship quickly becomes a "charnel dungeon" (440) filled with dying seamen. The motionless ship surrounded by "slimy things [that] did crawl with legs / Upon the slimy Sea" (121-22) challenges the narrative of colonial desire that figures the sea as a legible field where motility ensures victory.

> Day after day, day after day,
>   We stuck, ne breath ne motion,
> As idle as a painted Ship
>   Upon a painted Ocean.   (111-114)

During the period of stasis throughout the "middle passage" of the *Rime* the marine debris and unclassifiable creatures drawn to the stricken ship occlude clear seawater and block understanding. Loss of motility and transparency figures a crisis of epistemology; as Philip Steinberg writes, the colonial, mercantile ocean, "should be rendered as invisible as possible, since any feature – physical or political – on its vast expanse would serve only to impede the free flow of goods. The sea was perceived not as territory but as a space of distance, and the duty of

the merchant sailor was to annihilate that distance to the best of his abilities."[xxxiv] Frustrating their performance of any duty, the Mariner's ship and crew are dying in the vast distance of the ocean:

> And every tongue thro' utter drouth
>   Was wither'd at the root;
> We could not speak no more than if
>   We had been choked with soot.   (131-134)

Dr. Hector McLean, serving with the British Royal Marines attempting to put down the slave revolts in Saint Domingue, wrot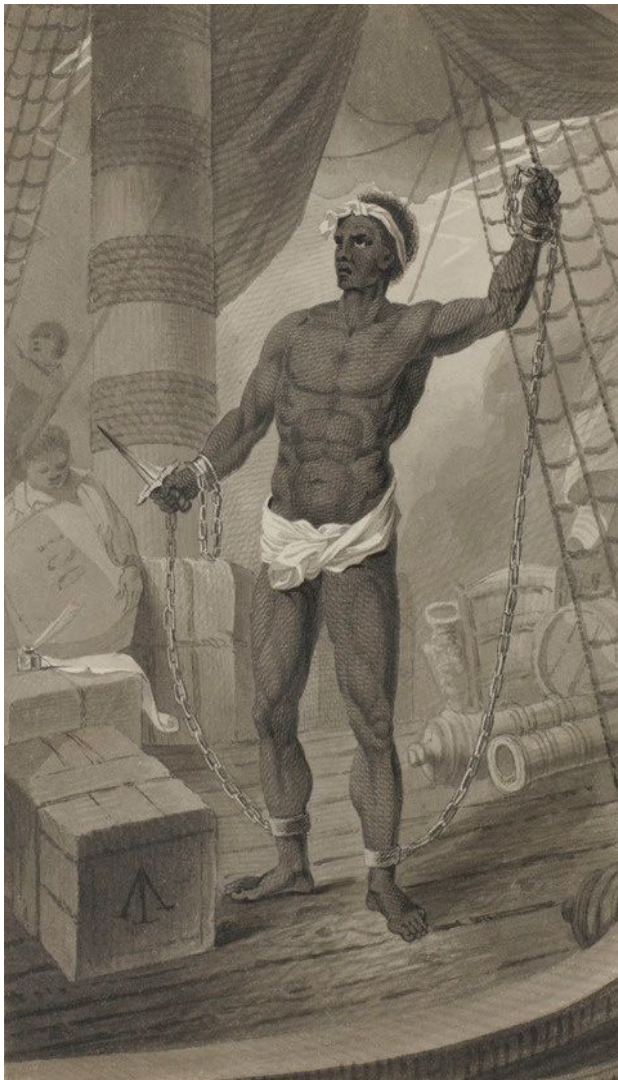e in 1797 about attending to the sick in the General Hospital in Port au Prince. The hospital was packed with victims of yellow fever; among the late symptoms was bleeding from the mouth and eyes; patients often disgorged large amounts of digested blood, which gave the disease its slang name, "the black vomit." New arrivals 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 82nd Foot lost 2/3 of its force in three months.[xxxv] McLean was a scientific man, yet he describes the fear of the men around him "hemmed in by an unseen enemy and haunted by the daily spectacle of death."[xxxvi]

What Doctor McLean's letters do not discuss is that the uprisings in Saint Domingue began with small groups of slaves who reportedly found solidarity and power in the exercise of local versions of African religions. To the British in the West Indies and at home, "Obeah," "Obi" or "voodoo" was simply and frighteningly black witchcraft. Its practitioners were said to have the power, 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."[xxxvii] The suspicion that white soldiers died in overwhelmingly larger numbers than local slaves because of the spells of the "obi men" may not have made it into official documents, but to the common soldier, McLean's "unseen enemy" was more than a theory about disease.

Figure 5: *Slave on Deck*. **© National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery**

The Mariner and his shipmates suffer, standing helplessly, "With throats unslack'd, with

black lips bak'd / – "thro' drouth all dumb" as they watch the approach of a second vessel. Hopes of a rescue turn to greater horror as the advancing ship passes close aboard. The Spectre ship carries only two figures:

> And are these two all, all the crew,
>   That woman and her fleshless Pheere?
>
> *His* bones were black with many a crack,
>   All black and bare, I ween;
> Jet-black and bare, save where with rust
> Of mouldy damps and charnel crust
>   They're patch'd with purple and green.
>
> *Her* lips are red, *her* looks are free,
>   *Her* locks are yellow as gold:
> Her skin is white as leprosy,
>   And she is far liker Death than he;
> Her flesh makes the still air cold.   (179-190)

This phantom vessel, like a weird sister-ship to the Mariner's ship-of-state, carries a jet-black skeletal figure, resembling the remains of an African slave whose body has been broken, and his partner, a female Anglo-European figure described in the language of debasement and unchecked sexuality. The Spectre-ship brings the violence of the plantation and the violent appetites of the English public face-to-face with the men whose labor *did* blur the distance between producer and consumer. The work of the death-ship is the work of the Traffic: the slave voyage, the press gang, and the routine abuse of sailors: to transform living men into products, machines, tools for the profit of the voyage.[xxxviii] When the Spectre-ship vanishes over the horizon, it leaves the Mariner and his crew to die:

> With never a sigh or groan,
> With heavy thump, a lifeless lump
>   They dropp'd down one by one.   (209-211)

After seven days dead, the men began to rise:

> 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 Marineres all 'gan work the ropes,
>   Where they were wont to do:
> They raised their limbs like lifeless tools–
>   We were a ghastly crew.   (323-332)

Returning to their positions, the reanimated crew of the Mariner's ship work silently, with an eerie collective autonomy. English planter Bryan Edwards published his multivolume history of the British West Indian colonies in 1793. His openly partisan account includes this report that only added to English fascination with voodoo: "[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."[xxxix] In Haitian folklore, the zombie becomes a slave of the person who made it, working silently, deprived of will, memory and consciousness.[xl] Expensive and troublesome parts of the ship's gear at best, the once "merry" crew have become soulless but efficient *undead*.

Literary sources for such figures are available both in Europe and in the West Indian colonies. Gothic novels such as *The Monk* (1796) sensationalized the horrors of live burial and mob violence.[xli] "The Three Graves" (1797), begun by Wordsworth and continued by Coleridge, was partly inspired by Edwards's account of "'*the Oby* witchcraft' in his well-known *History*."[xlii] Although "voodoo" and the term "zombi[e]" had not yet entered common English, the ideas of a reanimated human corpse put to work at the behest of a practitioner of obeah were well known in the 1790's.[xliii] In "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807" Alan Richardson writes, "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."[xliv]

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 origins (much later, Coleridge would refer to Jason and the Argonauts

Figure 6: 'Every Dog Has His Day - or Black Devils Amusing Themselves With a White Negro Driver' (detail) © National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, London, Michael Graham-Stewart Slavery Collection.

when discussing the early English seafarers on whom the *Rime* is based)[xlv] to undead automatons, the ship a floating wreck that only survives long enough to return them, strangely propelled by unnatural winds, to their home port.

5. Homecomings

The Mariner is the only living person onboard the ship that arrives looking as if it had been at sea for generations. In a significant passage that was deleted after the poem's 1798 debut the Mariner stares forward, while the corpses of the other seamen leave their work and congregate behind him:

> The moonlight bay was white all o'er,
>   Till rising from the same,
> Full many shapes, that shadows were,
>   Like as of torches came.
> …………………………………………
> 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.
>
> 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.   (481-484, 489-498)

The Mariner is shocked to find himself standing between the bodies of his menacingly organized shipmates and the bay. He is the one survivor of a wrecked crew – whose zombified bodies face him – their arms, like torches "borne upright" (496). The ballad need not specify the threat that a band of torch-bearing men might signify to an audience well familiar with slave revolt in the Caribbean, unrest in England and the French Revolution spreading into Europe. The Mariner's crew has returned to England changed by their voyage: once merry seamen, now a torch-bearing mob standing united in "red and smoky light" (498).

Beginning with the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* in 1800, these five stanzas are deleted and the men with the burning right-arms become "seraphs," the crew unambiguously dead:[xlvi]

> Each corse lay flat, lifeless and flat;
>   And by the Holy rood
> A man all light, a seraph-man,
>   On every corse there stood.   (*LB* 1800, v1)[xlvii]

These seraphs have none of the 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 the men's empty bodies: "The angelic spirits leave the dead bodies, / And appear in their own forms of light" (1834 482-85). This emendation removes the last trace of the crew from the deck of their vessel. Whatever agency their abject bodies may have retained after maneuvering the ship to port is lost 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.[xlviii]

Two ships in a weirdly oneiric ocean – dramatizing the way the sea, like dreams, like the Romantic imagination – enables vastly different and perhaps incommensurable events, and people, and substances to mingle dangerously. Military invasion, miscegenation and the erosion of class boundaries were only some of the fears circulating through the British imagination in the 1790's. Coleridge's poem registers these very conservative fears even as it reiterates his social critique. However, no identification can be precise where there are so many complicated levels of signification. To make matters worse, lifelong revisions, additions and retractions only further occlude the "original" meanings of the poem, confounding critics and readers who search for a single comprehensive interpretation.

Near the end of *Annus Mirabilis*, London is personified in terms reminiscent of the reign of Elizabeth I and the earlier days of English maritime ambitions, yet predicting the fleet of treasure ships yet to come:

> 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.   (St. 297)

A very different vessel stands in England's harbor by the end of Coleridge's poem. The Pilot and his boy, approaching in their boat with the Hermit, are wary of the decrepit ship. The Pilot cries, "Dear Lord! it has a fiendish look–" (571). In a moment, the ship sinks "like lead" and the senseless Mariner is taken into the Pilot's boat, by all presumed drowned. But:

> 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's 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 is over, having delivered not a happy crew and the riches of East and West, but a shipwrecked soulless mob, and all are gone, 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 England's shore, and that the Devil is a sailor.

NOTES

[i] A version of this essay was delivered as part of the panel "Sea Stories: Narrative Experiences Within The Oceanic Realm" at "'Maritime Environments': North American Society for Oceanic History / National Maritime Historical Society Annual Conference," University of Connecticut, Avery Point and Mystic Seaport in May, 2010. I thank my colleagues on that panel, Richard Guy and Dr. Mary K. Bercaw Edwards, and our chair, Dr. Glenn Gordiner. I also thank the National Endowment for the Humanities and my colleagues during the summer 2010 Frank C. Munson Institute of American Maritime Studies at Mystic Seaport Museum for their support and feedback. Thanks to Paul O'Pecko and the staff of the G.W. Blunt White Library at Mystic Seaport for their kind and enthusiastic assistance, and Melanie Oelgeschläger, Picture Librarian at the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, London for permission to reproduce many of the images herein.

[ii] David S Shields, *Oracles of Empire: Poetry, Politics, and Commerce in British America, 1690-1750* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 26.

[iii] Marjorie Hope Nicolson, *Mountain Gloom and Mountain Glory: The Development of the Aesthetics of the Infinite* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1997); John Barrell, *The Dark Side of the Landscape : the Rural Poor in English Painting, 1730-1840* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980); John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place, 1730-1840 : An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare.* (Cambridge: University Press, 1972).

[iv] Dustin Griffin, *Patriotism and Poetry in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 57.

[v] Although the poem was extensively revised many times during Coleridge's life, this essay is concerned with the first published edition of 1798, when the *Rime* appeared as the opening selection in Coleridge and William Wordsworth's anonymous *Lyrical Ballads, with a Few Other Poems* (Bristol: Joseph Cottle, 1798). All references are to this text unless otherwise indicated.

[vi] *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). *The Works of John Dryden: Poems 1649-1680*, ed. Edward Niles Hooker and H. T. Swedenberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1956). Block quotes are cited by stanza, parenthetical citations in the text refer to line number.

[vii] C. A. Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760," *PMLA* 41, no. 2 (June 1926): 362-401.

[viii] Ralph Davis, *The Rise of the English Shipping Industry In the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, 1962), 12.

[ix] Ibid., 15.

[x] For studies of poetic imagery in the C18 mercantile panegyric, see Suvir Kaul, *Poems of Nation, Anthems of Empire : English Verse in the Long Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 2000); and Shields, *Oracles of Empire*; the classic article on the subject, though not exclusively maritime, is Moore, "Whig Panegyric Verse, 1700-1760."

xi Dryden carefully (and satirically) distinguishes the English and Dutch fleets here and in many other places, which space does not permit me to cite individually. The English are virtuous and manly, never obtaining victory without sacrifice but demonstrating superior technical skills as sailors and shipwrights while the Dutch are often effeminate and hubristic.

xii Michael McKeon, *Politics and Poetry in Restoration England: The Case of Dryden's Annus Mirabilis* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1975), 119-21.

xiii *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.

xiv "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.

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

xvi Ibid., 664.

xvii Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces," trans. Jay Miskowiec, *Diacritics* 16, no. 1 (Spring 1986): 22-27.

xviii Notably, 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.

xix *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).

xx 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).

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

xxii Robert Fowke explores the competing narratives of Shelvocke and his captain Woodes Rogers and interestingly develops their probable influence on Coleridge in "Three Men in a Boat: The Real Ancient Mariner," *The Coleridge Bulletin* 35(NS) Summer 2010. 65-75.

xxiii Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Vol 1, Lectures 1795 on Politics and Religion* (London: Routledge and K. Paul, 1969).

xxiv David Geggus, *Slavery, War and Revolution: The British Occupation of Saint Domingue 1793-1798,* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1982), 206. Geggus elsewhere writes that during the years 1789-1793 the government of Pitt and Henry Dundas expended ten million pounds and the lives of 15,000 men trying to conquer "the Eden of the Western World."

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

xxvi 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).

xxvii"Rime of the Ancyent Marinere," Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge's Poetry and Prose*, ed. Nicholas Halmi, Paul Magnuson, and Raimonda Modiano (New York: W. W. Norton, 2004). All quotations from the 1798 *Lyrical Ballads* text unless otherwise indicated. Citations to line number given parenthetically.

xxviii 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.

xxix "Lecture on the Slave Trade," Coleridge, *Lectures 1795*, 247.

xxx 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).

xxxi The recent explosion and loss of the drill ship *Deepwater Horizon* 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."

xxxii *Routes and Roots: Navigating Caribbean and Pacific Island Literatures* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2007), 67.

xxxiii Ibid., 68.

xxxiv Philip E Steinberg, *The Social Construction of the Ocean* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 46.

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

xxxvi Qtd. in Geggus 368, 370.

xxxvii The word "zombi" enters the English language in 1819 with Southey's *History of Brazil*, though it occurs as early as 1697 in French (OED). 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.

xxxviii See, especially, Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History* (New York: Viking, 2007).

xxxix *The History, Civil and Commercial, of the British Colonies in the West*, 2nd ed. (London: Stockdale, 1794), v2, 84.

xl 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.

xli 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).

xlii Alan Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo: Obeah and British Culture, 1797-1807," *Studies in Romanticism* 32 (1993): 4.

xliii The word "zombi" enters the English language in 1819 with poet Robert Southey's *History of Brazil*, though it occurs as early as 1697 in French (*OED*). 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.

xliv Richardson, "Romantic Voodoo," 5.

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

xlvi 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).

xlvii William Wordsworth, *Lyrical Ballads, with Other Poems, in Two Volumes* (London: Longman, 1800) 189. This edition credits Wordsworth as author (the first edition was published anonymously) and also demotes "The Rime" from the first poem to the penultimate selection at the back of the first volume.

xlviii 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.