

Maritime Sensibility: Sentimentalism, Racial Capitalism, and a Critique of the American
Maritime Genre

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Abstract

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This dissertation looks to the early American literary marketplace and argues that the American maritime genre, assumed to have begun with James Fenimore Cooper's novel *The Pilot* in 1824, was not an uncontested genre prior to Cooper's popularization of maritime nationalism. Instead, this dissertation remaps the genealogy of the genre of American maritime literature by beginning with the circulation of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* and port town periodicals marketed to women in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. Doing so has implications for reassessing the development of sentimentalism in popular forms throughout the nineteenth century. Chapter one looks at the American reception of Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* and considers his text as both undermining the trope of maritime nationalism and interrogating the uses of sentimentalism within systems of racial capitalism.

Chapter two continues the consideration of sentimentalism within racial capitalism by offering a survey of women's periodicals circulated within port towns during the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century. In these periodicals, the sentimental trope of "presentiment" is mobilized to forge connections between the material experiences of hyper-exploited laborers, particularly unwaged feminized laborers. I argue that this trope emerges from the same discourse of financial speculation within the Atlantic trade system that Equiano engages in his narrative—these engagements are what I term "maritime sensibility," a potentially insurgent countercurrent to the dominant discourse of financial speculation. In chapters three and four I track the half-life of maritime sensibility throughout the late-nineteenth century. In chapter three, I consider Melville's *Billy Budd* and argue that Captain Vere's decision to execute Billy must be understood in the context of racial capitalism and Vere's history within the Caribbean. I also consider Billy as a figure who, emerging from the women's periodicals discussed in chapter two, confounds the distinction between forms of masculinized and feminized labor within the Atlantic system. Finally, in chapter four, I look to two examples of literary realism and naturalism, Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Charles Chesnut's *The Marrow of Tradition*, and trace residual elements of maritime sensibility. I argue that maritime sensibility serves an imaginative resource in these two novels to interrogate and intervene in the historical reconfiguration of racial capitalism in the post-Reconstruction U.S.

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In chapter four of this dissertation I cite the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci who wrote that within each of us history deposits an “infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory.” Here again, I find myself thinking of this quote as I attempt to thank all those whose guidance, care, and love exists as traces within this work. While the following inventory is necessarily incomplete (“the draught of a draught!”), I wish to thank the following people for their support during the composition of this dissertation.

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Introduction:

The American Maritime Genre as a Site of Contestation: Historicizing the Countercurrents of Early American Maritime Writing

In the “Theories and Methodologies” section of the 2010 issue of *PMLA*, a collection of essays under the rubric “Oceanic Studies” called attention to a lingering “hydrophasia” in literary theory and criticism and proposed various alternative approaches to sea-worn texts that take the ocean as “the proprioceptive point of inquiry” rather than relying on “methodologies and frameworks imported from existing discourses.”¹ Of the hydrophasia in novel studies, Margaret Cohen points out how novels that are unquestioningly ocean-bound have largely been read as pertaining to land-based realities such that the *Pequod* resembles factory labor and Crusoe’s trials serve as allegories for agrarian land management and territorial colonization. Cohen argues that “[hydrophasia] is part of a pervasive twentieth-century attitude that the photographer and theorist Allan Sekula has called “forgetting the sea” (48).”² In attending to this hydrophasia, scholars in the issue offer various attitude adjustments³ that attempt to draw the material ocean into view not as a metaphor or a secondary concern, but as the primary object for analysis and as an organizing principle.

The capaciousness of this call has inspired new scholarship in literary studies and ecocriticism.⁴ It has also led scholars to return to texts from earlier periods to read for the

¹ Blum, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” 671.

² Cohen, “Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe,” 658. Cohen is citing Allan Sekula’s *Fish Story*.

³ For instance, in this issue Patricia Yaeger offers eco-poetics with which to approach study of the ocean such as *techno-ocean*, a term inspired by Donna Haraway’s discussion of “crittercams” to denote the interpenetration of the oceans with technology; the conception of *ecocriticism* that “insists on the imbroglio of markets and nature” and refuses to essentialize nature (529); and echo-criticism, a temporal approach to the ocean which encourages us to read anachronistically and see, for instance, the way the Victorian notion of the “oceanic sublime” reverberates into our present in which the oceans have been thoroughly filled with plastic particles.

⁴ Insisting on the ocean as a site for reorganizing and rethinking histories has informed Erin Finzer’s exploration of feminist poet Magda Portal discussion of the sea in a way that “imagines a new form of relatedness, or subjectivity, for a female revolutionary navigating the realities of global capitalism, nationalism, and patriarchy” (325), and shaped Anna Snaith’s intervention in *Modernist Voyages* which tracks and brings together feminist and anticolonial

materiality of ocean ecologies and taxonomies and to look for the ways that oceans act upon literature and literary history.⁵ More specifically, studies such as Hester Blum's *The View from the Masthead* and Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea* draw on texts from nineteenth-century American maritime literature in ways that allow for important and innovative understandings of the genre. Blum looks to the roles sailors played in shaping nineteenth-century imagination as a type of embodied knowledge—emblemized in Ishmael's view from the masthead which is a space of imagination and bodily endangerment—and Cohen explores the ways sailors' narratives prefigure the development of the novel form—arguing that sailor yarns communicate a type of know-how that is at once entertainment during long stints at sea and information about how to be a successful sailor. However, while Blum and Cohen look to sailors' narratives to show how they either complicate our understanding of nineteenth-century literary culture or influenced the development of the novel form, both scholars take the genre as a mostly coherent, identifiable formation. As a result, because such studies focus on reexamining the oceanic encounters within texts from the genre of American maritime literature rather than reexamining the genre itself, they end up reifying a periodization of the genre rather than seeing it as a site of contestation.⁶ To put it crassly, many of these projects of new materialism end up

writers through the ocean space they shared rather than their seemingly disparate nationalities ranging from South Africa, India, Canada, to Jamaica. Similarly, Patricia Yaeger's work creating new eco-poetics of the ocean is continued by Aaron Pinnix who exposes the limit of the rhizome as a concept for understanding the black Atlantic and proposes the seaweed sargassum as a possible reconceptualization, and by Melody Jue who considers how the materiality of seawater might cause us to rethink our understanding of information systems beyond concepts like flow and fluidity.

⁵ For examples of the former see: Steve Mentz, *Shipwreck Modernity*; Lowell Duckert, *For all Waters*; Graham Burnett, *Trying Leviathan*; Richard King, *Ahab's Rolling Sea*; and Stacy Alaimo, *Exposed*. For examples of the latter see: Hester Blum, *A View from the Masthead*; Margaret Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*; and Siobhan Carroll, *An Empire of Air and Water*.

⁶ A note on terms: scholars have variously referred to these texts as “maritime literature,” “sea adventure fiction,” or “American sea fiction.” I have landed on “American maritime literature” for a few reasons. First, I use the term “maritime” to call attention to the American industry within which the authors and characters I discuss orbit rather than the more capacious term “sea” or “ocean” which exists in excess of the maritime industry. While I cite the industry as a way to corral my texts, I do not mean to suggest that the ocean plays a secondary role. On the contrary, while texts may at first seem like they are centered on landed society, understanding them as part of the negotiation

losing the insights of the other, older materialism. In what follows, I argue that in order to approach the ocean space in the early American context we must first historicize what is signified by the American maritime genre to understand how the abolition of the slave trade and its continuance in a prohibited form, the creation of a feminized labor force that sustained the maritime industry in an invisibilized and unwaged form, and the development of speculative finance capital in the Atlantic zone composed the historical context from which this genre emerged.

By examining the scholarship on this genre, it becomes apparent how the periodization that is often taken up is in dire need of historicization and can be traced back to Thomas Philbrick's argument in his 1961 study *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction* that Cooper alone continued Tobias Smollett's legacy of maritime writing by commencing the American maritime genre with his publication of *The Pilot* in 1824.⁷ This dissertation begins by working to address what I identify as two major fault-lines that emerge from Philbrick's genealogy which continue to shape our understanding of both the cultural work the genre performs and the way later texts take up and inherit the genre. The first fault-line is

over the genre of maritime literature actually demands that we take their descriptions of the ocean more seriously. Secondly, I use the term "American" not to designate anything exceptional or nationally distinct in the form of writing from, say, British or French maritime literature, but to focus in on the circulation of texts within a single literary marketplace. In other words, I am not looking for a particular "American" characteristic of this genre of literature but instead argue that the American literary marketplace was one particular site among inter-related marketplaces where such genres were forming. Doing so allows me to focus in on the local and specific historical and social contexts that went into shaping the genre, even while I aim to hold a transnational and transatlantic perspective as fundamental to my approach. Finally, I have landed on "literature" rather than "fiction" or "novels" to open up my consideration of the genre to works that fall outside the two latter forms such as Equiano's autobiographical narrative or serialized accounts of the industry within periodicals of port towns.

⁷ The first edition of Cooper's novel was actually published in 1823, but for some reason 1824 is the year scholars point to when they refer to its publication. The 1824 second edition is cited as the marker for the beginning of American maritime literature in Cohen's work as well as Philbrick's—Philbrick, who refers to *The Pilot* using the 1824 date exclusively, might have been the originator of this error as his source text is the 5th edition published in 1832 which makes no references to an original publication date (see Philbrick, 273). I have kept 1824 as the year I use because I am focused on the way scholars have built the genealogy of maritime literature, and whether or not *The Pilot* was popular in 1823, the scholarship on this genre exclusively uses the year 1824.

Philbrick's argument that romance was the tonal paradigm necessary for proper depictions of the ocean and maritime industry which recursively dubs Cooper as the founder of the genre of American maritime literature. Doing so has elided other forms of writing such as sentimental genre fiction and autobiographical narratives which were concomitantly engaged in imagining the ocean space and the histories of the American maritime industry, and, as such, played a fundamental role in shaping the genre. This elision keeps such texts out of frame when fields like oceanic studies make calls to reassess the material role of the ocean in certain bodies of literature. The second fault-line, inter-related to and dependent upon the first, is the argument that because the actual history of the American maritime industry did not lend itself to Cooper's project of maritime nationalism, works of American maritime literature must be set in an undefined and fictionalized past. This leads Philbrick to skirt any serious historicization of the industry Cooper's writing depicts and causes other scholars to begin their genealogy with 1824, obfuscating the American maritime industry's participation in the transatlantic slave trade up until 1807 and its largely unsuppressed continuance of this trade illegally until it became more actively suppressed from 1825 onward.

Countercurrents of the Genre of American Maritime Literature

The first major issue with scholarship on the maritime genre that emerges from Philbrick's foundational study is the assumption that Cooper is the first author in the U.S. to offer a distinct voice in sea fiction. Philbrick set out to correct the misconception, wide-spread at the time, that *Moby-Dick* was "often thought of as the first appearance of the sea in American literature."⁸ To do so, Philbrick positioned James Fenimore Cooper as the creator of the sea

⁸ Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, vii.

novel which, he argues, jumpstarted the popularity of American maritime writing more generally. In part, Philbrick's decision to position Cooper as a foundational figure in American maritime writing might have been suggested by Cooper himself. In the preface to the first edition of his novel *The Pilot*, the novel Philbrick credits with founding the genre, Cooper invokes the eighteenth-century British author Tobias Smollett who was the dominant figure of maritime writing at the time. Referring to himself in the third person, Cooper writes, "He will probably be told, that Smollett has done all this before him, and in a much better manner. It will be seen, however, that, though he has navigated the same sea as Smollett, he has steered a different course."⁹ Philbrick demonstrates that after the surprising U.S. victory against the British navy in the War of 1812, Cooper found his "different course" in his desire to stoke feelings of maritime nationalism. In his introduction, therefore, Cooper is calling for—and presuming to inaugurate—a type of distinctly American sea fiction which, by Philbrick's estimation, focused less on the "long history of an institution," as was the case in British fiction's preoccupation with its navy, and more on "the daring exploits of heroic individuals" to promote feelings of American maritime nationalism.¹⁰ This then becomes Philbrick's tautological reasoning for not considering alternative literary engagements with the ocean: unlike romance, "sentimentalism, in itself, had the effect of diminishing the capacity of maritime life to evoke a sense of wonder, the central response of the romantic imagination to the sea and its affairs...obviously, neither the satirized nor the sentimentalized sailor was fitted to the titanic environment in which the romantic imagination placed him."¹¹ While Philbrick argues these registers of writing fail in comparison to depictions of the romantic hero, he nevertheless gestures to their existence.

⁹ Cooper, *The Pilot*, vi.

¹⁰ Philbrick, 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

Still, while Philbrick's study does gesture toward texts that were countercurrents to Cooper's writings, scholarship that draws on Philbrick's genealogy often focuses exclusively on his discussion of Cooper and maritime nationalism. Public-facing collections of American maritime fiction marketed to lovers of the sea or bibliophiles with a penchant for adventure have mapped the genre in ways that have mirrored Philbrick's conclusions. In the 1980s, the U.S. Naval Institute published of a two-volume collection by George Solley and Eric Steinbaugh. While its focus on poetry and short stories distances it from Cooper, who was a novelist foremost, their selections of American texts proceed from Cooper chronologically and their organizational structure—visible in categories such as “Adventures at Sea” and “Storm and Shipwreck”—thematically mirror Philbrick's engagement with romanticism and maritime nationalism.¹² This tradition is visible, too, in a two-volume 1993 Norton collection entitled *The Norton Book of the Sea* whose fiction component contains no American authors before Cooper, and, like Philbrick, the collection's editor John Coote sidelines any major consideration of distinct registers in which the ocean and maritime industry might emerge in literature. Coote condescendingly asks, “should a steamy love story set on a cruise-liner in the Caribbean qualify for our attention, or could it just as easily have been written against the background of a holiday camp in Morecambe Bay without losing its central point – which turns on who was in cabin 221 at midnight on New Year's Eve?”¹³ The person who has most effectively enshrined this tradition in recent years, however, is Thomas Philbrick's son, Nathaniel Philbrick, whose historical writings on American maritime culture expand on and reinforce these basic premises.¹⁴ While

¹² George C. Solley and Eric Steinbaugh, *Moods of the Sea: Masterworks of Sea Poetry and Short Stories of the Sea*.

¹³ Coote, xv.

¹⁴ Nathaniel Philbrick has seen widespread success for his historical writings in the last two decades, for instance, *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex* which tells the story of the ship which inspired Melville to write *Moby-Dick*, was made into film by Ron Howard starring Chris Hemsworth in 2015. Philbrick also brings his father's discussion of maritime nationalism to bear upon historical moments less obviously affiliated with it. For

still public-facing, his forward to Peter Neill's 2000 collection *American Sea Writing* also reinforces this tradition to a more scholarly audience by arguing that "As critics such as Bert Bender, Thomas Philbrick, and Jonathan Raban have pointed out, the emergence of Romanticism in the early nineteenth century had a pivotal role in determining American attitudes toward the sea."¹⁵ Academic work on the genre, too, has generally reinforced the assumptions that romanticism was the nineteenth-century tone appropriate to serious narrations of oceanic encounters and that Cooper was the founder of such a form of maritime literature.¹⁶ One important counterexample is Haskell Springer's collection *America and the Sea: A Literary History*. Springer includes essays on the sea in literary history such as "African-American Literature," "Personal Narratives, Journals, and Diaries," and "Hymns, Chanteys, and Sea Songs," which all pull in a different direction from Cooper's maritime nationalism. Springer also gestures to the fact that "the sea novels of James Fenimore Cooper are now our most accessible literary windows into some nautical aspects of this era, but many other narratives, fictional and otherwise, were popular at the time."¹⁷ However, as Hugh Egan's essay in the collection "Cooper and His Contemporaries" makes clear, this collection leaves Cooper's place as the foundational figure largely unquestioned. As these collections demonstrate, Cooper's place as the sole inventor of the genre of American maritime literature remains unshaken, even when the focus is on other, later texts.

instance, see: *Mayflower: A Story of Courage, Community, and War* (2006) and *In the Hurricane's Eye: The Genius of George Washington and the Victory at Yorktown* (2018).

¹⁵ Philbrick, xiv. Neill's collection largely follows the genealogy laid out by Thomas Philbrick with the exception of one excerpt from Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* about customs at Nantucket, itself of more interest to Melville fans than to Equiano's project.

¹⁶ For scholarly accounts that follow Philbrick's formation see: Jeanne-Marie Santraud, *La Mer Et Le Roman Américain*; William S. Dudley and Michael J. Crawford, *The Early Republic and the Sea*, particularly part II "James Fenimore Cooper and the Birth of American Maritime Experience"; Gordon Milne *Ports of Call*; John Peck, *Maritime Fiction*; and Bert Bender, *Sea-Brothers*.

¹⁷ Springer, 4.

The one substantial exception to this embrace of Cooper's place in the genealogy of American maritime literature is a seven-page chapter called "Sea Adventure Fiction, 1748-1824?" in Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea*. In this chapter, she questions the apparent absence in sea adventure fiction between Smollett's *Roderick Random* in 1748 and Cooper's *The Pilot* in 1824. Cohen admits this chapter "could well be a stub awaiting emendations,"¹⁸ and conjectures as to why there might be this absence especially considering the period coincided with wide-ranging maritime activity and major developments in the novel form. Yet, because Cohen is focused on the form of the novel, she, like Philbrick, ends up drawing a genealogical line from Smollett's maritime picaresque to Cooper's romance of the sea, side-stepping the distinct registers of writing which were deeply involved in imagining the role of the maritime industry, the ocean, and the relays between the type of labor within port towns and the type on board ships.¹⁹ What is distinct about her account, however, is that like Philbrick, Cohen points to the existence of these distinct registers before moving on to Cooper. Cohen writes that throughout this lull in sea fiction readers "perused shipwreck narratives," "bought historical accounts of routine sea voyages by travelers other than mariners," and "consumed collections that included summaries of famous voyages."²⁰ In addition to these non-fictional accounts popular throughout this time, Philbrick admits that while he is only considering works written in the tone of romance—precisely because Cooper understood romance to be the only literary tone appropriate to the sea—there were in fact other types of writing about the ocean and maritime

¹⁸ Cohen, 100.

¹⁹ I offer a more extended discussion of the distinction between Cohen's exploration of narrative craft and those inspired by Philbrick's myopic focus on romance and maritime nationalism in chapter two. There I argue that while Cohen offers craft as a countercurrent to the dominant discourse of maritime nationalism, writings in port-town periodicals of the time before Cooper demonstrate that craft was but one among many counterdiscourses about the ocean and maritime industry.

²⁰ Cohen, 99-100.

industry that predate and were contemporaneous to Cooper including sentimental accounts of life at sea.

While Cohen demonstrates how these registers of writing did not play the same role as sailor narratives in shaping the contours of the novel form, they are nonetheless forms which make evident the material struggles over how the ocean and the American maritime industry were imagined and represented in the nineteenth century. Raymond Williams's *Marxism and Literature* reminds us through his discussion of genre that "recognition and investigation of the complex relations between these different forms of the social material process, including relations between processes at each of these levels in different arts and forms of work, are necessarily part of any Marxist theory."²¹ In other words, while Cooper's sea novels are currently understood as the dominant form of early American maritime literature, part of what any Marxist theory of genre must do is position Cooper's writing among other "arts" and "forms" which were of the same historical circumstance and which were involved in the same imaginative task. By sidelining sentimentalism and other popular forms of writing that depicted the sea, then, Philbrick misapprehends the way that Cooper's type of sea writing was necessarily part of a larger social material process and cannot be thought of in isolation. Fredric Jameson describes this as the dialogic structure of ideology within which American maritime literature was enmeshed. As Jameson writes, "the normal form of the dialogical is essentially an *antagonistic* one, and [the] dialogue of class struggle is one in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code."²² Pointing to this dialogic and relational structure in which ideological class conflict plays out, Jameson elaborates on the process of interpreting what seem at first like isolated and discrete works such as Cooper's sea novels:

²¹ Williams, 185.

²² Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 84.

...the illusion or appearance of isolation or autonomy which a printed text projects must now be systematically undermined. Indeed, since by definition the cultural monuments and masterworks that have survived tend necessarily to perpetuate only a single voice in this class dialogue, the voice of a hegemonic class, they cannot be properly assigned their relational place in a dialogical system without the restoration or artificial reconstruction of the voice to which they were initially opposed, a voice for the most part stifled and reduced to silence, marginalized, its own utterances scattered to the winds, or reappropriated in their turn by the hegemonic culture.²³

This is work that is not accomplished by Philbrick's study of Cooper. Yet, to understand the development of Cooper's sea novels, it is necessary to understand how Cooper's writing and the sentimental narrative, the non-fictional narratives of shipwreck, and, I would add, narratives about the slave trade like Equiano's are dialogical in structure.

My study of the American maritime genre, therefore, is distinct in that it looks to the cultural productions, the different "arts" and "forms," that surround Cooper's sea novels to position the formation of the genre as a site of evidence from which we can gain insight into a broader struggle over how aspects of the maritime industry could be understood. Looking at the genre this way, it becomes clear that the version of the maritime genre enshrined by Philbrick was by no means inevitable or uncontested. By extension, my aim in this dissertation is not to argue for a single text that ought to be considered as part of the maritime genre in the American literary marketplace, but to rethink the genre itself. To address this first fault-line, I look to both Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative* and to port-town periodicals marketed to women that circulated prior to Cooper's sea novels. In chapter one, I position Equiano's narrative as an

²³ Jameson, 85.

alternative starting point for understanding the genealogy of American maritime literature. I look to the ways his text takes on the theme of maritime nationalism later enshrined in Cooper's sea novels as well as sentimentalist discourses in the maritime industry by exposing their limits within the Atlantic system of racial capitalism. I draw on the feminist scholarship of Hazel Carby and Lori Merish, among others, who read sentimentalism as "instantiat[ing] a particular form of liberal political *subjection*, in which agency and subordination are intertwined."²⁴ In particular, drawing inspiration from Hazel Carby's discussion of Harriet Jacobs's narrative, I look to the ways Equiano simultaneously engages the available discourses of maritime nationalism and sentimentalism in ways that establish sympathetic links between the feminized spaces in ports and the masculinized spaces of ocean-bound naval ships and turns them on their head by exposing how they are both discourses built on his exclusion. Likewise, in chapter two I discuss a sampling of archival texts which circulated in port-town periodicals marketed to women and explore some of the tropes and themes that emerge from this sampling. Such texts often confound the distinction between the port and the ocean by intertwining the disasters at sea and their ramifications in port. I look specifically to the career of the relatively unknown Mary Carr Clarke, widower to a mariner killed by complications from the War of 1812 and the first woman to start her own periodical in the U.S., as she tries to earn a living for her family by writing about networks of the maritime industry. In her novel *Clermont Herbert; or, Presentiment* and her ghost-written memoir for Ann Douglass, another woman who married into the maritime industry, I explore the way she insists on the connected networks between occurrences at sea and in port whether it is the War of 1812, a shipwreck, or the continuance of the prohibited slave trade. Through the work of these two chapters, a new purchase on the dialogical structure of the origins

²⁴ Merish, *Sentimental Materialism: Gender, Commodity Culture, and Nineteenth-Century American Literature*, 3. See also: Hazel Carby, *Reconstruction Womanhood*.

of the genre of American maritime literature becomes available. However, as Williams points out, it is necessary both to understand the different “arts” and “forms” that contend for prominence and to historicize the social material processes that subtend the emergence of the genre.

Historicizing the Maritime Industry

In addition to eliding different registers of writing contemporaneous with Cooper, scholarship on the genre of American maritime literature also smuggles in a periodization of the genre that avoids any serious historicization of the U.S. maritime industry. In Philbrick’s study, the latter emerges from former. Because Philbrick argues that Cooper sketched figures in a romantic tone in order to stoke feelings of maritime nationalism in his readers, he ends up also rationalizing the type of ahistoricism Cooper maneuvers in his sea fiction. Philbrick explains this logic: “The impasse which confronted Cooper was clear: the fictional celebration of his doctrine of maritime nationalism demanded the exalted and ideal tone of romance; the known facts of the American maritime history rendered such a tone absurd. The only recourse available to him was to invent appropriate incidents and characters and imbed them in a general historical setting.”²⁵ Philbrick does not expand on what the “known facts” are he references, and he takes for granted that this odd ahistoricism was a necessary part of Cooper’s project. By conceding the point that Cooper must set his novels in an undefined past, Philbrick side-steps any real consideration of the history of the U.S. maritime industry—especially its involvement in the transatlantic slave

²⁵ Philbrick, 51.

trade²⁶—that Cooper might have engaged outside of the War of 1812 and inaugurates the still pervasive 1824 date as the beginning point of the genre of American maritime literature.

One of the consequences of always starting with this date is it has caused a lacuna in scholarly attention to the way this genre engages the U.S. maritime industry's involvement in the slave trade. While the slave trade was prohibited with the Act of 1807 in the U.S., W. E. B. Du Bois demonstrates that it continued in the maritime industry largely unsuppressed until 1825.²⁷ Thus, by framing the genre as beginning in 1824, this genealogy largely ignores any cultural production published prior to Cooper's that might have taken on an abolitionist politics as well as any real engagement with what American mariners were actually doing in the maritime industry in the years preceding *The Pilot*. Not only was the existence of the illegal trade in captured and enslaved people from Africa a historical reality that Cooper suppressed to create the illusion of heroism, he also had to create the illusion of American nationalism that was largely absent in the maritime industry. Du Bois points out that one of the most common ways American slave ships avoided legal repercussions was that "American slavers cleared for foreign ports, there took a foreign flag and foreign papers, and then sailed boldly past American cruisers, although their real character was often well known." He cites a British officer who wrote in 1820 that "American vessels, American subjects, and American capital, are unquestionably engaged in

²⁶ It is important to clarify that I am not implying Cooper did not engage this history because he was morally opposed to the slave trade. One possibility for completely suppressing the reality of these ships and crews in his pursuit of a maritime hero might be understood through Marcus Rediker's description of the state of sailors who worked on slave ships: "They were nightmarish in appearance. Some had the bruises, blotches, and bloody gums of scurvy. Some had burning ulcers caused by Guinea worms, which grew up to four feet long and festered beneath the skin of the lower legs and feet. Some had the shakes and sweats of malaria. Some had grotesquely swollen limbs and rotting toes [etc.] ... These "refuse" sailors of the slave trade depended on charity" (351).

²⁷ Du Bois, W. E. B. *The Suppression of the African Slave-Trade to the United States of America, 1638-1870*. Du Bois writes, "Down to 1824 or 1825, reports from all quarters prove [illegal] activity in slave-trading" and that "although in the period from 1807 to 1820 Congress laid down broad lines of legislation sufficient, save in some details, to suppress the African slave trade to America, yet the execution of these laws was criminally lax" (85-6).

the trade, though under other colours and in disguise.”²⁸ This demonstrates a certain ambivalence toward American nationalism in the maritime industry as well as a prioritization of capital over nationalism in the thick of racial capitalism. Because setting maritime narrative in a vague and generalized past—what Ian Baucom calls “actuarial historicism”²⁹—becomes a dominant trope in sea fiction after Cooper,³⁰ it is necessary that we historicize this narrative ahistoricism and understand how the histories Du Bois points to inform this side of the genre of American maritime literature.

Importantly, I am not only contesting the 1824 date because I believe study of the genre must address the American maritime industry’s involvement in the transatlantic slave trade—although I do believe this—I also argue that proceeding from 1824 represents a flawed approach to the study of genre. Raymond Williams argues that genre is evidence of social material processes in the abstract³¹ and that any study genre must recognize two facts: “first, that there are clear social and historical relations between particular literary forms and the societies and periods in which they were originated or practiced; second, that there are undoubted continuities of literary forms through and beyond the societies and periods to which they have such relations.”³² What is crucial about this formulation is the temporality it implies. A genre is formed as a result of the struggle over inherited formal characteristics of writing and dominant

²⁸ Du Bois, 84.

²⁹ As I discuss in chapter one, Baucom argues “The actuarial type, then, in terms that will become crucial not only to the English and British novel but to post-Kantian German idealist thought... is the type of something that does not exist as *this* or *that*, but only as *such*, only in the aggregate or the abstract. To the extent, therefore, that the preromantic English and British novel licenses a revolution in epistemology, that revolution is generally consistent with the other historical, financial, and cultural revolutions of modern European speculative discourse” (216).

³⁰ For instance, Melville’s *Moby-Dick* opens with the famous lines, “some years ago—never mind how long precisely...” (18).

³¹ Williams writes, “Genre, in this view, is neither an ideal type nor a traditional order nor a set of technical rules. It is in the practical and variable combination and even fusion of what are, in abstraction, different levels of the social material process that what we have know as genre becomes a new kind of constitutive evidence” (185).

³² *Ibid.*, 183.

understandings of certain subject matter generated by social and material processes. Once a genre is formed, however, it exists as evidence of that struggle, implying that the collision of antagonistic discourses is settled, and continued proliferations of the genre are merely residue of the struggle over the cultural imaginary. For instance, while Philbrick argues that Cooper establishes a distinctly American genre of sea fiction, Williams demonstrates that Philbrick is actually identifying the dialectical resolution of the struggle over the genre of maritime literature which involved accounts like Equiano's, Carr Clarke's, and many others. In order to understand the social and material processes that precede Cooper's formulation, therefore, we must look earlier than 1824. From this perspective I make the somewhat controversial claim that the development of the form of American maritime literature actually ends with James Fenimore Cooper rather than begins with him.

The dangers of neglecting such a historicization become clear if we return for a moment to the 2010 *PMLA* issue where Margaret Cohen utilizes Allan Sekula's phrase "forgetting the sea" to describe the problem which the work of oceanic studies sets out to correct. Sekula argues in both *Fish Story* and *The Forgotten Space* that the ocean is a paradigmatic space of (post)modernity even while its material reality has all but vanished in our cultural imaginary. However, while Sekula does much work to bring the ocean back into view as a historical space of modernity, Christina Sharpe demonstrates that he also enacts an erasure of the history of the slave trade and racial capitalism. The extent to which Sekula and Burch's texts go to avoid grappling with the history of the slave trade is astounding—even titling a section "the Middle Passage" which Sharpe argues "bears no discernible resemblance to the planned disaster that is known by that name." Sharpe continues, "No surprise, then, that [*The Forgotten Space*] does not address the history of the trade in abducted Africans; does not locate *that* trade as the key point

in the beginning of global capital. Africa, the Caribbean, and the rest of the African diaspora are absent, the forgotten spaces of *The Forgotten Space*. And so, too, those histories and presents of slavery and colonization, of tourism, and of the establishment of military bases that containerization abets fail to appear.”³³ Sharpe’s critique here shows the way absenting the history of the slave trade in any discussion of modern maritime capitalism—a historical reality many scholars have argued must be seen as one of the foundational spaces of racial capitalism³⁴—ends up leading to further repeated absences. Much like the way Cooper’s writing avoids dealing with the grim reality of the U.S. maritime industry’s participation in the slave trade, Sekula here, too, sidesteps any sustained engagement with the articulation of racism with capitalism.

Sharpe elaborates on the consequences of this absence in her discussion of the film’s portrayal of Aereile Jackson, a black woman whose experience within racial capitalism the film is unable or unwilling to address. Sharpe writes, “I had held out some hope that this film that looks at the maw of capital wouldn’t simply feed her into it, wouldn’t simply use her as a container for all of that unremarked-upon history, would not use her as an an [sic] asterisk or an ellipsis to move the narrative forward ... Aereile Jackson appears only to be made to disappear. She is a metaphor.”³⁵ It is crucial to reckon with the way a text like Sekula’s which attends to Blum’s insistence that “the sea is not a metaphor,”³⁶ does not automatically escape the problems with the historiographies and methodologies it aims to complicate and might end up reenacting

³³ Sharpe, *In the Wake*, 26.

³⁴ I am thinking here of Cedric Robinson’s *Black Marxism*, particularly chapter five “The Atlantic Slave Trade and African Labor.” I am also thinking of Stuart Hall’s essay “Race, Articulation, and Societies Structured in Dominance,” Stephanie Smallwood, *Saltwater Slavery*, Marcus Rediker, *The Slave Ship*, David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick*, Sowande’ Mustakeem, *Slavery at Sea*, and Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*.

³⁵ Sharpe, 27.

³⁶ Blum, “The Prospect of Oceanic Studies,” 670.

certain erasures and elisions.³⁷ Sharpe continues, “the filmmakers’ language of analysis begins from the violence of [Aerelle Jackson’s] absence, and it is clear the film operates within a logic that cannot apprehend her suffering.”³⁸ The real material danger of asterisking a language of analysis that would attend to histories of the slave trade within the maritime genre becomes clear through Sharpe’s critique of Sekula.

Proceeding from this critique, I read the texts under consideration in chapters one and two in relation to the scholarship of Stephanie Smallwood and Ian Baucom which theorizes racial capitalism as it existed and emerged from the transatlantic slave trade. In chapter one, I read Equiano’s narrative as opening space for analyzing the way speculative racial capitalism positions him on the outside of the state discourse of maritime nationalism.³⁹ As David Kazanjian argues, despite certain legal rights Equiano gains, his narrative demonstrates how the concept of market-based freedom and, I would add, maritime nationalism are constitutively built on his exclusion. However, because the dominant speculative nature of racial capitalism exists in excess of the state, as Houston Baker Jr. demonstrates, for Equiano the marketplace is both a site for subjection to the market and an insurgent potential. Therefore, in my consideration of the texts in chapters one and two, I establish a distinction between the dominant form of speculation in the financial markets which are built on Equiano’s exclusion, and, on the other hand, the

³⁷ The essence of this hesitation is captured by Benita Sampedro Vizcaya “I wish, if in passing, to alert us to some of the risks and challenges in engaging the Atlantic: it should not, and must not, be an opportunity to simply ‘put the story together again’ (in the tradition of Bernard Bailyn), to retreat into Eurocentrism (or into what has been called by others the ‘white Atlantic’), or to remain at the diaspora (in which Africa figures only as an imagined presence for Afro-Caribbean, Afro-Latin-American or Afro-European configurations of identity, eternally punctured by the hyphen) ... The Atlantic should therefore, in my view, allow itself to be theorized persuasively, from its different loci, but should probably not – and perhaps cannot – be defined, or confined, in any totalizing way. Maybe in the end it might, essentially – although not exclusively – remain a locative, performative, and relational entity from which we can generate almost limitless meaning, and articulate critically its multiple reinscriptions” (919).

³⁸ Sharpe, 29.

³⁹ The texts I draw on here are Srinivas Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, David Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick*, and Houston Baker Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*.

practice of an insurgent speculation that engages both the market and a more quotidian speculation on futurity encoded, for instance, through sentimental tropes of presentiment. Connecting this discussion of speculative finance to David Kazanjian's rejoinder on speculative philosophy as a type of improvisation, I explore the way Mary Carr Clarke's work extends this form of insurgent speculation that is in excess of the state and law to the world of the port.⁴⁰ In chapter three, I read *Billy Budd* as a historical novella which imaginatively returns us to some of the early struggles over the genre prior to Cooper's constellation of maritime nationalism in sea adventure fiction. Doing so allows us to see how, for instance, Melville meditates on the historical presence of the West Indian slave trade in his engagement of the trope of the "handsome sailors"—a clear cognate of Cooper's romantic hero—and maritime nationalism. Additionally, this reading calls attention to the way the novella is framed as emerging out of the market in port-town periodicals similar to the one Mary Carr Clarke founded to explore acts of story-telling, speculation, and historicization.

By making these maneuvers—attending to the registers of writing that were the countercurrents to Cooper's brand of maritime nationalism and by historicizing the maritime genre in relation to the years leading up to its solidification—study of the genre of American maritime literature is made to contend with what scholars in Black Atlantic studies have long argued: engagements with the Atlantic space in the nineteenth-century American literary production has always been confronted with the history of the slave trade and the middle passage. Just as I argue that we cannot study the maritime industry without attending to the relays between the feminized labor in port and the experience out at sea, we must also

⁴⁰ David Kazanjian builds on Ian Baucom's discussion of speculation discourse as a fundamental logic to finance capital by exploring its philosophical origins. See: Ian Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic* and David Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom*.

understand the genre as necessarily bound-up in a struggle over the representation of the U.S. maritime industry's history within the slave trade and the way this history reemerges throughout the nineteenth century.

Maritime Sensibility

Thus far, by beginning with a reassessment of the genre of American maritime literature, I have demonstrated how it is necessary to attend to the “arts” and “forms” that serve as countercurrents to Philbrick’s exploration of maritime nationalism and form the dialogic construction of the genre. Additionally, I have argued we must historicize the genre by looking to the social material reality of the years leading up to the solidification of the genre which, in turn, demands that we position the genre within a period that saw a vast amount of abolitionist organizing against the slave trade. Now, rather than focusing on maritime nationalism and drawing genealogical lines from Cooper through the early work of Melville to the authors Jack London, James A. Michener, and C. S. Forrester like the public-facing anthologies I cited above do, it becomes possible to see the way these countercurrents to the dominant culture’s representation of maritime nationalism track throughout the nineteenth century and beyond. By understanding how the dominant sense of this genre covers over countercurrents of writing that worked to differently imagine the social material conditions of the maritime industry, and by exploring the work these countercurrents of writing do, I argue that we can track how authors in later historical contexts are disposed toward what I have called a “maritime sensibility.” This maritime sensibility emerges through the way the earlier countercurrents to the maritime genre negotiated the maritime industry as a highly speculative space, as an industry that often functioned outside of state-power, and as a historical site in which racism and sexism were

routinely articulated with capitalism. In chapters three and four, I discuss maritime sensibility as an affective disposition that draws on the tropes and figures from the earlier countercurrents of maritime writing which allows authors different apprehensions of time and space. For instance, drawing on the way port-town periodicals worked to confound the line between the port and sea to make visible feminized labor, authors of later historical contexts invoke maritime sensibility to knit connections between territorial and overseas expansionist projects. My understanding of the way this struggle over the representation of the maritime industry cuts through distinct historical moments is informed by theory and scholarship in Black Atlantic studies. In particular, Stephanie Smallwood shows how

The echo produced by the serial repetition of one-way departures, the voices of saltwater slaves, could not reverberate back to Africa. The individual stories of saltwater slavery form the antithesis of historical narrative, for they feature not an evolving plot of change over time but rather a tale of endless repetition that allows no temporal progression. Every protagonist was a pioneer, blazing a trail on the same ground traveled by predecessors in saltwater slavery, but without the benefit of historical memory. It is a narrative in which time *seems* to stand still.⁴¹

This characterization of time standing still emerges in Sharpe's discussion of Jackson as well and her argument that the history of the slave trade is a "past that is not yet past."⁴² Ian Baucom's argument against Walter Benn Michaels's critique of the hauntological trend in late-twentieth century writing also points to the importance of rethinking temporality: "Benn Michaels's critique relies on the self-evident, pre-ordained existence of a past and a present, assumes that

⁴¹ Smallwood, 201-2.

⁴² Sharpe, 8. Additionally, Sharpe writes that "When Ms. Jackson appeared in the film, she stopped time for me" (27).

these are in fact ontologically sound and separate things (rather than complex constructions in their own right), and proceeds accordingly, failing ever to address the possibility that the object of a novel such as *Beloved* is not to conflate these terms but to suspend them, not to make the past present but to reconceive our basic notions of temporality, periodicity, and contemporaneity.”⁴³ If, as these scholars demonstrate, the history of this disaster called racial capitalism is not to be thought of teleologically but as one which cuts through different temporalities and structures, then it is important to explore how the negotiation over the early American maritime space has a half-life in later forms of writing. This half-life I call maritime sensibility.

In the fourth chapter of this dissertation, I consider how some of the ideas from the countercurrents of the maritime genre get taken up through this disposition toward maritime sensibility in ways that exist beyond the confines of the original struggle over the genre. Specifically, I look to the post-Reconstruction literary landscape and consider how authors as different as Willa Cather and Charles Chesnutt exhibit this maritime sensibility in their regionalist and realist writings in a way that opens up space for considering continuities between their own political historical moments and region and those of a distinct historical space and/or time. One aspect of this sensibility highlights the way the speculative discourses of the maritime industry, both dominant and insurgent, exist in excess of the state and law. For instance, in chapter one I argue that Equiano demonstrates how maritime nationalism rests on the extra-legal maneuvers of racial capitalism which position him as the insurance of such a program. In chapter four, I explore how Charles Chesnutt’s *The Marrow of Tradition* draws on the imaginative resource of maritime sensibility as a way to represent the dominant speculative discourse which

⁴³ Baucom, 323-4. Baucom is referencing Walter Benn Michaels’s argument in “‘You Who Never Was There’: Slavery and the New Historicism, Deconstruction and the Holocaust.”

subtends extra-legal white supremacist violence in the post-Reconstruction south. Additionally, maritime sensibility also appears in texts like *O Pioneers!* and *The Marrow of Tradition* in a way that engages insurgent forms of speculation. While Mary Carr Clarke's writing speculates on futurity through tropes like presentiment as a way to negotiate her own legal disenfranchisement within the patriarchal maritime industry, characters like Alexandra Bergson and Janet Miller draw on maritime sensibility to inspire the way they speculate to make material changes in their situations in ways that are not supported or protected by the state. Another aspect of maritime sensibility is the confounding of the distinction between oceanic and territorial expansionist projects throughout the nineteenth century. As I illustrate in the first two chapters, Equiano and Carr Clarke established relays between oceanic ventures and the sentimentalized labor in the home ports, and, in chapter four, I argue that in both texts, *O Pioneers!* and *The Marrow of Tradition*, this disposition is repurposed in a way that establishes relays and confounds the distinction between projects of territorial expansion and racial capitalism in the U.S. mainland and American imperial projects overseas. Finally, in chapter three I argue that attending to maritime sensibility allows us to recast a canonical figure like Melville by seeing the way *Billy Budd* revisits some of the same negotiations that were involved in the struggle over the genre prior to Cooper.

Oceanic Studies?

Returning to where this introduction began, I believe that through the reassessment this dissertation makes of the genre of American maritime literature, the concerns of the 2010 *PMLA* issue might be cast in a new light. Part of the worry around such a call has centered on the relationship between the new materialism implied by the call and the old materialism present in

Black Atlantic studies and studies of racial capitalism.⁴⁴ This critique acknowledges that there is something vital in re-approaching literary history and ideology critique with the space of oceans, archipelagoes, inlets, and the littoral as the re-organizing principle, and yet insists that losing sight of how such histories and inquiries relate to larger systems of racial capitalism, colonial expansion, and empire-building undermines the stakes of such re-organizations. While this dissertation is decidedly focused on working through a genre via theorizations of the old materialism, it isn't apparent that the two materialisms being discussed here—the *PMLA*'s discussion of watery molecules of seawater shot-through with plastic particles and the history of labor, capitalism, and empire—are mutually exclusive points of entry.⁴⁵ In fact, much of what this dissertation might open up are spaces for considering the material ocean space in these countercurrents of the genre of American maritime literature. At the very least, the texts I discuss in the chapters that follow represent a distinct engagement with the ocean and the maritime industry of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century—including the experiences at sea and in port—one which forces us to chart a new understanding of developments and insurgent possibilities within nineteenth-century genre fiction.

⁴⁴ For instance, Jason Berger writes, "What interests me most about [antebellum American maritime narratives] is the manifold ways they *do* relate to broader "questions of empire, exchange, translation, and cosmopolitanism." But not in a reductive, zero-sum correlation." Similarly, David Drysdale insists that "While the sea itself may offer a model for an insurgent epistemological shift away from categories of the nation-state, it nevertheless remains a space that is always subject to inscription and organization by nation and capital." See: Jason Berger, *Antebellum at Sea* and David Drysdale, "Melville's Motley Crew: History and Constituent Power in *Billy Budd*."

⁴⁵ For an extended and illuminating discussion of this tension see Stephanie Clare's *Earthly Encounters*. Clare says of calls to approach the materiality of the outside world that "questions about signification, representation, and discourse have not simply disappeared. Account of materialist are themselves representations, and this new scholarship is itself a discursive formation that legitimizes some accounts of materiality over others. What are the politics of the ontologies that this new scholarship posits? Who is the implicit subject who comes to know materiality in the way described in this literature? How can we understand this ontological turn in light of prior, rich analyses of "situated knowledges," to use Donna Haraway's phrase? And finally, matter might always be something more, but it is also appropriated and transformed into property, territory, and the nation-state. How might new materialisms engage with *these* material politics (which is to say, what is the relationship between so-called new materialisms and old materialisms)?" (xx).

Chapter One:

“Who could do justice to my feelings?” Olaudah Equiano and an Unsentimental Education of Racial Capitalism

This chapter considers *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* in relation to the formation of the American sea fiction genre by looking at Olaudah Equiano’s engagement with discourses of sentimentality. Doing so requires a few explanations. First, looking at the narrative’s publication history, it isn’t immediately clear that this narrative could be considered anything but a British text.⁴⁶ Yet, Equiano often goes out of his way to break down distinctions between different national spaces. Equiano notes that there was no difference between the way he was treated in the West Indies to how he was treated in Savannah, Georgia or Charleston, South Carolina. And while many of the West Indian islands he discusses were controlled directly by the British, he most likely also visited islands in the Caribbean Sea controlled by the Spanish, Portuguese, French, Dutch, or Danish. Noting this he writes, “in all the different islands in which I have been (and I have visited no less than fifteen) the treatment of the slaves was nearly the same; so nearly indeed, that the history of an island, or even a plantation, with a few exceptions as I have mentioned, might serve for a history of the whole.”⁴⁷ Not only does Equiano purposefully draw little distinction between different national and colonial projects, his life and narrative for the majority of the text represents him as a stateless figure. In fact, as I will address further below, the only “country” to which he identifies himself is when he invokes other Africans with the phrase “my countrymen.” His relationship to national citizenship also remains vague throughout the narrative. At one point

⁴⁶ James Green writes, “It was written in England by an English citizen and was addressed to an English audience.” See: Green, “The Publishing History of Olaudah Equiano’s *Interesting Narrative*,” 363.

⁴⁷ Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, written by Himself, with Related Documents*, 112. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

he refers to himself as “almost an Englishman” (83), and is consistently being criticized for speaking English too well.⁴⁸ When he gains his freedom, he has a desire to return to London, but must remain on vessel in the West Indies as a semi-stateless figure. He comments on this stateless quality when he writes, just after gaining his freedom, “and now, being as in my original free African state, I embarked on board the Nancy” (137). Thus, when taken from Equiano’s perspective, it makes little sense to distinguish his experience as a distinctly British one.

Secondly, by positioning Equiano’s narrative in relation to the formation of American sea fiction, one is confronted with the uncertainty of the influence Equiano’s narrative had on the U.S. literary marketplace. From its publication in 1789, his narrative was a best-seller in London and went through nine different editions by 1794, including multiple translations. In the American marketplace, however, there is only record of a single printing during Equiano’s lifetime in 1791 and not again until 1837.⁴⁹ While this may seem to indicate his narrative was not influential in the American literary marketplace, James Green argues persuasively that, because of the relatively small American printing industry, we cannot take this single American edition as proof of a cold reception on its own. In fact, he argues the opposite: “of all new literary works that had been published in London since the appearance of the first edition three years before, Equiano’s was the only one that had been selected for reprinting in American by 1791” (368). Rather than indicating a failure, the very fact of the reprinting may indicate that there was

⁴⁸ Importantly this happens when, after defeating the French navy and being promised his freedom, he is sold back into slavery (98), and again when he is captured in Georgia as a freeman and is nearly sold back into slavery (152). In both instances, his ability to speak the English language prompts vicious chastisement at the very moment that his status within the British empire is in question.

⁴⁹ Green, 362-3.

already a degree of popularity or demand for the text in the U.S. The reprinting in 1837 alongside other abolitionist texts is also a testament to the lasting influence of the narrative.

Thus, this chapter places Equiano's narrative at the origin of the generic formation of American sea fiction with two assumptions: first, that Equiano's narrative must be thought of in a transnational context, and, second, that his narrative made an imprint within the American literary marketplace. As such, this chapter argues that Equiano can be read as participating within the generic tradition of maritime literature and that doing so forces us to reframe our understanding of the way this genre has formed. In particular, we can see how the widely marketed maritime genre which produced a specific form of maritime nationalism—emblemized in the work of Cooper—was built by jettisoning Equiano and any consideration of the historical role the U.S. maritime industry played in the slave trade from the depictions of maritime life. By looking at Equiano's narrative as historically engaged in the American maritime industry in the intervening years between Smollett and Cooper, we can gain insight into the production of maritime nationalism and the role the co-constituting sentimentalist discourse played. Doing so remaps our understanding of nineteenth-century genre fiction and recasts the relationship between sentiment—often tied exclusively to the family romance at this time—and labor. Since the scholarship of Thomas Philbrick which positioned Cooper as the foundational American sea fiction writer, critics have basically left this position unquestioned.⁵⁰ My goal is

⁵⁰ See: Thomas Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*. For scholarly accounts that follow Philbrick's formation see: Jeanne-Marie Santraud, *La Mer Et Le Roman Américain*; William S. Dudley and Michael J. Crawford, *The Early Republic and the Sea*, particularly part II "James Fenimore Cooper and the Birth of American Maritime Experience"; Gordon Milne *Ports of Call*; John Peck, *Maritime Fiction*; and Bert Bender, *Sea-Brothers*. Margaret Cohen's *The Novel and the Sea* offers an alternative to Philbrick's original formulation: "My difference from Philbrick turns on the image of the ocean as a dreary waste before Romanticism, whereas I understand it as the theater of craft. This leads me to understand Cooper as picking up Romantic figures to be sure, but also taking a position against the sublime seas when he moors craft to patriotism" (258, note 58). She also calls attention to the assumed absence of sea fiction between Smollett and Cooper (1748-1824), but, as she does not consider Equiano's or other slave narratives as engaged in literary genre production beyond that of recording,

not only to offer Equiano as an earlier figure in this patrilineage, but to consider how a text like Equiano's forces us to reconsider how Cooper, and the body of sea fiction contemporaneous to him, was very much in dialogue with the history Equiano records in their development and production of maritime nationalism. Scholarship which takes up these mariner narratives without historicizing this narrative production misses the extent to which the imagination of the maritime industry, at stake in the formation of the genre, was deeply contested and the reverberations of this contestation echo throughout the mid- to late-nineteenth century.

Equiano and Sentimentalism

At the beginning of Chapter VI, while in the West Indies, Equiano reflects momentarily on his narrative, "I have set before the reader a few of those many instances of oppression, extortion, and cruelty, which I have been a witness to," but continues that "were I to enumerate them all, the catalogue would be tedious and disgusting. The punishments of the slaves on every trifling occasion are so frequent, and so well known, together with the different instruments with which they are tortured, that it cannot any longer afford novelty to recite them; and they are too shocking to yield delight either to the writer or the reader" (114). He is confronting a problem, then. His narrative's purpose, as he explains at the onset, is to move his readers emotionally into compassion and to promote "the interests of humanity," with the ultimate goal of abolishing the slave trade (43). But he recognizes that continuing by listing the horrors of the slave trade would be tedious and redundant. How, then, in narrative does he propose to better move his readers into compassion when they already know of the cruelties of the slave trade? In an introduction to the narrative, Robert J. Allison suggests one place Equiano found his solution was in sentimental

she does not attempt to fill out this silence. For more on Cohen's discussion of craft see chapter two of this dissertation.

novels like those of Laurence Sterne. Allison writes that such authors “wanted their readers to feel a deep emotional bond with the characters ... Sterne understood what too many moralists did not. Before readers will feel sympathy, they must identify with the sufferer, and a reader is more likely to be moved by one person’s sad story than by the collective sorrows of a mob.”

Allison suggests that Equiano learned this lesson from the relative unsuccess of Ottobah Cugoano’s book—which, published just two years before Equiano’s, focused much more on sermonizing than Cugoano’s own personal journey—and instead drew from authors like Sterne to establish connections with his readers. Allison continues, however, to argue that while Equiano “echoes literary genres popular during his lifetime, particularly the spiritual autobiography and the sentimental novel,” it is the former that was the most influential.⁵¹

Indeed, while Equiano’s use of tropes from spiritual conversion narratives has been well attended to by scholars,⁵² scarce attention has been paid to the way Equiano draws on tropes of the sentimental novel. This scarcity is particularly striking when one realizes how directly Equiano’s narrative confronts the possibilities and limits of sentimental discourse.

Writing to British Lords and members of the parliamentary commons in his dedication, Equiano is clear that his purpose in writing the narrative is to “excite in your august assemblies a sense of compassion for the miseries which the Slave-Trade has entailed on my unfortunate countrymen” (41). Again, in the first paragraph of his narrative, he writes, “I am not so foolishly vain as to expect from [my narrative] either immortality or literary reputation. If it affords any satisfaction to my numerous friends, at whose request it has been written, or in the smallest

⁵¹ Allison, “Introduction: Equiano’s Worlds,” 29.

⁵² One influential study in this regard is Srinivas Aravamudan’s *Tropicopolitans*. Aravamudan has insightfully questioned how closely Equiano followed the tropes of the spiritual autobiography, arguing that Equiano “tropicopolitizes” the form for his own purposes, and that “Christianity, therefore, is a catchphrase for a range of social and political activity envisaged by its practitioners” (247).

degree promotes the interests of humanity, the ends for which it was undertaken will be fully attained, and every wish of my heart gratified” (43). In both instances, Equiano is stating clearly what many slave narratives published afterward do as well: this is a narrative intended to move readers. The aim of many sentimental domestic novels of the same period also sought to move the reader through sentiment as a precursor to education. Harriet Beecher Stowe offers up the paradigmatic formula for the American sentimental novel: “there is one thing every individual can do,—they can see to it that *they feel right*” (original emphasis).⁵³ These end goals for which Equiano is striving—to excite a “sense of compassion,” afford “satisfaction,” and/or promote the “interests of humanity”—are clearly modeled after the sympathetic appeals of the sentimental novel. And while his narrative was written with the express purpose of abolishing the slave trade,⁵⁴ in order to achieve this end Equiano drew on the rhetorical power of the day: sentimentalist discourse.

However, while Equiano is clear about these goals, he simultaneously reflects on the ability of his narrative to achieve them with heavy skepticism. He writes of memoirs that “what is uncommon is rarely believed, and what is obvious we are apt to turn from with disgust, and to charge the writer with impertinence.” Of his own memoir, in particular, he writes, “there are few events in my life, which have not happened to many: it is true the incidents of it are numerous; and, did I consider myself an European, I might say my sufferings were great: but when I

⁵³ Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, 556.

⁵⁴ Nowhere is this aim clearer than in the direct addresses and letters he includes in his narrative. For instance, his dedication makes clear he is writing to inspire those in the British parliament “when the question of Abolition is to be discussed” (41). Also, at the close of the narrative, Equiano includes a letter he wrote to England’s Queen Charlotte of Mecklenburg-Strelitz which attempts to convince her to abolish slavery. Both the dedication and this letter might be read in contrast to Equiano’s full narrative which was published one year after his letter to the Queen. All three texts aim to recruit readers into the project of abolition, but the narrative is written in a different register. The dedication and letter offer appeals to “pity,” “compassion,” and “humanity,” but do not attempt to build sympathetic connections by including personal details outside of referring to the subjects of his letter as “my African countrymen.” Indeed, at the start of the letter he refers only to the “obscurity of my situation” and writes that “my sufferings, although numerous, are in a measure forgotten” (210).

compare my lot with that of most of my countrymen, I regard myself as a particular favorite of Heaven” (42-3). The paradox here is that the experiences of capture, the middle passage, and enslavement are simultaneously extraordinary and common, depending the author’s subject position. By writing this, Equiano signals, as I discuss below, how sympathetic identification itself is distributed along racial lines in the literary market of the time. As such, he presents readers with the problem of the unreliability of narrative forms to excite a “sense of compassion,” afford “satisfaction,” and/or promote the “interests of humanity” for black authors. Try as he might to meet these goals, if his narrative is read as incredible or repellent, he will be unsuccessful. By foregrounding these concerns, Equiano himself makes the scholarly debate over the authenticity of his narrative seem very beside the point.⁵⁵ Equiano builds into his text a critique of literary form demonstrating that whether he writes fiction or memoir he confronts the same charges of incredulity or repulsion.

Of course, Equiano’s deep skepticism concerning the power of his narrative is well-founded. He details the difficulty of persuasion in the latter half of his narrative when he describes his attempts to convert individuals to Christianity, often unsuccessfully. He also includes a number of correspondences in which his proposals to work as a missionary and as an abolitionist are denied or curtailed. Even the form and genre of his narrative seems to be out of Equiano’s hands as Akiyo Ito argues when, at least at first, the original American publishers of Equiano’s narrative in New York seem to have marketed it as travel narrative meant to instruct

⁵⁵ Vincent Carretta began this discussion with “Olaudah Equiano or Gustavus Vassa?” Here, and again in Carretta’s biography *Equiano, The African*, he questions Equiano’s origins. Using baptismal records, Carretta offers an alternative possibility that Equiano was born in South Carolina. Since these publications, scholars have tried to establish the truth of his origins, with little definitive success. For examples of counterpoints to Carretta’s argument see Paul Lovejoy, “Autobiography and Memory” and Alexander X. Byrd, “Eboe, Country, Nation, and Gustava Vassa’s *Interesting Narrative*.”

readers on far-away geography.⁵⁶ Alongside but distinct from these fault lines, I argue we might also understand Equiano's skepticism as a direct response to the limits of sentimental appeals within a system of racial capitalism.

At certain moments throughout the narrative the limitation of sentimental discourse is put on full display. During a devastating episode when, after being promised freedom and prize money by his white shipmates and captain, he is instead sold back into slavery in the West Indies, Equiano writes, "But is not the slave trade entirely a war with the heart of man? And surely that which is begun by breaking down the barriers of virtue involves in its continuance destruction to every principle, and buries all sentiments in ruin!" (111). A few pages later, Equiano returns to this point that the institution of slavery plays out on the sentiments of the people who make up the institution: "had the pursuits of those men been different, they might have been as generous, as tender-hearted and just, as they are unfeeling, rapacious and cruel" (113). By focusing on the institution of slavery's "war with the heart of man," Equiano's narrative shines light on the paradox of writing a narrative meant to provoke feelings of sympathy for those who exist in a system that is built on the very rejection of idea that they are subjects worthy of sentimental identification. That is, because racial slave capitalism must, in Equiano's formulation, first "[bury] all sentiments in ruin," narrative recourse to sentimentalism is a precarious project at best. The final sentence of his narrative sums up this profound paradox: "To those who are possessed of this spirit [Christian morality], there is scarcely any book or incident so trifling that does not afford some profit, while others the experience of ages seems of no use; and even to pour out to them the treasures of wisdom is throwing the jewels of instruction away" (214). Rather than just pointing to his need to skillfully walk a line between

⁵⁶ Ito, "Olaudah Equiano and the New York Artisans: The First American Edition of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African*," 90.

believability and remarkability in narrative, here Equiano doubts whether a narrative appeal to a reader not already predisposed to grant Equiano humanity will ever be successful. Even all the “experiences of ages” will fail to move someone so thoroughly interpellated into a system of racial capitalism organized to disavow Equiano’s humanity.

Equiano’s text is by far not the only one to detail this limitation of sentimentalist discourse. Scholars of later sentimental texts have demonstrated how sentimentalism is symptomatic of early forms of modern capitalism. Ann Douglass writes of the mode of sentimentalism that “The pressures for self-rationalization of the crudest kind were overpowering in a country propelled so rapidly toward industrial capitalism with so little cultural context to slow or complicate its course; sentimentalism provided the inevitable rationalization of the economic order.”⁵⁷ While her critique helps us read sentimentalism as a symptom of capitalist expansion, her condemnation of literary women who, as she puts it, “substitute, in a sense, literature for life” has drawn much criticism.⁵⁸ Cathy Davidson, for instance, demonstrates how the sentimental novel from its first appearance in the U.S. has been slippery, full of contradictions, and is irreducible “to the simple formula that contemporary readers and critics commonly ascribe to it ... Instead of positing simple answers about the powers of pious procreation, many of the novels question the efficacy of the prevailing legal, political, and social values, even if questioning is done by innuendo rather than by actual assertion of a contrary view.”⁵⁹ (220). The feminist scholarship of Davidson’s and others from the 1980s and 1990s has demonstrated how rather than reading sentimentalism as solely a rationalizing force for capitalism, it can be understood to be an available medium for social and political contestation

⁵⁷ Douglass, *The Feminization of American Culture*, 12.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

⁵⁹ Davidson, *Revolution and the Word: The Rise of the Novel in America*, 220.

and demands for the recognition of subjecthood. Put succinctly, Lori Merish writes, “[sentimental narratives] thus instantiate a particular form of liberal political *subjection*, in which agency and subordination are intertwined.”⁶⁰ Therefore, rather than seeing the project of sentimentalism as either entirely incorporating readers into existing modes of production or offering a healing salve against the incursions of the market, I read Equiano’s narrative as a site where these “intertwined” forms emerge with a maritime character and can be read in relation to both sentimentalist discourse and the American maritime genre.

In relation to slave narratives, the sentimentalist discourse of femininity and motherhood was often turned on its head to simultaneously establish affinities with and make demands on the white readership by exposing the limits of such discourse. Concerning Harriet Jacobs’s narrative, for instance, Hazel Carby argues that Jacobs utilization of the form “place[s] white female readers in the position of having to realize their implication in the oppression of black women, prior to any actual realization of the bonds of “sisterhood.””⁶¹ Following Carby’s lead, Lori Merish argues that Jacobs’s “appropriation of sentimental tropes and topoi in her account of a slave woman’s self-affirmation through maternal resolve serves to challenge the culture that denies black women the civil status and legal rights of white women—especially the right to participate in the institutions of parenthood and family—even while it affirms and symbolically instates Jacobs’s claims to social equality.”⁶² Jacobs invokes and critiques the assumption that cross-racial sympathies can be founded through the sentimentalist discourse of femininity and motherhood. This feature of invoking cross-racial affinities is shared with most other slave

⁶⁰ Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*, 3. In addition to Davidson and Merish work see Linda Kerber, *Women of the Republic*; Jane Tompkins, *Sensational Designs*; Hazel Carby, *Reconstructing Womanhood*; Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty*; and Eva Cherniavsky, *That Pale Mother Rising*.

⁶¹ Carby, *Reconstruction Womanhood: The Emergence of the Afro-American Woman Novelist*, 51.

⁶² Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*, 192.

narratives, including Equiano's.⁶³ And while sentimentalism has been explored in-depth in relation to Harriet Jacobs's narrative, the implications of such scholarship on Equiano's narrative has not been as sufficiently considered. However, while I argue that Equiano makes similar moves to Jacobs in his writing—simultaneously orbiting within a mode of sentimental appeals while critiquing and laying bare the limits of this mode—because their narratives come out of distinct historical contexts and as a result have different relationships to sentimentalism, it is important to briefly sketch the differences between these types of sentimentalism.

By the time Equiano's narrative emerged, enlightenment philosophers had debated the meaning of sensibility and the role of sentimentalism in society for a few decades.⁶⁴ Seen largely as a mark of civility, sympathy was seen as an instructive feeling that promoted humanity, morality, and spirituality. Sentimental fiction, then, was a tool that could be used to form connections between readers and characters as a way to elicit such feelings. However, as John Brewer notes, "Between 1750 and 1780 critics, authors and readers became fully conscious of what I have termed a new literary technology, a sentimental mechanism to establish bonds of sympathy and excite sensibility among authors and readers alike. This technology impressed contemporaries with its power—its ability to transport the reader, to transform the relations between authors, texts and readers. But like any powerful mechanism, it was also regarded with some apprehension and fear."⁶⁵ There was emerging uncertainty around whether sentimentalism in literature would be used to moral ends, and by the time Equiano was writing his narrative there were "a plethora of advice books, essays and reading manuals which prescribed not only

⁶³ For a discussion of cross-racial sympathy in sentimental narratives see: Karen Sánchez-Eppler, *Touching Liberty* and Dana Nelson, *The Word in Black and White*. For a detailed account of the utilization of sentimentalism as a tactic of solidarity see: Alice Pedersen, *The Romance of Solidarity*.

⁶⁴ For a discussion of the diverse origins of sentimentality in the philosophical and physiological writings of John Locke, Thomas Willis, George Cheyne, Albrecht von Haller, and Robert Whytt, see Brewer, John. "Sentiment and Sensibility," 22.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

the content but the manner of reading, seeking to contain sentimental poetics within the bounds of a limited sensibility.”⁶⁶ From this new technology, then, emerged the possibility of using it for different political ends and the elites who largely benefitted from systems of racial capitalism and the slave trade became nervous of its power.

This is largely distinct from the type of domestic sentimental fiction that circulated in the American marketplace in the mid-nineteenth century. In this fiction, characterized largely by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s novel *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, the domestic sphere had come to be seen as the proper realm for sentiment as a corrective to the public sphere of the marketplace.⁶⁷ Further, Christine Levecq points to this distinction illustrating how the liberal form of sentimentalism emerged from Adam Smith’s discussion in *Theory of Moral Sentiments* in which he argues that sympathy “requires work of the imagination on the part of the observer, who attempts to duplicate the feelings of the suffering person under observation,” while the republican strain of sentimentalism is epitomized by Francis Hutcheson’s *System of Moral Philosophy* and enacts “an expansion of the sympathetic impulse from a direct interaction with the individual other to a feeling for community.”⁶⁸ However, for my purposes here I am mainly concerned with the way the maritime world offers a unique culturo-historical network from which Equiano interrogates logics of sentimentalism within racial capitalism and maritime nationalism, not to the way Equiano’s appeals to sentiment are characteristically British or American. While Levecq puts it in terms of cosmopolitanism and republicanism, she also acknowledges the unique space of the black Atlantic writing that authors like Equiano “had multiple anchorings, and a consciousness

⁶⁶ Ibid., 43.

⁶⁷ For instance, Venetria K. Patton argues that in her attempt to write a sentimental text that promotes the abolition of slavery as a moral necessity, by writing it in a way that “that used the separate-spheres ideology as a means to attain power,” Stowe ends up reifying the concepts of domesticity, motherhood, and femininity. Patton, Venetria K. *Women in Chains: The Legacy of Slavery in Black Women’s Fiction*, 45.

⁶⁸ Levecq, *Slavery and Sentiment: The Politics of Feeling in Black Atlantic Antislavery Writing, 1770-1850*, 18 and 20, respectively.

and knowledge of the diverse world outside the nation and across the Atlantic, which allowed them imaginatively to step outside national boundaries and look back critically at their own condition. These writers perceived an international community rather than an extension of liberal national feeling. The international for them was not a repository of alien or foreign entities, or a hierarchical chain of nations, at least not to the same extent that it was for mainstream white writers.”⁶⁹ Indeed it is from this positioning among “multiple anchorings” that Equiano deploys and interrogates various appeals of sentimentalism and maritime nationalism that are themselves outside national boundaries.

Some of the key ways Equiano mobilizes sentimentalism within the maritime world, and which later become mainstays in American maritime fiction, are appeals to the homeward bound journey after long stints at sea and the feelings of sympathetic attachments to figures across the ocean in distant ports, often configured as white, feminine, and domestic. However, while he mobilizes these forms to excite a “sense of compassion” from his readers, he, like Jacobs, simultaneously undercuts the discourse of sentimentality. While later domestic novels set the conditions for the marriage of sentimentalism with abolition, by engaging the new mechanism of sentimentalism in the Atlantic world during the height of the slave trade, Equiano ends up exposing some key pressures and fault lines in such a project. By understanding how these pressures played out in Equiano’s narrative, we can see how a counter narrative is produced through moments in which the discourse of sentimentality is subsumed by the marketplace and fails to have a compensatory function. By reading such moments it becomes clear Equiano was as aware as Sterne of the inner workings of sentimentalism, but that he understood something Sterne did not: the limits of identification within a system of slavery and racial capitalism.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 27.

Sentiment and Racial Capitalism

The period that spans Equiano's narrative, roughly the second half of the eighteenth century, was a high point in European colonialism and the expansion of global capitalism and empire. Cedric Robinson argues that "the historical development of world capitalism was influenced in a most fundamental way by the particularistic forces of racism and nationalism" and that "from its very beginnings, this European civilization, containing racial, tribal, linguistic, and regional particularities, was constructed on antagonistic differences."⁷⁰ In this formulation Europe's nascent racialism and nationalism founded within Feudalism was articulated in the global scale of capitalist, colonialist expansion. He contends that capitalists were "From the fifteenth century on ... no longer dependent upon the material restraints Europe presented for the primitive accumulation of capital."⁷¹ In this expansion, slavery was not, as Marx figured it, merely primitive accumulation, but foundational for the development of global capitalism: "From whatever vantage point one chooses, the relationship between slave labor, the slave trade, and the weaving of the early capitalist economies is apparent. Whatever were the alternatives, the point remains: historically, slavery was a critical foundation for capitalism."⁷² As such, it is important to consider how the world Equiano navigates in his narrative was precisely what Robinson locates as the stage where early capitalism was developed.

Bringing these insights to bear on Equiano's situation more specifically, David Kazanjian considers the limits to Equiano's attempts to realize his subjecthood under this system of racial capitalism. He reads Equiano's narrative as a way to understand the racial and national limits to

⁷⁰ Robinson, *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition*, 9-10.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 100.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 116.

equality and freedom within the discursive system of mercantilism: “Equiano’s declaration “to commence merchant” inaugurates an attempt to realize not just his material sustenance, not even just his economic independence, but also his freedom as an active social subject in this new world that has forced itself upon him. In other words, he is hoping to have free subjectivity conferred to him by actively engaging in the logic of capitalist accumulation and exchange.”⁷³ While Equiano does become an expert in commerce, often making astute investments his white shipmates fail to understand, he confronts, repeatedly, the racist and nationalist articulations of this early capitalist system. In other words, since commodity speculation and exchange was the logic of contemporary mercantilist capitalism, the fact that Equiano’s own expertise in and mastery of such market speculation does not result in the promised free subjectivity demonstrates how such a system is built on his exclusion.

For instance, every time Equiano enters the marketplace with commodities to sell he runs the risk of having his goods stolen. Equiano describes one such event: “we were met by two white men, who presently took our three bags [of fruit] from us. We could not at first guess what they meant to do; and for some time thought they were jesting us” (117). These white men steal Equiano’s goods and, because the laws don’t extend rights to black merchants, there is nothing he can do. These experiences become so common that Equiano begins to shorthand them by calling them the “tricks” whites play. Throughout the narrative these tricks range from stealing commodities from Equiano to attempting to sell Equiano himself back into slavery. Equiano shows again, near the end of his narrative, that despite being an English citizen, a missionary for Christianity, and a naval hero, he is always under threat of re-enslavement. During a trip to Philadelphia, Equiano writes, “We had a nine weeks passage, which caused our trip not to

⁷³ Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick: National Culture and Imperial Citizenship in Early America*, 50.

succeed well, the market for our goods proving bad; and, to make it worse, my commander began to play me the like tricks as others too often practice on free negroes in the West Indies” (205). It is through the repeated conflicts and "trickery" of white merchants mobilized by a structuring racism within the capitalist market logic, that Kazanjian argues Equiano fails to successfully realize this market-bound freedom. Kazanjian writes, “[Equiano’s] mercantile failures are neither incidental nor unique, but systematic and constitutive of the logic of “formal and abstract equality.” That is, Equiano does not encounter simply an exclusion from such equality, but a *constitutive* exclusion ritually iterated and reiterated in the Atlantic zone at least in part by a mercantilist system.”⁷⁴ Thus, as Robinson argues, the exclusion, disenfranchisement, and enslavement of black mariners is constitutive of the way European colonial nations articulated racism with global capitalism. Such incidents in Equiano’s text must not be read as unique, but as foundational to the economic system Equiano navigated.

Because Equiano’s failures, as Kazanjian puts it, are a “constitutive exclusion” of the Atlantic mercantilist system, some of the key moments of Equiano’s appeals to sympathy illustrate the way this market-based constitutive exclusion is built into maritime sentimentalist discourse as well. However, it is not that the narrative fails to establish sympathetic identification, but that Equiano demonstrates how even when bonds of sympathetic identification are successful throughout his life, this “constitutive exclusion” will consistently interrupt such feelings through incursions of the marketplace. From within a system of such constitutive violence and exclusion, it seems very unlikely that circulating a narrative that attempts to establish cross-racial sympathies would be successful. In fact, Houston Baker Jr. argues that the only way for Equiano to gain some agency is to abandon sentiment and negotiate the

⁷⁴ Ibid., 59.

marketplace. While Baker, like Kazanjian, does not believe circulating within the marketplace offers Equiano any actual equality, as it was thought to have done for Americans at the start of the republic,⁷⁵ he points out that “commencing merchant” within a system of such pervasive racial capitalism was the only material recourse for Equiano. For instance, once Equiano has gone through the middle passage and begins working aboard slave ships, he eschews sentimentalism and stops describing the horrors of the slave trade. Considering this change in form, Baker writes that “One explanation for the bracketing of slavery that marks this passage is that the narrator, having been reduced to property by a commercial deportation, decides during his West Indian captivity that neither sentiment nor spiritual sympathies can earn his liberation. He realizes, in effect, that only the acquisition of property will enable him to alter his designated status *as property*.”⁷⁶ In this passage, Baker demonstrates how the marketplace seems to completely subsume and overpower sentiment. In Equiano’s situation, sentimental appeals have no traction. Because the logic of commodity capitalism is so pervasive, the only way for Equiano to counter racial capitalism is through the buying and selling of commodities. Baker explains how the form of manumission exposes this peculiar logic: “The document—which gives, grants, and releases to “the said Gustavus Vassa, all right, title, dominion, sovereignty, and property” that this “lord and master” Mr. King holds over him—signals the ironic transformation of property by property into humanity. Chattel has transformed itself freeman through the exchange of forty pounds sterling.”⁷⁷ It is with this insight that Baker traces the logic of the commodity form through Equiano, Douglass, and Jacobs. It is precisely this confrontation with the

⁷⁵ Kazanjian, 35-39.

⁷⁶ Baker Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature: A Vernacular Theory*, 35.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 36.

overpowering pervasiveness of racial capitalist thought that Equiano is so continually skeptical of his narrative's ability to successfully engender a material change.

Baker's formulation here is certainly correct. Relying on the sentiment and sympathies of the functionaries of the slave trade would have been a difficult, and probably impossible, way for Equiano to establish a material change in his situation. Yet, for my purposes here, I am concerned with how Equiano nevertheless engages sentimental discourse in his narrative, despite knowing it is these very sentiments which have been buried "in ruins." While Baker points to a moment when Equiano brackets the horrors of the slave trade, I am interested in why certain moments of sentimental appeal remain unbracketed in the narrative, and to what ends Equiano mobilizes them. Surely, in much of his narrative he must abandon sentiment to engage in the marketplace, but I demonstrate in what follows that this abandonment is not incidental but fundamental to the narrative. Instead, by paying close attention to how and when Equiano invokes appeals to sentiment, we see how Equiano's narrative establishes or attempts to establish sympathetic attachments with readers only to subsequently lay bare the futility of such attachments to those same readers. That is, Equiano's narrative seems to suggest that this recourse to sentimentalism within the maritime industry does offer something to him, even while he exposes the limits of such a project. When considered in this way, it becomes clear the narrative never actually offers a stable version of sentimentalism despite being steeped in such appeals to sympathy.

From the very start, Equiano's description of sentiment is steeped in capitalist logic. In his dedication, Equiano considers how through "mysterious" providence the horrors of the slave trade which torn him from "all the tender connexions that were naturally dear to my heart" have, in the ledger of life, been paid. He writes that such horrors "I ought to regard as infinitely more

than compensated by the introduction I have thence obtained to the knowledge of the Christian religion, and of a nation which, by its liberal sentiments, its humanity, the glorious freedom of its government, and its proficiency in arts and sciences, has exalted the dignity of human nature” (41). This sentence positions the experience of horrors and the acquisition of knowledge as counterbalanced, compensating for one another. In other words, the debt these Lords and Gentlemen owe Equiano for having sent him through the slave trade is presented as paid. Their payment was Christianity and a nationalism rife with sentimentality, humanism, and the arts. However strange this ledger is, Equiano effectively begins his narrative by collapsing the arts and the market. In this framing, rather than being a discursive response to the market, liberal sentiments are characterized as a type of payment and sentimentality itself is a market transaction.

This transactional logic appears again in the following paragraph as Equiano instrumentalizes his own identity. He writes, “as the production of an unlettered African, who is actuated by the hope of becoming an instrument toward the relief of his suffering countrymen, I trust that *such a man* pleading *such a case*, will be acquitted of boldness and presumption” (original emphasis). Significantly, Equiano’s appeal offers a transformation of his identity from “unlettered African” to “instrument” as a process of *actuation*. Having been one of the key players in the court case of the Zong massacre which involved a convoluted account of insurance fraud,⁷⁸ Equiano would have been well-versed in legal jargon and no doubt aware of the double meaning of actuate. The OED lists both actuate and actuary, through having different suffixes, as sharing the same Latin root “*actus*,” to act. Thus, his hope to become an instrument of relief both “gives life to” this “unlettered African” at the same time it is haunted by the “statistics of

⁷⁸ See Carretta, *Equiano, the African: Biography of a Self-Made Man*, 237-46.

mortality, accidents, etc.,” and “[calculations of] insurance risks and premiums” (41). This, again, collapses both meanings of actuation into a single concept: demands of personhood via capitalism.

To demonstrate how Equiano establishes sympathetic attachments with his readers as a strategy of confronting them with the limits of such attachments within racial capitalism, I have drawn on Srinivas Aravamudan’s discussion of literacy as technology. He implores scholars to read literacy in Equiano’s narrative not as proof of humanity but as one of many technologies at Equiano’s disposal with which to fight for the abolition of the slave trade. Regarding the scholarship surrounding slave narratives, Aravamudan questions “why should the act of literate—idealized as literary—persuasion be privileged as *an end in itself* (to the extent that it is conflated with the a priori definition of humanity) if not for the fact that we believe, perhaps too much as literary critics, in the transformative power of literature and are all too willing to demonstrate literature *as* the sign of humanity?”⁷⁹ Critiquing much of the scholarship surrounding Henry Louis Gates Jr.’s foundational study on slave narratives, Aravamudan points out how when studying the trope of the attainment of literacy, scholars often end up forwarding the idea that literacy brings humanity.⁸⁰ He continues that if we instead view “Literacy, as technology,” we then see that “Equiano’s story is not just about the development from slave object to desiring subject through literacy, as narrated by Gates, but also about how literacy, as a reconfiguration of agency, gives the subject the catachrestical sense of “owning” himself or herself, something articulating these historical property dynamics through metaliteracy.”⁸¹ Aravamudan’s point is that rather than seeing Equiano’s literacy alone as proof of black

⁷⁹ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans: Colonialism and Agency, 1688-1804*, 270.

⁸⁰ See Henry Louis Gates Jr., *The Signifying Monkey*.

⁸¹ Aravamudan, *Tropicopolitans*, 281.

humanity, no doubt the way it was used by many contemporary abolitionists, we ought to instead see how Equiano takes advantage of the fetishization of literacy as one tool among many in the fight for the abolition of the slave trade. I argue that along these same lines, discourses of sentimentality must be considered an available technology Equiano utilized to similar ends. While applying Aravamudan's formulation to the technology of sentimental appeal would underestimate the degree to which writers of the time—Equiano included—would have been steeped in sentimentalism as the available mode of appeal, I nevertheless want to argue that certain scenes in the narrative are included precisely because they show something different than the success of the compensatory project of sentimentalism. Rather than arguing that Equiano deploys sentimentalism as a tool to expose its limits, like Aravamudan argues he does with the fetish of literacy, I argue instead that he includes failures of sympathy or the premature severance of sympathetic identification which make visible the idea that the systems of morality which sentimentalism is supposed to evoke are built on his exclusion. As such, it becomes clear why he was doubtful that appeals to the sentiment alone would have any impact on slave owners and profiteers of the slave trade, and how the way he nevertheless mobilized this form of appeal demonstrate the futility of sympathetic attachments for those already predisposed to offer up their sympathies.

The paradigmatic formulation of sentimental appeals in Equiano's narrative is his connection to the Guerin sisters. He first meets them when he is in London and they "took much notice and great care of me" (78). He quickly becomes "a favorite" of the elder Miss Guerin and she helps to send him to school and have him baptized. When he must first leave them to sail to the Mediterranean and, eventually, to go to war against the French navy, he writes, "Nor did I leave my kind patronesses, the Miss Guerins, without uneasiness and regret. They often used to

teach me to read, and took great pains to instruct me in the principles of religion and the knowledge of God. I therefore parted from those amiable ladies with reluctance; after receiving from them many friendly cautions how to conduct myself, and some valuable presents” (85). In narrating his relationship with these women, Equiano is later able to evoke a few different sentimental tropes. First, he invokes the trope of feminine affective labor as the Guerin sisters work to encourage religiosity, manners, and literary concern. Such sensibilities are right at home in the type of sentimental discourse in authors like Sterne. In addition to this, however, is a particularly maritime sentimental appeal that knits the space of the home port to those at sea which becomes prominent in the American maritime genre. Up to this point, readers would have been familiar with these tropes and the attachments Equiano establishes with them. These attachments are further cemented during the war with the French navy. At a moment when Equiano is in great danger, he staves off the fear by “pleasing myself with the hope, if I survived the battle, of relating it and the dangers I had escaped to the dear Miss Guerin, and others, when I should return to London” (89). Equiano invokes Miss Guerin “and others” as listeners or readers of his adventures. Miss Guerin can be read here as a stand-in for white female readership, the “others” to whom Equiano tells his story. This passage also illustrates the extent to which Equiano thought about storytelling; even while facing possible death, Equiano was aware of the type of sympathy this story might evoke.

There are a couple aspects of sentimentalist discourse being evoked here. First is the build-up of a distinct maritime nationalism prevalent in war that was also at home in the sentimentality of Sterne.⁸² It is not just that this scene evokes feelings for a home port, but that

⁸² For a discussion of the way war-making is at home in the sentimentality of Sterne see Andrea Speltz, “War and Sentimentalism: Irony in Voltaire’s *Candide*, Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy*, and Lessing’s *Minna von Barnhelm*.” In the article Speltz argues that “Laurence Sterne draws attention to the ability of sentimentalism to mask self-interested justifications for war” (287).

they carry with them a particular nationalist character. Secondly, Equiano's invocation of Miss Guerin imaginatively establishes a moment of sympathetic identification that is ultimately impossible because, as his forced re-entrance into the West Indies as a slave demonstrates, maritime nationalism is also built on his constitutive exclusion. Therefore, unlike the typical sentimental appeal in which a narrative of suffering or danger might evoke sympathy from others as a compensatory salve to address the incursion of the market, Equiano's sympathetic attachments are only able to exist imaginatively as his ability to communicate his story of heroism to those in port is curtailed. As I will discuss in chapter two, the negotiation of such communication networks becomes a major preoccupation in the writing published within port-town periodicals.

It is from this battle that Equiano earns enough prize money to purchase his freedom. This is first time in the narrative Equiano describes thinking about gaining his freedom, and his white shipmates encourage these thoughts as they think sentimentally of their home port. One sailor even tells Equiano that, once they return home, "he and I should never part, and that when our ship was paid off, and I was as free as himself or any other man on board, he would instruct me in his business, by which I might gain a good livelihood" (96). These white sailors, after fighting a successful battle against the French, are reveling in their sentimental attachments to English nationalism as they configure themselves as mariner longing for home ports. In the next paragraph, however, Equiano learns that he will not be able to enjoy either attachment as he has been sold back into the West Indian slave trade. As David Kazanjian notes, it is not merely incidental Equiano is excluded from this sentimental attachment to nationalism. Instead, the discourse of nationalism itself is predicated on his exclusion. Equiano confronts Captain Pascal about stealing his prize money and all his wages, but to no end. Not only are the sentimental

attachments of the sailors not extended to Equiano, his desire to narrate his adventures to Miss Guerin also remains unfulfilled. For the other sailors, sentiment is offered as a reprieve from the marketplace which requires their labor. English nationalism and the domestic space of the home port function to sustain their labor in the navy and to rationalize their participation in systems of violence and exploitation. For Equiano, he only momentarily imagines having access to such sympathy. Neither is he given access to maritime nationalism nor is he able to evoke the sympathy of the Guerin sisters by telling of his adventures. Therefore, while this seems like the standard functioning of sentimentalism—where the market violates the sacred bonds of feelings, sentiments like nationalism, feminine sympathetic bonds, and familial ties offer reprieves—Equiano demonstrates that there is either no such reprieve or the imagination of such a reprieve is cut short by an incursion of the market.

Much later in the narrative, after re-gaining his freedom in the West Indies, Equiano returns to London to try to retroactively establish these same bonds of sympathy that being sold back into the system of slavery prematurely severed. He writes, “my first thoughts were to look out for some of my former friends, and amongst the first of those were the Miss Guerins . . . They were most agreeably surprised to see me, and I quite overjoyed at meeting with them. I told them my history, at which they expressed great wonder, and freely acknowledged it did their cousin, Capt. Pascal, no honour.” In this passage, Equiano acknowledges how the sisters form a sympathetic attachment to Equiano, they agree being sold back into slavery in the West Indies does their cousin “no honour.” But rather than leave the exchange here, a moment which seems to highlight cross-racial sympathies, he explains how this moment of sympathy is also severed by a second incursion of the market. Equiano instead pairs this sympathetic identification with a material demand. He continues that a few days later,

I met Capt. Pascal at Miss Guerin's house, and asked him for my prize-money. He said there was none due to me; for, if my prize money had been £10,000 he had a right to it all. I told him I was informed otherwise; on which he bade me defiance; and, in a bantering tone, desired me to commence a lawsuit against him for it: 'there are lawyers enough,' said he, 'that will take the cause in hand, and you had better try it.' I told him then that I would try it, which enraged him very much; however, out of regard to the ladies, I remained still, and never made any farther demand of my right. (155-6).

The dynamics of sentimentalism are at least two-fold in this passage. First, it shows that while Equiano wanted to narrate his maritime adventures to the Guerin sisters, his ability to do so is overshadowed by Capt. Pascal's theft of Equiano's prize money. This theft, which was a structuring part of racial capitalism, is underlined by Pascal's confidence that even in a court of law, Equiano's right to the money would not be considered. Therefore, this constitutive feature of racial capitalism, as Baker demonstrates, ultimately subsumes the ability to form sympathetic attachments. Equiano's recourse to sentiment is not only ineffectual, it is prevented by his exclusion from the material benefits of nationalism in the form of prize money.

Secondly, when he is able to return to the house of Miss Guerin and retroactively form the sympathetic attachments which were initially denied him, he exposes the futility of such attachments. At first, the narrative Equiano offers to the sisters of his injury causes them to offer him their sympathy, even though they are unable to retroactively intervene. This compensatory sympathy enacts the standard function of sentimentalist discourse. However, when Equiano confronts Capt. Pascal in front of the sisters, which redramatizes and repeats the theft, they slide into the background of the scene and are unable to advocate for a material change in Equiano's situation or offer their sympathy as a reprieve to the injury caused by their cousin's theft from

Equiano. It is this staging which demonstrates how the constitutive exclusion that Equiano experiences in the promises of the “formal and abstract equality” of the marketplace so thoroughly saturates the project of sentimentalist discourse. Equiano’s own attachment to them might even be read as an impediment to his ability to make “farther demand of my right.” While Equiano clearly critiques sentiment in this passage, he critiques it from inside his own enmeshment within this form of appeal. These scenes demonstrate how important certain forms of sentimentality are for Equiano at the same time that they demonstrate how he is scandalized by their failure to offer a bulwark against marketplace incursions.

Readers who had formed sympathetic attachments to Equiano by this point in the narrative ought to have been troubled by this scene. Seeing themselves as the sympathetic but ineffectual Guein sisters, they would be forced to consider the limits of sympathy. Importantly, however, to make plain to the reader the limits and frustrations of systems of sympathetic identification for Equiano, he must first engage sentimental discourse. As such, Equiano’s engagement of sentimentalism exposes its limits as a literary technology. By using this technology to establish sympathies and then stage a scene in which sympathy is thwarted by an economic and legal system organized around Equiano’s exclusion and disenfranchisement, he does more than merely abandon sentiment. He mobilizes it which in turn shows how, as a marketplace transaction, it is a project that is not extended to him in systems of racial capitalism. In each instance in the above passages, readers form attachments only to have them critiqued: the maritime nationalism of his shipmates are exposed as reserved for white mariners, the sentiments of white femininity which would be offended by Equiano’s continued confrontation with Captain Pascal who impedes Equiano’s ability to attain his prize money, and finally, our own readerly sympathies with Equiano are dramatized as being totally ineffectual. In other words, it is not that

sentiment is ineffectual in the narrative—it functions properly for Equiano up to a point. It is able to establish right feelings: religious, aesthetic, socially, and otherwise, but it offers no protection for Equiano against the incursion of the marketplace precisely because such a marketplace is built on his exclusion. Therefore, while Equiano demonstrates it might be relied upon for establishing affinities and moving readers and figures in the narrative sentimentally, it does not function as a corrective to the marketplace precisely because it is itself a marketplace transaction. If sentimentalism is a marketplace exchange, then this exchange might at the same time be overwritten by other features of the marketplace. To return to Kazanjian's formulation, just as democratic participation within the marketplace is built on Equiano's exclusion, his participation within the marketplace of sentiments is also built on his exclusion.

But Equiano's narrative goes further than this. Scenes like the early ones of his family prior to his capture and enforced migration across the middle passage and the moment he is able to gain his freedom do not square with the forms of sentimentality which emerge from the genealogy of Smith and Hume. Because such a project elicits feelings of humanity and morality that, as have been seen, are built on Equiano's exclusion, this mode of identification is not able to attend to scenes in Equiano's life that exceed the constraints of this specific version of humanity and morality. For instance, while sentimental appeals are common in the narrative prior to his enslavement and forced passage across the Atlantic, they function in a contradictory way. After Equiano is separated from his sister for the last time, he is surprised by some relative liberty in what he hopes is an adoptive family. However, it is just at the moment when he begins to regain some happiness that he is taken to the slave market. Following this moment, Equiano briefly pauses the narrative for a description of his thoughts and feelings. He writes,

Thus, at the very moment I dreamed of the greatest happiness, I found myself most miserable; and it seemed as if fortune wished to give me this taste of joy, only to render the reverse more poignant. The change I now experienced was as painful as it was sudden and unexpected. It was a change indeed from a state of bliss to a scene which is inexpressible by me, as it discovered to me an element I had never before beheld and till then had no idea of, and wherein such instances of hardship and cruelty continually occurred as I can never reflect on but with horror. (63)

Equiano doubles opposing emotions: joy and its opposite exist in a “very moment.” The paragraph itself contains a doubling: first Equiano describes the concomitant happiness and misery, and then he couples bliss and horror. Yet, here again Equiano asks us to look closer at his language. If read hastily, this aside on sentiment seems clear, even repetitive. Looked at more closely, Equiano writes that as he dreamed of happiness, he was most miserable. The embodied emotion is misery while happiness is an unmet aspiration. Then, as the paragraph seems to repeat this sentiment, Equiano flips the terms. The felt emotion is bliss while the horror is a reflection felt retrospectively (one can imagine Equiano invoking his own writerly self into this paragraph). Indeed, in the present tense of the narrative, the change is from a feeling to a scene, rather than from one feeling to another. It is as if this scene of an undiscovered and inexpressible element of cruelty is so large and so incomprehensible that it can only be felt retrospectively. What is significant about Equiano's formation is that he is offering the reader a troubling set of objects and the paired subjective feelings they engender. At the same moment that he is dreaming of greatest happiness, he is indeed most miserable. Alternatively, while he is feeling bliss, he is confronted with a scene of unarticulated cruelty which can only really be sentimentally rendered in retrospect. This confusion is significant for a narrative that attempts to excite a “sense of

compassion,” afford “satisfaction,” and/or promote the “interests of humanity.” By holding up an object of contemplation and then misplacing the emotional resonance it brings with it, Equiano is demonstrating he is aware of the unreliability of sympathetic connections through narrative.

Another moment when the system of sympathetic identification that Equiano was familiar with in writers like Sterne is unable to attend to his experience is when he gains his freedom. This scene also holds importance for my discussion of Equiano’s narrative as a foundational text to American maritime fiction. Just before Equiano copies the detail from the form of manumission that Baker reads as foundational to the logic of slave narratives, Equiano attempts to narrate his feelings. He writes, “I could scarcely believe I was awake. Heavens! who could do justice to my feelings at this moment! Not conquering heroes themselves, in the midst of a triumph—Not the tender mother who had just regained her long-lost infant, and presses it to her heart—not the weary hungry mariner at the sight of the desired friendly port—not the lover, when he once more embraces his beloved mistress, after she had been ravished from his arms!—All within my breast was tumult, wildness, and delirium!” (135). Equiano here pits his central question “who could do justice to my feelings” against four sentimental tropes of heroism, motherhood, maritime nationalism, and romantic love, in order to demonstrate their inadequacy. He shows here that the sympathetic attachments built through such narrative will never “do justice” to the material experience of freedom. Again, Equiano invokes these tropes to which readers might form attachments at the same time he undercuts the sufficiency of these attachments. Like the collapse of sympathetic attachments at the onset of his enslavement, here again we have a moment of confusion over emotional resonance as his feelings are narrated through negations: neither heroes, nor mothers, nor mariners, nor lovers are adequate to capture the feeling of gaining one’s freedom.

However, Equiano is gesturing to more than the literary encoding of regimes of feeling here, he is also illustrating what Ian Baucom describes as the collision between actuarial logic of averages and generalizations and the literary historical types that are invented in the novel. Baucom writes, “The actuarial type, then, in terms that will become crucial not only to the English and British novel but to post-Kantian German idealist thought (particularly Hegel’s theory of right and his philosophy of history), is the type of someone or something that does not exist at *this* or *that*, but only as *such*, only in the aggregate or the abstract. To the extent, therefore, that the preromantic English and British novel licenses a revolution in epistemology, that revolution is generally consistent with the other historical, financial, and cultural revolutions of modern Europeans speculative discourse.”⁸³ To use Baucom’s phrasing, Equiano’s description of his moment of freedom critiques this logic by demonstrating how *such* and *such* an experience does not do justice to *this* feeling. What Equiano is pointing to then is that not only is, as David Kazanjian points out, the concept of market-based freedom in attaining “formal and abstract equality” is constituted on his absence, the literary types upon which readers may attach their feelings of sympathy are also conspicuously unable to “do justice” to the experience of freedom Equiano attempts to narrate. By calling into his discussion freedom literary tropes, Equiano exposes the connection that Baucom describes: the discourse of averages and generalizations that so violently underwrite the history of the transatlantic slave trade also colonize the very formation of literary tropes with which authors used to describe reality of the time. In other words, neither the “formal and abstract equality” promised by the marketplace nor the literary form of the novel that was caught up in producing types of characters could do justice for Equiano.

⁸³ Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 216.

This moment of not having a proper literary form to narrate freedom is echoed in later slave narratives as well. For instance, Harriet Jacobs notes that her experience diverges from what is typical of an autobiographical narrative when she writes, “Reader, my story ends with freedom; not in the usual way with marriage. I and my children are now free!”⁸⁴ Additionally, Frederick Douglass admits that when asked what it felt like to gain his freedom he has “never been able to answer the question with any satisfaction to myself,” and, in a surprising similarity to Equiano, continues that “I supposed I felt as one may imagine the unarmed mariner to feel when he is rescued by a friendly man-of-war from the pursuit of a pirate” or like “one who had escaped a den of hungry lions” but that these fleeting comparisons “very soon subsided; and I was again seized with a feeling of great insecurity and loneliness.”⁸⁵ Thus, like Equiano, both Jacobs and Douglass invoke what is typical of literary forms only to then demonstrate their inadequacy in dealing with their own specific moment of freedom.

Of these four tropes, the ones I am most concerned with here is the “weary hungry mariner” because I argue that Equiano’s narrative is an important foundational text to which the American maritime genre responded.⁸⁶ This trope is common enough among the sea fiction Equiano would have been familiar with. Indeed, Srinivas Aravamudan argues that Equiano’s narrative is a direct response to the sea fiction that came before him, namely the work of Daniel Defoe. As such, we need to read this moment as a response to the work of maritime fiction. As was seen in the above passage where Equiano’s shipmates described their home ports after the war against the French, this trope was often a way to invoke attachments to nationalism. Equiano demonstrates that such writing does not “do justice” to the experience of the black mariner. This

⁸⁴ Jacobs, *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Written by Herself*, 201.

⁸⁵ Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, 100.

⁸⁶ Chapter two of this dissertation looks at American periodicals marketed to women which take up the tropes of the mother and the lover as they existed in relation to the maritime industry.

very trope of maritime nationalism is predicated on Equiano's exclusion, and the feeling he has after gaining his freedom can only be described as the negation of maritime nationalism.

In addition to the trope in maritime literature of the homeward bound mariner is the trope of the ocean as a space of dispersal and freedom from the constraints of society.⁸⁷ It is in this trope of maritime fiction that we can read an important constellation of Equiano's narrative that later maritime fiction had to take into account. Not only does Equiano thoroughly critique the trope of maritime nationalism by exposing the limits of its logic, he also builds into his narrative a separate set of attachments through his resignification of the sea itself. Early in his narrative when he first arrives on the coast and looks westward, he writes, "The first object which saluted my eyes when I arrived on the coast was the sea, and a slave ship, which was then riding at anchor, and waiting for its cargo" (38). The construction of this sentence renders two distinct objects into a singular "first" object: the sea and a slave ship. He is greeted by them both simultaneously such that he describes them as a single entity. The slave ship for Equiano is inseparable from the ocean in this initial description. His construction of the singular sign "sea/slaveship" is foundational to his reworking of how the maritime space of the late-eighteenth century is narrated. While the ocean for white mariners might serve as a space outside of the constraints of society, Equiano demonstrates that in this historical context the system of the transatlantic slave trade and the ocean must always be thought together. In this formulation, it becomes plain the extent to which Cooper and others went to eschew Equiano's experience both for their project of maritime nationalism and for their theorization of the ocean as a space of freedom. For Equiano, the ocean does exist as a space that is in excess of the state—after all, it is

⁸⁷ For instance, as I discuss in chapter four, William Boelhower argues that in literature, "The Atlantic world is fundamentally a space of dispersion, conjunction, distribution, contingency, heterogeneity, and of intersecting and stratified lines and images." See: Boelhower, William. "The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix," 92-3.

during moments on the ship that he is able to assert most authority and exist in somewhat equal standing to the indentured and impressed white sailors on board—but it is also always underwritten by the slave trade. That is, the maritime industry does offer Equiano an informal network that exists in excess of the state through which he is able to engage in an insurgent form of speculation, gathering and reselling commodities between ports. It is his speculation—an insurgent type that runs counter to the dominant form Baucom illustrates—that allows Equiano to gather enough capital to buy his own freedom. However, the space of the sea is also always a space of heightened danger for Equiano in that the extra-legal “tricks” of white men threaten to resubject Equiano to the state-sanctioned slave economy. In other words, while the sea might be a space that exists in excess to the state and create space for Equiano to resist state-power, that excess is also able to be mobilized in service of the state.

I would like to end this section, then, by gesturing to one final moment in Equiano’s narrative in which he imagines a potential outside to this linkage between racial capitalism and the conception of maritime nationalism within sentimentalist discourse. After Equiano’s experience of the foundational rupture of the middle passage which thereafter subjects Equiano to a system of racial capitalism that simultaneously promises a type of marketplace freedom while it systematically excludes him from it, Equiano is unable to form a stable attachment either to his past, his role as a mariner, or his attempts to become a full English citizen. As Christine Levecq writes, Equiano “develops a notion of diasporic identity as anchored in negotiation and exchange, in an attempt to squeeze out of both colonialist discourses and romantic notions of African purity, he attempts to create a new form of cosmopolitanism, anchored in forms of caring and giving that also imply a recognition of difference and of equality.”⁸⁸ As such, Equiano

⁸⁸ Levecq, *Slavery and Sentiment*, 29.

moves his speculative project outward at the end of his narrative to discuss alternative attachments he has made that are not as immediately bound up in the British and American system of racial capitalism and transatlantic slave trade. It is interesting, in light of my discussion of Equiano's interrogation of the project of sympathetic attachment, to read the moments when he forms fleeting connections to Eastern Europe, Islam, the Mediterranean, and the Jacobin spirit in Ireland as moments where he imaginatively lays out forms of attachments that might exist outside of systems of social organizations in which he finds himself enmeshed. As Stephanie Cronin notes, when Equiano visited Smyrna, he "expressed astonishment at the way in which white slaves were "kept under by the Turks, as the negroes are in the West Indies by the white people." Indeed, so defining a moment was this for Equiano that for a long time he dreamed of emigrating to the Ottoman Empire. In the Middle East, and perhaps especially in North Africa, hierarchies of race and colour were neither absolute, immutable nor impermeable and racial identity was constructed differently."⁸⁹ While Equiano only briefly discusses his identification with Smyrna and Turkey, in light of the way he thoroughly discusses his inability to form stable attachments to either his home or the system of maritime nationalism he is forced into, I believe we can read such scenes as a suggested alternative to his own relationship to the constitutive exclusion of racial capitalism. By attending to the linkages between sentimental discourse and maritime nationalism that Equiano stages throughout his narrative, we might open new critical space for understanding of Equiano's projects during the latter part of his life.

As I explore in the following chapter, this act of imaginatively articulating attachments across wide-ranging spaces is a project that gets taken up by periodicals of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century in American port towns. For Equiano the project is used to imagine

⁸⁹ Cronin, "Islam, Slave Agency and Abolitionism in Iran, the Middle East and North Africa," 965.

sympathy from the Guerin sisters, but is also, if briefly, mobilized to imagine an outside to his position within racial capitalism. In the periodicals to which I now turn, these relays are established to call attention to the feminized forms of affective and domestic labor that are invisibilized by the hyper-individualist maritime genre exemplified by Cooper's sea novels.

Chapter 2:⁹⁰Countercurrents of Maritime Fiction: Port-Town Periodicals and the Writings of Mary Carr
Clarke

Her fancy followed him through foaming waves
 To distant shores, and she would sit and weep
 At what a sailor suffers; fancy too,
 Delusive most where warmest wishes are,
 Would oft anticipate his glad return,
 And dream of transports she was not to know.

-William Cowper, *The Task*

A Glance at Maritime Life before Cooper

In the spring of 1807, the New York-based periodical *Lady's Weekly Miscellany* ran the second piece of their recurring column "Glances at Life." In this week's "Glance," the author E. writes about an encounter with a sailor with a broken leg who is supported by his peers. The narrator learns from the sailor's messmates that "the unfortunate man had recently returned from the West Indies in the vessel on board of which he was at work when the disaster befell him. The ship he had sailed from this port in, had been condemned by Court of Admiralty of a foreign nation, and he had worked his passage back, without having in it his power on his landing, to present his wife with a single shilling." Out of feelings of humanity and sympathy, the captain and crew decided to pool their money for his recovery, and he ended up with three months' pay. The narrator is moved by the charity of the sailors and begins to expound on the "worthy action"

⁹⁰ Throughout this chapter, I reference many pieces of writing from periodicals that were either published anonymously or the attribution was too obscured to read. In the latter case, I have tried to track down subsequent reprintings to locate the author's name but have often been unsuccessful. Additionally, many of these texts from anonymous or unknown authors share vague titles like "A Fragment" or "The Shipwreck." In my footnotes, therefore, I cite these texts by listing an author (if possible), the title, and, if the title is shared, the name of the periodical in which I found the text. For full citations, see my works cited page.

of generosity. In doing so, E. makes an illustrative connection between the charity of women and sailors,

Society is not destitute of characters in more exalted stations, who, like these seamen, pour the balm of comfort into the wounded mind; and administer to the wants of virtuous mendicity.

The exquisite sensibility which characterizes the female mind, is often productive of great and lasting bounty to the afflicted part of the community. As a proof of this, it is but necessary to be acquainted with the proceedings of the society, in this city For the relief of Poor Widows with small Children. At periods when distress as unexpected as unforeseen, has assailed many families, this band of excellent women have with a zeal that reflects the highest credit on their exertions, sought out, and administered to, the pressing necessities of their fellow creatures. During the severe winter of 1805, how many, who, but for them, could not have known the comforts of warm raiment, and seldom the luxury of a comfortable dinner partook, with grateful hearts, of this society's bounty. Indeed, the day passes not, in which some act of beneficence is not effected through the means of this excellent institution.⁹¹

In making sense of the charity of the seamen, the narrator draws from the paradigmatic figure of charity: women-run relief societies. In doing so, this week's "Glance" in the *Miscellany* knits together a web of connections, sometimes explicit sometimes opaque, between different actors in the early nineteenth-century maritime industry.

First, and most obviously, there is a connection drawn between the charity of the sailors who pool their money from their own wages to pay for the injury of a fellow sailor and the

⁹¹ E. "Glances At Life: No. 2."

“female mind” that is associated with relief efforts. The narrator praises both groups for their generosity and right feeling toward the afflicted part of the community. However, this praise implies an inverse connection between them as well: their material survival is dependent on the charity of their peers. If not for the pooling of money to pay the sailor’s wages as he heals, both he and his wife would be without the money necessary to survive. Similarly, if not for the women-run charitable societies, widowed mothers would be without “the comfort of warm raiment” or “comfortable dinner” and, the author seems to imply, would have frozen to death in a winter like that of 1805. Both groups therefore “pour the balm of comfort into the wounded mind” and “administer to the wants of virtuous mendicity,” but are shut out from full state protection. Rather than focus on the scandal that widows and injured sailors are being allowed to starve and freeze to death, this passage focuses on how readers ought to feel toward these two groups. Doing so places sailors and widows in analogous social positions; they are both in need of extra-state support and protection and are figures with whom the readers of the *Miscellany* ought to form sympathetic attachments.

Second, while the connection between the character of the injured sailor and the character of the “Poor Widows with small Children” is made explicit, the material connections between the two are less obvious. While E. does not discuss the causes behind the mothers’ widowed status, in a seaport city like New York, many families would have had fathers and husbands who were either absent during long stints at sea or killed by the dangerous work in the maritime trade. During the same years as this “Glance,” Thomas Jefferson signed into law a series of embargo acts which, while lining the pockets of wealthy merchant capitalists, made life for American sailors even more precarious as they were exposed to capture and impressment by British and

French ships.⁹² This reality was so common, the courts of port towns extended certain legal rights such as marriage annulments for women whose husbands had been away without contact for multiple years or the designation of *feme sole* status that allowed married women to enter into contracts, own property, and conduct their own businesses.⁹³ In other words, the maritime industry was often the source of both the sailor's injury and the widow's status. Considered this way, the fact that women-run relief societies and the informal fraternity of sailors are applying balms to groups injured by the same institution suggests that not only are they united in their "exquisite sensibilities" but in their material enmeshment within the hyper-exploitation of the maritime industry as well.⁹⁴

This material connection is often suppressed in the canon of American sea fiction. Occasionally, canonical sea novels will gesture at the fact that sailors have wives and families at home and that their role in the maritime industry has implications for the lives of those living in home ports. Perhaps the most famous and surprising example of this is the moment when readers find out that Ahab is thinking of his wife (or has one at all) just before his final attempt to destroy Moby-Dick. Speaking to Starbuck, Ahab says "from that young girl-wife I wedded past fifty, and sailed for Cape Horn the next day, leaving but one dent in my marriage pillow—wife? wife?—rather a widow with her husband alive! Aye, I widowed that poor girl when I married her, Starbuck."⁹⁵ Looking instead to sentimental narratives of the early nineteenth century, we can see how the trope Melville draws on of the widowed wife with a living husband is first developed and articulated in women's periodicals. Yet, while these moments do exist in

⁹² Sofka, "The Embargo Era, 1807–1809," 41.

⁹³ Susan Branson discusses how Mary Carr Clarke and Ann Carson, two women who married into the maritime industry, negotiated these extended legal rights in chapters one and two of *Dangerous to Know*.

⁹⁴ Indeed, it seems that occasionally, the injured mariner and the poor widow with a small child were one and the same person. In "The Shipwreck: An American Tale," a woman survives a shipwreck with her child and must resort to begging for food and shelter after swimming to an unfamiliar shore. See: "The Shipwreck: An American Tale."

⁹⁵ Melville, *Moby-Dick; or The Whale*, 405.

canonized sea fiction, rarely do the implications of long voyages or injuries and death at sea get played out at home. As this chapter will demonstrate, one key difference between the sentimental narratives in periodicals marketed to feminine tastes that pre-date much canonized American sea fiction is their attention to the relays between disaster at sea and disaster at home.⁹⁶

Finally, a third connection that haunts the background of this entire “Glance” is the West Indian slave trade and the sailor’s involvement in the trade. This issue of the *Lady’s Weekly Miscellany* was published almost exactly two weeks after the ban on the international slave trade was signed into law by Jefferson in March of 1807.⁹⁷ While the slave trade was officially abolished within the British Empire and the United States, and would go into effect 1808, the timing of this issue of the *Miscellany* would have coincided with the beginning of an illegal effort in the West Indies by ship owners to continue to import enslaved laborers into the American south. As W.E.B. Du Bois documents, it took over a decade for the ban on the importation of enslaved Africans to be adequately enforced. Du Bois writes, “On the whole, it is plain that, although in the period from 1807 to 1820 Congress laid down broad lines of legislation sufficient, save in some details, to suppress the African slave trade to America, yet the execution of these laws was criminally lax. Moreover, by the facility with which slavers could disguise their identity, it was possible for them to escape even a vigorous enforcement of our laws. This situation could properly be met only by energetic and sincere international co-

⁹⁶ It is important to note that I do not wish to reestablish the faulty claim that only men served in the ocean-bound end of the maritime industry. From the beginning of this U.S. industry there have been female-identifying and gender-queer people who worked on board ships as books such as *Women Under Sail* by Greenhill and Giffard, *Seafaring Women* by De Pauw, and *Telling Travels* edited by Schriber establish. Periodicals of the time also acknowledged this fact (See: “Female Sailor” from 1827 which discusses the arrest of William Brown legally known as Selina Hamilton). However, my point is to acknowledge how such accounts largely leave the split between the masculinized realm of the ocean and the feminized realm of the home port intact. Attention to the writings of these periodicals repeatedly confounds the distinction between these two realms.

⁹⁷ Du Bois, *The Suppression of the African Slave Trade to the United States of America*, 94.

operation.”⁹⁸ Of the original provisions of the bill, Du Bois writes, “On the whole, the strong anti-slavery men, like Bidwell and Sloan, were outgeneraled by Southerners, like Early and Williams; and considering the immense moral backing of the anti-slavery party from the Revolutionary fathers down, the bill of 1807 can hardly be regarded as a great anti-slavery victory.”⁹⁹ Du Bois goes on to argue that it was not until 1824 or 1825 that the prohibited slave trade was suppressed in any meaningful way—the same year James Fenimore Cooper published his first sea novel, heroizing American mariners.¹⁰⁰

Rather than responding to the illegality of the slave trade, ship owners and captains only started to change their practice to avoid detection and suppression during the beginnings of the hostilities in the build-up to the War of 1812. In England, part of the bill to abolish the slave trade in 1807 declared that American slave ships were to be captured and condemned under piracy laws. This led to American ships going under Spanish disguise to avoid capture by the English navy. Du Bois quotes from the *House Reports*, “This sudden substitution of the Spanish for the American flag seemed to confirm what was established in a variety of instances by more direct testimony, that the slave trade, which now, for the first time, assumed a Spanish dress, was in reality only the trade of other nations in disguise.”¹⁰¹ While there is insufficient evidence to make a determination one way or the other, E.’s “poor sailor” was no doubt caught up in the international, extra-legal maneuvers during the abolition of the slave trade. Whether the fact that his ship was “condemned by Court of Admiralty of a foreign nation” had anything to do with the English capture of American slavers or not, it stands to reason that this sailor’s resort to work

⁹⁸ Du Bois, 129-130.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁰⁰ Du Bois writes that while it was not officially recognized as such, “Down to 1824 or 1825, reports from all quarters prove [illegal] activity in slave-trading” (85).

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 110.

on a foreign ship for his passage back to New York is illustrative of the slave trade's reverberations within the U.S. maritime industry and upends the emphasis on nationalism in Cooper's sea fiction.

While it is clear that E.'s "Glance at Life" is not offering us abolitionist politics in the spirit of Equiano explicitly, the unelaborated reference to the West Indian trade signals an awareness of global politics of the of the moment. What is significant is that while the social reality of the American maritime industry's participation in the illegal slave trade is largely suppressed in canonical accounts of the ocean and maritime world, sentimental narratives often struggled more to deal with and incorporate the reality of sailors' involvement in the slave trade than sea fiction written in the tone of romanticism. That said, it is not possible to easily settle or resolve the relationship between port town periodicals marketed to feminine sensibility and projects for the abolition of slavery and the slave trade. Many accounts like the "Glance at Life" demonstrate an awareness of the slave trade without voicing explicit opposition to it, occasionally valorizing it.¹⁰² Other publications like *Weekly Visitor, or Ladies' Miscellany* explicitly took up causes for the abolition of the slave trade and slavery.¹⁰³ Still, others use the history of the slave trade as fodder for hauntings and ghost stories.¹⁰⁴ This variance demonstrates the different investments periodicals and authors had, but unlike the sea novels of James

¹⁰² For instance, in "The Mother," a woman who is dying onboard a ship tells a fellow passenger her extremely bleak life story in which she accounts how her husband, her only daughter, and all her sons have died. At one point she explains that after failing in the mercantile business, two of her sons "became embarrassed, and necessity drove them to seek their fortunes in a hot, sickly, climate" where yellow fever eventually killed them. Clearly referencing the West Indies, the mother praises them for being "indefatigable in their exertions to preserve the citizens' property from the negroes' pillages" (312-3). A. E. R. E. "The Mother."

¹⁰³ For examples see: "The Slave" and "On Slavery" from 1804 in the *Weekly Visitor*. The poem "The Slave" has an interesting publication history. It is later attributed to James Watkins in *Poems, Original & Selected Works* but in Watkins' own slave narrative, he attests that he was born in 1821, and might have merely been reprinted in his narrative. It seems to have first appeared anonymously in April of 1804 in *The Scots Magazine and Edinburgh Literary Miscellany* and was republished later that year in the *Weekly Visitor*. In the poem Maratan is captured in Angola and forced onto a slave ship where he decides to commit suicide and jump overboard.

¹⁰⁴ See Heysham, "The Messenger; Or a Story from the Lee Booms," in which a sailor who worked on a slave ship brings a haunting onto a ship in the Pacific.

Fenimore Cooper which are set in an undefined past, placing the history of the slave trade in the U.S. maritime industry under erasure, the circulation of periodicals of the time refracted the realities of U.S. involvement in the slave trade in distinct and explicit ways. Additionally, recalling my argument in chapter one that sentimentalism is a marketplace transaction within a system of racial capitalism built on Equiano's exclusion, it is important to note that here, again, the forms of sympathetic attachments which connect the injured mariner to the injured domestic subject are formed at a remove from and exclusion of those who were enslaved in the West Indies.

Ultimately, E.'s "Glance at Life" and the many other published works like it offer us a nexus of associations within the maritime industry nearly two decades before James Fenimore Cooper writes his first sea novel. By looking to the way vernacular print culture in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth century engaged with the maritime industry, it becomes clear how the dominant form of the genre of American maritime literature represents a particular raced and gendered depiction of the U.S. maritime industry. As I illustrated in chapter one, canonical narratives of the maritime industry occlude the way racism is articulated within the sphere of Atlantic finance capital such that projects for maritime nationalism suppress the way black mariners like Equiano are constitutively excluded from state protections. Building on this, I argue in this chapter that this same body of canonical sea fiction worked extensively to dislodge the material world of the port from the adventurous world at sea. Because the periodicals discussed in this chapter continually established relays between the unwaged, feminized forms of labor in port and the precarious, masculinized labor onboard ships—often to such an extent that it becomes nearly meaningless to distinguish between the two—the formation of the genre of maritime literature can be recast as a project which, at its very foundation, is built on the

exclusion of such labor from any conception of the U.S. maritime industry. However, it is crucial to understand how much of this work in the periodicals simultaneously establishes the role of the port in the maritime industry and reenacts the racialized exclusions by encoding it within sentimental tropes.

To demonstrate these dynamics, I begin by discussing familiar periodizations of the genre. Following this discussion, I offer a survey of the literature within these periodicals that dealt with distinct relays within the maritime industry before Cooper developed his own brand of maritime nationalism. Finally, after the survey, I take a closer look at the writings of Mary Carr Clarke, the first woman in the U.S. to run her own periodical and the wife of a captain who died of complications from injuries in the War of 1812. Doing so can illuminate the connections between actors and the imaginaries of the ocean that were variously disavowed, emphasized, or rewritten in service of an American literary relationship to the ocean. This literature has been largely understudied and under-acknowledged in writing on the development of American sea fiction and attending to it demands that we recognize how aggressively the often feminized domestic world of the port and the sentimental accounts circulating within its literary marketplaces has been severed from considerations of the literary imagination of the ocean during this period. Doing so forces us to recalibrate how we understand the social and political work that sea fiction did in the early nineteenth century and remaps our understanding of vernacular print culture in the early nineteenth century.

Accounts of the Development of American Sea Fiction

The original instigator of the myth that American authors had not adequately captured the ocean until Cooper's publication of *The Pilot* in 1824 was Cooper himself. In his preface to the

1823 first edition of his novel, Cooper discusses Tobias Smollett, invoking a tradition of maritime writing that presumably ended with Smollett's publication of *The Adventures of Roderick Random* in 1748. After describing his aspirations for the subject matter, Cooper, speaking of himself in the third person, writes, "He will probably be told, that Smollett has done all this before him, and in a much better manner. It will be seen, however, that, though he has navigated the same sea as Smollett, he has steered a different course; or, in other words, that he has considered what Smollett has painted as a picture which is finished, and which is not to be daubed over by every one who may choose to handle a pencil on marine subjects."¹⁰⁵ With this description of his own work, Cooper claims to begin a new canvas, as it were, of American maritime fiction that leaves alone the tradition of British sea fiction. This image of splitting the literature of the ocean onto two different canvases continues to have reverberations in our understanding of the American imagination of the maritime industry. However, in Thomas Philbrick's foundational study of American Sea Fiction, he points out that the uniqueness of Cooper was not one of subject matter, but one of tone.

Thomas Philbrick's main argument is that the astounding American victory in the War of 1812 against the British Royal Navy sparked a demand for maritime nationalism in American cultural production which led Cooper to invent the sea novel.¹⁰⁶ However, lacking the long history of a naval institution that had defended an empire, as was the topic of much of Smollett's fiction, American authors were tasked with creating their own form of sea fiction that continued to stoke the flames of maritime nationalism. Cooper, dedicated to drawing on the American myth of rugged individualism, decided to forego Smollett's satire and realism and write within the tone of romanticism. However, after settling on the tone he found most appropriate for

¹⁰⁵ Cooper, *The Pilot*, vi.

¹⁰⁶ Philbrick, *James Fenimore Cooper and the Development of American Sea Fiction*, 2.

representing maritime nationalism, Cooper turned to the annals of American maritime history and came up short. Philbrick writes, “The impasse which confronted Cooper was clear: the fictional celebration of his doctrine of maritime nationalism demanded the exalted and ideal tone of romance; the known facts of American maritime history rendered such a tone absurd. The only recourse available to him was to invent appropriate incidents and characters and imbed them in a general historical setting.”¹⁰⁷ We then have a formula for the paradigm of American maritime literature: a work that is set in the general past, has the objective of stoking maritime nationalism, and embraces romanticism as the tone appropriate to the sea. This maneuver of Cooper’s, to set his fiction in an undefined past, became a trait in much of the sea fiction that followed his, including Melville’s. One of the effects of this maneuver is that it became easier for works written in the tone of romanticism to skirt confrontations with social realities like the U.S. involvement in the prohibited slave trade.

While Philbrick’s focus is on the particular type of maritime writing he sees leading straight to Melville, he does acknowledge that other engagements with the ocean existed. He writes, “One possible line of development, shunned for the most part by Cooper but adopted by some American writers of short fiction, was indicated by English songs and comic drama of the later eighteenth century: the sailor could be sentimentalized, transformed into a curly-locked, graceful lad whose heart beat true for his Susan, his Nancy, or whatever sweet girl he had left behind him at the dockside in Portsmouth.” Though, just as quickly as he condescendingly introduces this body of sea fiction he dismisses it: “But sentimentalism, in itself, had the effect of diminishing the capacity of maritime life to evoke a sense of wonder, the central response of the romantic imagination to the sea and its affairs. Writing at the peak of romanticism in America,

¹⁰⁷ Philbrick, 51

Cooper and his contemporaries necessarily viewed the sea from a perspective vastly different from that of their British predecessors.”¹⁰⁸ Philbrick seems here to be caught within the tautology that Cooper originally set up: sea fiction ought to be represented through romanticism, and thus sentimental accounts of the sea are insufficient because they do not have the same effects as romanticism. However, it is useful to once again return to Cooper as he demonstrates how dodging sentimentalism was always about more than a question of tone.

Importantly, Cooper’s disregard for sentimentalism seems to emerge from his disdain for the feminized tastes of the literary marketplace in the U.S. In 1849, Cooper wrote a meditation on the reception of *The Pilot* that served as a new preface in later editions. In it, he describes the discouragement he received once he decided to write a novel about the sea claiming “The women very generally protested that such a book would have the odor of bilge water, and that it would give them the *maladie de mer*,” and explains that “*The Pilot* could scarcely be a favorite with females. The story has little interest for them, nor was it much heeded by the author of the book, in the progress of his labors. His aim was to illustrate vessels and the ocean, rather than to draw any pictures of sentiment and love.”¹⁰⁹ It is unclear which group of women Cooper is talking about. All that is needed is a quick glance at women’s periodicals in the two decades prior to Cooper’s novel to notice a proliferation of poems, anecdotes, works of fiction, and nineteenth-century think-pieces that deal with maritime life. Contrary to Cooper’s point, women’s periodicals continually returned to oceanic and littoral spaces for contemplating the status of vessels and those on board, the sublimity of the ocean, and the reverberations of the

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 7-9

¹⁰⁹ Cooper, “Preface,” ix-x.

maritime industry and culture in port.¹¹⁰ It was perhaps because of the very popularity of maritime culture in periodicals that Cooper felt compelled to criticize this particular “damned mob of scribbling women” and establish a sharp distinction between narratives of “sentiment and love” on the one hand and “vessels and the ocean” on the other. Acknowledging these origins cues us into the fact that discounting sentimentalism was not about—or not only about—finding a tone that “evoked a sense of wonder,” but was instead meant to diminish the world of the port that the feminized sensibilities of the literary marketplace had begun to imagine as integral to the maritime industry. It is this split, based in the nineteenth-century ideology of the separation between the domestic and public spheres, that informs Philbrick’s sole focus on the tonal paradigm of romanticism.¹¹¹ It is ultimately this maneuver that causes the slippage between the characterization of Cooper as an exceptional author of sea fiction and Cooper as the *first* American author of sea fiction. Scholarship on the genre of maritime fiction has largely followed Philbrick’s description of Cooper as the paradigmatic example of the genre of American maritime literature.¹¹²

Margaret Cohen’s *The Novel and the Sea* is one of the few genre studies of maritime fiction to offer a substantial alternative to Philbrick’s original formulation. Working in the field of novel studies, Cohen’s spatial analysis centers the ocean and offers a new genealogy of the development of the novel. Cohen demonstrates how prototypical examples of the novel like Daniel Defoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* took cues from the journals and narratives of sailors and ship

¹¹⁰ I discuss the first and third trends below. For examples of the way the sublimity of the ocean gets discussed, see the two anonymous works “A Day Between the Tropics” and “The Morning Star” as well as “A Night Scene on the Water,” “Ocean,” and “Ocean’s Crown” attributed to Almanzor, F.D.W.X., and Boston Bard, respectively.

¹¹¹ I am thinking here of Amy Kaplan’s essay “Manifest Domesticity” and Cathy Davidson and Jessamyn Hatcher’s Introduction to the collection *No More Separate Spheres!*.

¹¹² For examples of work that follows Philbrick’s timeline see: Jeanne-Marie Santraud, *La Mer Et Le Roman Américain*; William S. Dudley and Michael J. Crawford, *The Early Republic and the Sea*, particularly part II “James Fenimore Cooper and the Birth of American Maritime Experience”; Gordon Milne *Ports of Call*; John Peck, *Maritime Fiction*; and Bert Bender, *Sea-Brothers*.

logs for its formal construction.¹¹³ This illustrates how Cooper's sea adventure novels which followed Defoe's and Smollett's drew on the plain style of ship logs in describing problems faced at sea and the steps taken to resolve such problems. In this way, Cohen not only upends the history of the novel, she is also able to argue that sea adventure fiction helps to solve the "conundrum challenging novel scholars" that labor seems largely absent in the novel form by developing a theory of the way maritime craft prefigures the form of the novel (12). This is a clear departure from the genealogy offered by Philbrick, as Cohen makes clear in a footnote, "My difference from Philbrick turns on the image of the ocean as a dreary waste before Romanticism, whereas I understand it as the theater of craft" (258, note 56). As such, Cohen's emphasis on the similarities between the way Smollett and Cooper drew on maritime craft, rather than on the ingenuity of Cooper, offers a first step in repositioning Cooper's role in the development of the genre of American maritime literature. Cohen's tracking of the way the form of the ship log migrates to the formation of the modern novel is indebted to the work on genre by Wai Chee Dimock. Dimock argues that the forming of a genre is an alluvial process—a metaphoric that resonates particularly well with this genre as alluvium is a sediment and geological residue formed through the flowing of water—and that such a process is "sedimentary as well as migratory."¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, Dimock also proposes kinship systems as an allegorical model for understanding the way genre functions, and she uses this concept to ambitiously track "the co-evolution and crossfertilization of literary forms" from antiquity to the present and across wide-ranging geographies.¹¹⁵ Such a characterization underwrites the way Cohen is able to show how ship logs shape maritime fiction by Defoe and Cooper alike.

¹¹³ Cohen, *The Novel and the Sea*, 68-72. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

¹¹⁴ Dimock, "Genres as Fields of Knowledge," 1380.

¹¹⁵ Dimock, "Genre as World System: Epic and Novel on Four Continents," 91.

However, while this alternative focus on craft rather than maritime nationalism allows for new insights into the relationship between labor and the novel, Cohen's exclusive focus on the novel form leads her to a familiar periodization: "Following *Roderick Random*, the maritime adventure novel will yield in the second half of the eighteenth century to novels set on land about the pleasures and desires of civil society. This territorialization applies to adventure novels, as well as novels of manners until James Fenimore Cooper revitalized the sea adventure novel in 1824" (98). This demonstrates that while Cohen splits from Philbrick by focusing on craft rather than romanticism, this split nevertheless keeps Cooper in place as the founder of the genre in the U.S. context. Because Cohen's focus is on tracking the development of the novel form and not on looking to the way the maritime industry and ocean was being imagined in various forms—as is the case in this chapter—she passes over distinct registers of writing that precede and surround Cooper and ends up reifying the conception of the American maritime genre. Cohen is diligent in explaining that her focus on the novel, and thus I am not critiquing Cohen for failing to attend to these registers of writing. However, I do want to demonstrate that without reassessing the contestation over the imagination of the American maritime industry, Philbrick's formulation of the maritime genre will continue to define our understanding of U.S. literary engagements with the ocean and maritime industry, and thus curtail our ability to track insurgent countercurrents in this imaginary.

As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak points out in a response to Dimock's essay cited above, tracking such wide-ranging "co-evolution and crossfertilization" does not get us out of the Marxist imperative to historicize.¹¹⁶ Also, as I discuss in the introduction, Raymond Williams

¹¹⁶ In "World Systems & the Creole," Spivak argues, "As I have tried to point out in the cases of Aristotle and the epic, and Dante and Latin, people in different historical periods think differently, they inhabit different epistemes" (108).

and Fredric Jameson both point out that understanding how a generic form comes to be recognizable requires us to attend to the social material processes of the period that produced it as well as the counterdiscourses which co-exist alongside what comes to be known as the genre itself.¹¹⁷

Importantly, Cohen does not take the absence of such counterdiscourses for granted. Instead, in the chapter “Sea Adventure Fiction, 1748-1824?” she asks why there seems to be such a dearth in maritime literature during a period that saw major developments in both the form of the novel—such as “the novel of worldliness, the domestic novel, and the novel of education, as well as the sentimental novel”—and in maritime projects—such as “the systematic exploration of the Pacific” (99). She proposes that an answer lies in the way “the novel was engaged in unifying the nation as an imagined community in the English and French traditions at issue in my study” and that maritime narratives “would be hard to transform to achieve such a centripetal project. Its rambling disposition pulls it outward from civil society toward comportment that navigates risk on the Edge zones of the globe, in the world beyond the line” (102-3). Cohen ends this chapter with one final question about the role of the domestic novel. She writes,

One question from a feminist perspective is whether the absence of maritime novels in 1748-1824 was shaped by the novel's pervasive association at this time with feminized sociability. There was a sociological component to this association: the female reading public expanded. And there was an ideological component: the feminization of private life was part of how middle-class ideology established the distinction between public and private spheres, and private life was an important part of the novel's domain. The

¹¹⁷ See: Raymond Williams’s *Marxism and Literature* and Fredric Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious*.

masculine work of maritime adventures could be hard to accommodate to the processes of feminization so visible in the novel in the seventy-five years between Smollett and Cooper.” (103)

Such a view of American maritime literature, however, is only possible if we take the genre of masculinist sea adventure fiction Cooper produced as existing autonomously, without the countercurrents of periodical literature that subtend it. It is here that we can see an alternative path for understanding the development of the genre of American maritime literature. The distinction Cohen draws between the “masculine work of maritime adventures” and the “feminization so visible in the novel” does not hold when we look beyond the form of the novel to what was being published in periodicals, particularly those that circulated in port towns. By looking to these periodicals, we can see that the collision of maritime labor in the domestic sphere is exactly the work performed by such sentimental fiction. From this vantage point, I argue that Cohen is right to point to the ideology of separate spheres, but misses the way the formulation of the American maritime genre she picks up from Philbrick works to *produce* this split rather than merely existing because of it.

By missing the way the authors of periodicals attempted to chart out these resonances between forms of labor, Cohen inadvertently re-establishes a split between the masculinized craft of “vessels and the ocean” and the feminized narratives of “sentiment and love” that Cooper set up. The problem lies in not properly recognizing narratives of sentiment as themselves marketplace transactions, and in invisibilizing the feminized labor in port as somehow distinct from craft.¹¹⁸ As Lori Merish demonstrates, the consumption of feminized narratives of the

¹¹⁸ An illustrative example of how the line between feminized labor in port and maritime craft is confounded is the labor of the Mary Seacole, a free multiracial woman who, in 1817, nursed naval officers back to health in Jamaica during the Crimean War and is credited with founding the practice of nursing. Seacole is clearing engaging in both affective care work and the “craft” of nursing, both within the maritime industry. Such a figure drops out from

maritime industry “cannot be severed from production: home consumption is part of the production process.”¹¹⁹ Thus, it is important to acknowledge that sentimental narratives of port life must be considered contiguous with maritime craft. Additionally, it is important to also recognize that sentimentalism is not a wholly liberatory counterculture of writing that privileges feminized domestic fiction over masculinized adventure fiction, nor is it merely a form of domination via affect, but is, as Merish demonstrates, a narrative form that instantiates feminine subjection. Merish cites Catharine Belsey and argues that “the “subject of sentiment” does not preexist but is constituted through the identificatory exchanges of sentimental narrative.”¹²⁰ In other words, the “constitution of feminine subjectivity and agency are inseparable from an identification with subordination and dependency; indeed, the production of feminine (sentimental) subjectivity depends upon that latter identification.”¹²¹ Therefore, by looking to one specific subset of sentimentalist discourse—the understudied current of maritime writing in port-town periodicals—I explore the production of the subject of maritime sentiment. Doing so allows us insight into surprising configurations of feminine agency within what has largely been considered an exclusively masculine realm of maritime labor. As I will demonstrate, while these periodicals do instantiate a form of feminine subjection within the maritime industry, by doing so they also open space for a type of informal speculative epistemology designed to treat the pervasive absence of information about those at sea.

Trends in Sentimental Sea Fiction Before 1824

Cohen’s split between masculine labor at sea and feminized narratives at home. See: *Wonderful Adventures of Mrs. Mary Seacole in Many Lands*.

¹¹⁹ Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*, 9.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*, 23. Merish is citing Belsey’s *Critical Practice*.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, 24.

Looking through periodicals marketed to women that were published and distributed within the U.S. literary marketplace prior to and contemporaneous with 1824, I found an immense amount of writing that discussed the ocean and maritime industry. As such, what follows is by no means a complete account of sentimental treatment of the maritime industry before Cooper, but an overview of some key trends in the way these periodicals engaged the ocean and maritime institutions. Many of the tropes and trends within this subset of sentimental fiction of the nineteenth century mirror the more canonical texts of sentimentalism. In this section, I track the ways such writing offers a purchase on the maritime industry that is distinct from dominant forms of maritime literature. The major trend I trace in what follows is the way such writing confounds the distinction between the port and the sea as certain sentimentalist tropes are reworked or invented as a way to attend to the material experience of being in port while connected to a mariner at sea, whether as a spouse, sibling, parent, or returned mariner. After discussing how these linkages imagine a network of connections across far-ranging spaces, I turn to the way authors perform a type of speculative epistemology concerning those at sea encoded in sentimentalist tropes like weeping and presentiment.

One common trope is the miraculous return of a family member who has been out at sea. Usually, just as the narrative is coming to its climax, the long-lost mariner will return to the home and hearth of their family and either solve a narrative conflict or join those at home in mourning some loss. A typical example of this trope can be seen in the anonymously written piece entitled “A Fragment” in the Boston-based periodical *Ladies Port Folio*. In this fragment, an elderly couple notice a shipwreck at night and go out to the seashore to see if anyone is alive. They find a sailor who tells them his life story just before he dies. He tells the couple how he regrets that as a boy he ran away from home to go to sea to gain knowledge and wealth. He fell

in love with a woman named Antoinetta, but her friends kept him away from her. On taking leave of Antoinetta, he is taken by pirates and enslaved. Eventually, he escapes for England, but on his way gets caught in a storm and is shipwrecked. This concludes the mariner's story, after which the author writes, "'My son! my beloved son!' sobbed out the withered and wretched figure which hung over the dying man." We are told that just as the sailor realizes he has somehow managed to shipwreck himself at his father's doorstep, "he clasped convulsively the hand of his father, and in a few minutes ceased to breathe. One grave contains the bodies of the father and the son."¹²² A version of this narrative is told over and over again in the pages of periodicals in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, and never are they any less coincidental as the story in "A Fragment."¹²³

An example of a happier resolution than the one in "A Fragment" is seen in "The Sailor's Return." In this story, Lucy, the sister of a presumed-drowned sailor, is being courted by a man in town. The man goes to Lucy's home to propose marriage, but—ignorant of the family's history of loss within the maritime industry—he first tells a story to Lucy and her mother about a shipwreck. Lucy's mother begins to wail and cries out for her son. Just as Lucy begins to cry for her brother, the brother returns home.¹²⁴ In the happily-ever-after closing to the narrative, the author writes that after his return he never goes back to sea: "The honest sailor amuses himself by working in their little garden, and twining the woodbine and honeysuckle round the walls of their dwelling; planting flowers around the green yard, or in telling long stories of toils and dangers at sea; and always ended them with a fervent thanksgiving that he had quitted a roving life, and was enabled to live with comfort and happiness in the home of his childhood."

¹²² "A Fragment." *Ladies Port Folio* (1820-1820).

¹²³ For other instances of the miraculous return see the anonymous works: "A Sailor's Gratitude," "Poor Jack the Sailor," and "Select Tales: The Shipwreck."

¹²⁴ M., H. "The Sailor's Return."

In both these versions of the miraculous return, the mariner is reintegrated into the domestic space—whether it is in the grave or in the garden. In the latter story, we have the added element that the sailor transforms the type of labor he performs for the family. Significantly, this new labor, which consists of working in the garden and telling “long stories of toil,” incorporates his previous labor by narrativizing it. This signals the degree to which labor was understood as something that could be narrativized. Much like the account Margaret Cohen gives of sailor’s telling yarns during long stretches at sea to incorporate labor into narrative, “The Sailor’s Return,” demonstrates how such yarns could exist within the domestic space as well.¹²⁵

One can imagine how the ending of this account, however unrealistic, would have been appealing to a readership who were most likely dealing with their own anxieties about loved ones out at sea. Such narratives enact, in a fairly straightforward way, imaginary resolutions to the real material anxieties many readers were unable to resolve in their actual lives, but they also offer a surplus of information about what constituted these anxieties. In one final example of the miraculous return, the author of “Select Tales: The Shipwreck” narratively reflects the way such anxieties manifested in those stuck at home while loved ones were out at sea. In this short work of fiction, the narrator meets a brother who cares for his sister because she is unable to independently function in society. When the group of characters see a ship caught in a storm just off the coast, the sister faints and needs to be carried back home. Afterward, the brother tells the narrator, “Poor Henriettea, she once loved a foolish sailor boy, and since, she never sees a ship without believing him on board, and will not allow herself to dream of any thing but the dangers of the sea, and storms, and tempests, and shipwrecks, always associating her idol with them

¹²⁵ As I discuss in regards to Allan Cunningham’s commentary on the story “Miles Colvine,” it was often the very type of fireside yarns that this sailor tells that were the source material for sea fiction in the nineteenth century literary marketplace.

all.”¹²⁶ These dreams and sentiments of Henrietta’s were so prevalent in the very periodicals which published her story that it is hard to imagine anyone connected to a mariner at sea would not have been similarly overcome with anxiety. That the anxiety could be so debilitating that one would become unable to function in society, illustrates the relays between feminized labor at home, which Henrietta was unable to conduct as her brother’s sour temperament evidenced, and the masculinized labor at sea. The countless narrative accounts of shipwrecks, storms, and funerals at sea that graced the pages of issue after issue, most often without much in the way of a resolution beyond that of grief, offer us a window into the reality of living in port while a family member is away at sea.

The most commonly narrativized maritime anxiety for those in port, shipwreck, appeared in many different forms. Sometimes periodicals would publish ornamented accounts of actual shipwrecks¹²⁷ and other times fictional stories of shipwreck would appear. Fictional narratives occasionally featured a sole survivor as in “The Shipwreck: An American Tale” in which a mother narrowly survives a shipwreck with her child and must rely on begging for charity while she mourns the loss of her husband.¹²⁸ Other times, they utilized an omniscient narrative construction like in “The Transport” where, when a ship catches fire and begins to sink, a woman throws her child overboard onto to a lifeboat yelling “Go, husband, go, for I am content to die.— Oh! live—live—my husband, for our darling Willy’s sake!” Unable to escape the flames, the husband ensures Willy’s safety and perishes with his wife.¹²⁹ Alternatively, some printed

¹²⁶ Later in the narrative, Henrietta is presumed drowned after she goes out to look for her husband among the corpses laying on the beach. But, at the end of the narrative, the brother, now an old man, visits Henrietta’s grave just as she happens to pass by with her long-lost husband whom she located that day long ago on the beach. “Select Tales: The Shipwreck.”

¹²⁷See “Variety” in which a mother, father, and child swim to safety by throwing overboard a sheep for the child to hold onto and “Dreadful Shipwreck,” both published anonymously in *Lady’s Weekly Miscellany*.

¹²⁸“The Shipwreck: An American Tale.”

¹²⁹ “The Transport.”

accounts demonstrate that those in port occasionally had direct experience with a shipwreck when it happened in proximity of the beach. In “The Haunter Beach,” by British poet Mary Robinson, a woman mistakes the hull of a shipwreck for a shed and finds herself among corpses.¹³⁰ Finally, just as Henrietta’s anxiety led to nightmares, shipwreck dreams also appeared in print in which a narrator would wake-up just before drowning. Often these accounts are surprisingly gruesome. One account features a narrator who is dragged underwater by the frozen corpses of his former shipmates, and another describes a long and protracted death as the narrator drifts on flotsam under the hot sun starving to death.¹³¹

In these examples, it is significant to note that there is no clear delineation between the domestic sphere and the onboard world of sailors. Whether it is the misrecognition of a wrecked hull for a home or the physical breaking apart of families through shipwreck, such narratives represent oceanic disaster and domestic disaster as one and the same. Even in the accounts of the nightmares, the distinction between the port and oceanic spaces are confounded when the dreamer is instantly delivered from the ocean back to their bed. This imaginative relay between the ocean and the dreamer at home finds unusual expression in an “Editor’s Study” that serves as a preface to the poem “The Sailor’s Funeral” attributed to Mrs. Sigourney. In the study, the editor ruminates at midnight on such a funeral and asks, “What is it all but a dream? He with whom yesterday we roved and forgot care; whom to-day finds on the ocean bound for foreign climes—what is he but a dream?” Considering who else might be awake at this hour, the editor imagines a student up late studying writing who, despite “All the treasure of knowledge and thought he has been heaping up for years, death will perchance to-morrow wash away with a

¹³⁰ Robinson, Mary. “The Haunted Beach.”

¹³¹ For the former see: “A Fragment.” *Lady’s Book (1830-1833)*. For the latter see: “A Tale of the Sea.”

single wave,” as well as a mother who “wakes and sobs as she thinks of her buried child; and the wife whose husband is on the deep.”¹³²

The reverberations of disaster also travel in the opposite direction when domestic tragedy impacts those onboard ships, as a short work of fiction by Alexander Hamilton Heysham demonstrates.¹³³ Heysham’s father was a captain and the naval officer of the port of Philadelphia. Heysham himself died at the age of 28 after a long battle with an unnamed disease. His obituary in 1830 notes that this disease “disabling [sic] him for laborious pursuits, he cultivated with enthusiasm and ardour, a taste which he had early imbibed for drawing and painting . . . He was also a writer of much merit, and contributed to most of the periodicals and daily papers of this city.”¹³⁴ Whether it was because he was uninterested or unable to follow in his father’s career in the maritime industry, he turned from a career onboard a ship to an aesthetic life of representing such labor. Perhaps keenly aware of the way difficulties at home in port had reverberations on board ships, Heysham wrote “The Messenger; Or, A Yarn Upon the Lee Booms—A Sea Story” which was published posthumously. In the story, an old tar tells a yarn to a bunch of young sailors to harangue them for their skepticism about old-time maritime superstitions like the Flying Dutchman. In his yarn, he explains that after returning home from a long stint at sea, he found his mother had been deathly ill, but the farmer’s daughter Molly Spencer had cared for her and nursed her back to health. Enamored by Molly’s care for his mother, the sailor proposes to Molly, spends all his money from his previous voyage on a cottage for Molly, his mother, and

¹³² See “Editor’s Study” and “The Sailor’s Funeral” both from *The New-York Mirror*.

¹³³ In addition to Heysham’s narrative which I discuss below, see: “For the Ladies’ Literary Cabinet,” an 1819 poem attributed to Horentius in which a sailor becomes unable to work once he hears that a woman he loves has died; and “The Sailor’s Mother” published in *The Methodist Magazine*, a poem in which a sailor learns of his mother’s death and it throws him into crisis. He writes, “I, her wretched orphan, so long the object of her tenderest care, must wander about the world without a home—with no heart to feel for me, and no eye to pity me; must meet with the neglect, the scorn, and the reproach of an unfeeling world, and at last sink, unpitied and unknown, to a watery grave!”

¹³⁴ “Obituary.”

himself, and goes on another expedition to earn money before their marriage. Accompanied by Lynn, a largely disliked sailor from the same town, the narrator boards a ship that quickly becomes haunted by a specter. During the voyage, Lynn takes sick while the narrator tries to deal with a figure who has appeared up in the masts who looks like “a strangled man” and produces “hellish laughs” and a “wild woman-like scream.” Eventually, having connected Lynn’s illness to the apparition, the captain decides they are being haunted by a messenger brought to them by some evil deed of Lynn’s. At the close of his story, Lynn confronts the narrator and confesses that just before they set sail he had murdered Molly Spencer out of jealousy and tried to frame the sailor by using his knife, but he mixed up the knives and accidentally left his own. Having given this confession, Lynn dies. Upon returning from the voyage the sailor learns that what Lynn said was true and finds his mother dying from heartbreak. He then writes, “My hopes had all gone astern. And I didn’t care much what come. The cottage was there and I thought to live there for mother and Molly’s sake; but my troubles wasn’t done. I’d bought the cottage with a bad title, as they called it, and had to give it up. I thought the sea was the best place for a broken heart.” This closes his story and those who came to listen look at the old tar and “could not conceal their surprise to witness such feelings emanating from a heart which they had considered as hard as the timbers of their gallant barque, and rude as the waves she rode.” Heysham, through this story, tracks the way the domestic world of the port, especially tragic occurrences in port, haunt the world of the ship.

But there is another reason for the haunting. We learn early on that Lynn is disliked by the other sailors because he had previously worked on slave ships. When he makes his confession to the narrator, he admits that he was in love with Molly and tried to win her over by making a lot of money. He says, just as a “a smile crossed his deathly face. ‘I loved her, and I

tried hard to win her. I turned slaver, to get money to marry her. I joined a pirate, and—and,’ said the dying man, as he raised on his elbows—‘I robbed—I murdered—and—and I sold my soul to make her mine.’” This confession harkens us back to a moment in the narrative when the apparition appears, and the old sailor describes it saying “his face was either black or bloody.” This narrative uncertainty signals that the messenger is haunting Lynn for more than his murder of Molly Spencer, as his role in the violence of the slave trade is directly evoked in this passage. It may be the case, being published posthumously in 1831, that the act of working on a slave ship and becoming a pirate was one and the same act. Or, because the story features an old tar telling an old story, Lynn may have worked on the slave ship prior to 1807. In any case, the decision to work within the slave trade was equated with selling his soul for money. What we are left with is a story of a ship haunted by an act of domestic murder that is itself haunted by the slave trade.

Much like the “Glance” that began this chapter, this narrative explicitly addresses the presence of slavery and the slave trade without necessarily elaborating an abolitionist politics. What this narrative does illustrate, however, is the understanding that the slave trade is a past that constitutes their present as it continues to haunt those laboring within the maritime industry. Additionally, it makes plain the way other sailors and people in town dislike Lynn precisely because of his involvement within the slave trade, and indeed their distrust of him is confirmed by the fact that he murders Molly out of jealousy. As his violence moves beyond his participation within the slave trade and enters the domestic space, the narrative seems to suggest that such violence not only haunts the space of the ship, but may have real violent manifestations in the home port as well. As such, Lynn and those who ship with him are haunted by a woman’s scream and a face that is either “black or bloody” or, perhaps, both. While black subjectivity is not imagined within the space of the narrative as the history of the slave trade is specifically

something that haunts *white* sailors and domestic spaces, this piece of fiction is engaged in imagining the aftermath of a maritime industry built on the violence of the slave trade. Rather than suppress the reality of the American maritime industry's participation in the slave trade as Cooper's sea novels do, Heysham's narrative calls attention to the anxiety around this recent past as something that haunts the industry and continues to threaten violence as those who made a living within this industry continue to work and live in port towns.

The character of Lynn also calls into question the act of charity that began this chapter. The "Glance" praises the act of charity toward the injured sailor who came in from the West Indies. Likewise, Marcus Rediker has pointed out that sailors who worked on slave ships were "nightmarish in appearance" and explains that "some had a starved and beaten appearance, courtesy of their captain. They had "cadaverous looks," and indeed many were near death. The more able ones "begg[ed] a mouthful of victuals from other seamen." One well-travelled sea captain called them the "the most miserable objects I ever met with in any country in my life." These "refuse" sailors of the slave trade depended on charity."¹³⁵ The fact that Lynn acts violently in port and is so widely disliked by people in town and the sailors with whom he ships seems to call into question the way charitable institutions negotiated offering charity to sailors who had made their living through the violence of the slave trade. Lynn, and others like him, is a figure on the outer limit of the project of sympathetic attachment. However, the people who were racialized and enslaved are, through their absence, excluded from the calculation of charity and, instead, figure as specters, haunting the continuance of the trade.

Thus far, all the pieces of fiction, non-fiction, poetry, and texts-in-between work to establish clear connections between the life out at sea and the life in port. Whether it is

¹³⁵ Rediker, *The Slave Ship: A Human History*, 351. Rediker is citing from various sailor testimonies in the archives about the turn-of-the-century slave trade.

enumerating the anxieties caused by having a loved one or person you depend on financially out at sea, imagining and narrating miraculous resolutions to the dangers labor within the maritime industry, or investigating the inheritances of the violent history of the slave trade, such accounts confound any easy distinction between feminized labor in port and masculinized labor at sea. In addition to what I have already cited, there are numerous love letters,¹³⁶ humorous anecdotes,¹³⁷ and passages of domestic sentiment¹³⁸ that also reflect the enmeshment of these worlds with each other.

Yet, while such accounts established material relays between the world of the port and the world of ships at sea, there was also a real crisis of information that existed. Oftentimes, sailors would be gone for years at a time without being able to write letters home. Other times, it was difficult to confirm who had died and who had survived a disaster at sea. As such, it is necessary to understand how the writings in such periodicals went beyond just illustrating the networks between actors in the maritime industry, these periodicals were also concerned with establishing a type of informal epistemological approach to gaining knowledge about those at sea.

For instance, these same periodicals demonstrated a preoccupation around the true character of a sailor. Portrayed variously as characters for sympathetic identification, derision, or to humor, the figure of the sailor is ever present in these periodicals. Periodicals had equal portions of pieces praising the sentimentality and generosity of sailors like the “Glance” that opens this chapter and pieces demeaning and making fun of sailors. Punchlines usually revolve

¹³⁶ See: “Sailor’s Love Letters,” and “A Husband’s Reflections At Sea: Addressed to His Wife.”

¹³⁷ See: “A Sailor’s Wedding” in which a sailor yells at a minister during the marriage vows saying “Avast, there-- What do you think I’m such a blubber as all that comes to?” When told he must repeat the vows the sailor explains, “for better and richer, if you will--but d--- me if I’ve anything to do with poorer and worsen.”

¹³⁸ See: Elah’s “The Pirate at His Mother’s Grave.”

around the idea that while a sailor knows a vast amount of nautical terminology, this terminology is either useless or an impediment in society. Representative of this is an “Anecdote of an Irish Sailor” that ran in the *Ladies’ Museum* of Philadelphia in 1800 in which an Irish sailor gets drunk and is locked up in wooden stocks, but when he tells his captain about it, confuses it with going into the woods.¹³⁹ Or in the “Anecdotes and Scraps” of the *Ladies’ Literary Museum* in 1817, when a sailor is struggling to ride a horse because the saddle keeps sliding forward, he ties rocks to its tail for ballast.¹⁴⁰ And, as one final example, in the same issue, two sailors are described trying to help a donkey get over a wall and out of the pound. A passerby asks what they are doing and they reply, “Why lookee, master; we saw this here animal aground, without victuals, d’ye see; and so my messmate and I agreed to cut his cable, and give him his liberty; because we have known before now what it is to be at short allowance.” In each of these accounts we see sailors confusing and confounding the landed world with terms, practices, and occurrences at sea. These accounts, while not outright condemnations of sailors, expose a preoccupation with the character of maritime workers and their relationship to female readership in the early nineteenth century.

However, the most common trope of this body of literature, and the one that demonstrates the struggle to ascertain information about those out at sea, is a description of a person on the shore who is looking out to the ocean and crying. Most often, the subject of this scene is a solitary wife of a mariner, but, notably, it is also often seamen who have lost someone at sea, as well as siblings, parents, or friends who are parting with a loved one. A primary focus of these poems and accounts is the attempt to gain some insight or closure into what might be happening

¹³⁹ “Anecdote of an Irish Sailor.”

¹⁴⁰ “Anecdotes & Scraps.”

to their loved one. A typical example of this account can be seen in the first few stanzas of the poem “On Seeing a Young Man Take Leave of his Sister to Cross the Sea” by the author Maria:

O, how sad the hour of parting!
 Strong the fond fraternal tie;
 Tears of fond affection starting,
 And the bosom rending sigh.

The streaming eye, the look evasive[,]
 Told the parting mourners dear,
 And in silence, most expressive,
 Bade adieu, and dropt a tear.

Thinking on the storm that rages
 On the the rough Atlantic main,
 Something in my breast presages
 That we ne'er shall meet again.¹⁴¹

Out of the seven stanzas, all but one mention the tears of the brother or sister. This embodied form of mourning plays a key part in this trope. Importantly, with the occasional exception of the home, it is almost exclusively at the seashore that this embodied mourning takes place.

Periodicals would occasionally publish letters and poems written by sailors to their partners and family, and often these letters would reference such tears and attempt to offer consolation.¹⁴²

Another example of this trope is the serialized work of short fiction “Miles Colvine: The Cumberland Mariner” which had some success in the early nineteenth-century periodical marketplace.¹⁴³ The story concerns an old hermit who mysteriously has a solitary seashore cottage far from civilization. It is rumored that he is the sole survivor of a shipwreck and, as

¹⁴¹ Maria. “On Seeing a Young Man Take Leave of His Sister Cross the Sea.”

¹⁴² An example is the anonymous “A Husband’s Reflections at Sea: Addressed to His Wife”: “Now if for me, my love, by hopes or fears, / Thine eyes are fill’d with ever anxious tears, / One consolation still remains behind— / Thy faithful husband ever has been kind.”

¹⁴³ It seems that “Miles Colvine” was first published in either the *London Magazine* or the *The Weekly Entertainer and West of England Miscellany* in December of 1821. In 1822, it was republished in Boston’s *The Atheneum*, Philadelphia’s *The Saturday Magazine*, and, importantly for my purposes here, New York’s *The Weekly Visitor and Ladies’ Museum* which was evidently impressed enough with the story to republish it only a few months after the original without attribution.

such, there is much superstition around his deliverance. Eventually, the narrator finds out that the hermit lives alone with his daughter at the shore where they arrived after surviving a shipwreck. While Miles Colvine and his daughter were saved from the shipwreck by a skilled sailor, he lost his wife in the storm and refuses to leave the shore so he can look out to the last place he saw her. The memorable final lines of the story are, “Such was the narrative of Miles Colvine. He has been dead several years, and though his daughter wedded the man who saved her father and her, he refused to forsake the sight of the Solway and the sound of its waters, and was found at his cottage door cold and stiff, with his eyes open and looking seaward.”¹⁴⁴ While in this story the mariner’s eyes are dry in death, it nevertheless emphasizes the devastation of losing a loved one at sea and the indefinite process of attempting to gain some insight by staring out at the ocean.¹⁴⁵

Interestingly, this work of short fiction’s publication history gives us insight into another way that such periodicals complicate the narrative of the development of the genre of American maritime literature. While in the periodicals I mention above, “Miles Colvine” is printed with no attribution to an author—with the exception of the *Weekly Entertainer* where the attribution is too obscured to read—it appears to have been written by the Scottish dramatist Allan Cunningham. In an appendix to an 1822 issue of *The New Monthly Magazine and Literary Journal* from Boston, there is a review of a collection entitled *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry* by Allan Cunningham of which the reviewer wrote, “Miles Colvene [sic], or the Cumberland Mariner, is to our taste the most striking and pleasing of the collection.” The reviewer, while comparing Cunningham’s style to his good friend Sir Walter Scott’s—whose novel *The Pirate* Cooper saw as his main competition for reanimating maritime literature—gives

¹⁴⁴ “Miles Colvine: The Cumberland Mariner.” *Weekly Visitor and Ladies’ Museum (1817-1823)*, 35-36.

¹⁴⁵ See also: for a poem containing a sailor’s tear for his home, see “For the Ladies’ Literary Cabinet”; for a poem dealing with grief after the loss of a loved one, see Barry Cornwall, “Sea Shore Stanzas”; and for a later example of this trope see “Meditations: On the Sea Shore.”

readers some insights into Cunningham's composition process, "The way in which he gathered the outlines of his fables is thus explained by Mr. Cunningham. "In former times, and within my own remembrance," he says, "old men wandered from house to house, chanting ballads, reciting portions of the old romances and curious stories of real or fictitious adventures. I have listened to these oral novelists at our farmers' hearths when they pleased many an audience, and like the minstrel of old, won their food and their raiment, of which they were worthy. To these humble and wandering novelists I owe the origin of many of the stories in this collection.""¹⁴⁶

Cunningham's description of these wanderers as proto-novelists who spun tales in the hearths of townspeople has a striking resemblance to Margaret Cohen's description of the sailor's yarn. What I believe this demonstrates is the degree to which sailors' yarns existed as much within the domestic space of the home as they did in the space of the ship.¹⁴⁷

One final example illustrates the extent to which this trope was a discursive practice meant to ascertain some information about those at sea: "Upon the Sea-Grit Beach She Stands" by Mrs. Muzzy. In the poem, we witness a woman weeping at the shore and see how her tears form impressions in the sand that the poet configures as a type of record of her sorrow for her loved one who is out at sea. These lines seem to alternate between gesturing toward a material record and the futility of such a record. Because this poem clarifies some of the tropes and themes I have been discussing so far, I offer a few lengthy sections from the poem:

Upon the sea grit beach she stands,
Her own forsaken native soil,
And seems to write upon its sands
With streaming eyes and trembling hands—
The story of her woes and toil.

Ah! soon the tide will wash away

¹⁴⁶ "Appendix: New Publications, with Critical Remarks."

¹⁴⁷ For another example of how such stories originated from the hearth, see "The Fisherman's Domestic Pleasures," which is a reprinting of a section from Samuel Pratt's *Gleanings in Wales*.

The tale of these long sorrowing years;
 No *friend* of thine will pass that way—
 No loved one o'er that lone beach stray,
 To bathe the record with their tears.

...

Ah! who can tell what changeful years
 Are passing through that stranger's mind!
 What hopes, what agonies, what fears,
 What gleams of rapture, quench'd in tears—
 What pangs for all that's left behind!

Ah! could that fading record stay,
 'Twould tell of *love*'s pure tender dream
 Fair bubs of promise snatch'd away,
 Fond ties dissolv'd by slow decay—
 All swept down time's resistless stream.

...

'Twould tell—but ah! the illusion flies
 'Twas sleeping *fancy*'s idle theme,
 No sea-grit beach salute thine eyes,
 The scene where all thy sorrows lies—
 Is here—and all the rest *a dream!*¹⁴⁸

The first stanza suggests that she writes in the sand either through the impressions her tears make, or, perhaps, by drawing in it with her “trembling hands.” In either case, the embodied act of crying and trembling is what “seems” to record the history of her troubles. But what is most striking about this poem is the way the woman in the poem is standing still, yet seems to experience multiple temporalities at once.

While she is on the shore weeping, we are asked to imagine the “changeful years” that are passing through her mind. These past events become immediately “quench'd” in the present moment as she embodies her remembrance of these events through tears that are currently recording her woes in the sand she is standing on. Because of this, we are not taken back to the past as we are, for instance, in the way the old tar of Heysham's story brings us into the past, but instead are aware of how the past ruptures into this moment of the present. There is also an

¹⁴⁸ Muzzy, Mrs. “Upon the Sea-Grit Beach She Stands.”

awareness throughout the poem that “soon the tide will wash away / the tale of these long sorrowing years” as the woman thinks or the poem’s narrator laments, “Ah! could that fading record stay.” This awareness of the impending future seems to emerge out of a previous moment in which she speculated on the future and was disappointed. We are told that if we could read the record her tears write we would learn of dreams and “promise snatch’d away, / Fond ties dissolv’d by slow decay— / All swept down time’s resistless stream.” As such, this poem offers a particular apprehension of time through the embodied act of weeping that allows the woman on the sea-grit beach to be present in her body at the same time that she negotiates the “changeful years” and the “soon” future, symbolized by the ebbing and flowing tide that threatens to erase the record of her struggles. However, while the future seems impending and the past seems to rupture the present, the lines “The scene where all thy sorrows lies— / Is here—and all the rest *a dream!*” indicate there is neither a past nor a future, but that they nevertheless exist “here” through dreaming. We can read this final turn of phrase as implying that while we are fixed “here” in whatever our surroundings are, through the imaginative act, we can understand how the past ruptures through to the present and anticipate the future by recognizing the “resistless stream” of time.

This poem, which configures tears as a type of ink that can record her life unto a littoral space, confronts us with the discursive practice of weeping. Weeping, here, functions more than as evidence of sorrow, it is the means by which information is gleaned, even if fleetingly. As I discuss at the close of this chapter, Mary Carr Clarke also narrates her own moment of weeping and analyzes its impact on her life and writing. However, before getting to that particular moment of tears, I look at how the trends and tropes I have discussed find expression throughout Mary Carr Clarke’s writing career. Rather than narrating the experience solely from the

perspective of the mariner, Mary Carr Clarke, like the poems, anecdotes, and pieces of fiction I have just discussed, looks to the homes, shores, and cities of sailors in addition to ship life. This sentimental countercurrent to maritime writing attempts to form attachments between actors caught up in the maritime trade: families stuck at home, dock laborers in distinct ports, and the seafarers themselves. In *Clermont Herbert; or, Presentiment* written by Mary Carr Clarke in 1814, these patterns also find expression in novel form.

Mary Carr Clarke's Maritime Networks

While it is clear that women's periodicals of the time were engaged in producing knowledge about the American maritime industry through fiction and poetry long before Cooper wrote the first pages to *The Pilot*, the author Mary Carr Clarke¹⁴⁹ stands out in these writings as an author who was both intimately connected to the maritime world and spent much of her career exploring the relationship between women and the maritime world in fiction, drama, poetry, and song verse. Carr Clarke's husband was a naval officer who was severely injured in the War of 1812 and died shortly thereafter.¹⁵⁰ Because of this, Carr Clarke would have been intimately familiar with the maritime industry in the U.S. and it is safe to assume that her engagement in her writing with sailors, captains, dockworkers, and ocean-going passengers were drawn from personal experience. In much the same way Sir Walter Scott's friend Allan Cunningham explains he found material for his stories through the hearth-side recounting of adventures from old men,

¹⁴⁹ She used the name Mary Carr in the majority of the writing I discuss here, but after the death of her husband in 1816, she started going by Mary Clarke. It is not clear if she remarried. Because the majority of her writing is published under the name Mary Clarke, including in works which retroactively cite Clarke as the author of original fiction in the *Tea Tray*, I have chosen to use a compound version Mary Carr Clarke throughout. See: Susan Branson, *Dangerous to Know: Women, Crime, and Notoriety in the Early Republic*.

¹⁵⁰ In the memoir of Ann Carson, Carr Clarke explains that she felt an attachment to Carson because they both had maritime husbands who had died, "I had lost my husband very shortly after Richard Smyth's execution; he too had been an officer in the last war, and lingered for a long time" (119).

Carr Clarke was most likely privy to a number of yarns recounted within her own hearth.

Unsurprisingly, throughout her life she continually took on maritime themes and elements in her writing. She was the ghost writer for Ann Carson's memoir, a woman who also struggled to negotiate the life as a widow to a sea captain, wrote a play entitled "Lake Champlain" about the War of 1812 and the women of sea captains, and, in November of 1814, started *The Intellectual Regale; or, Ladies' Tea Tray*, the first American periodical to be edited and run by a woman.¹⁵¹ In the periodical, Carr Clarke published her own novel *Clermont Herbert; or Presentiment* which lasts almost as long as the periodical itself, but, after two years and nearly sixty issues, Carr Clarke is forced to dissolve the publication because of financial hardships.¹⁵²

In her study of Ann Carson's ghostwritten memoir, Susan Branson describes Mary Carr Clarke as a very self-conscious narrator and author, always aware of how her writing impacted her readers. In the *Tea Tray* she often wrote notes to readers drawing on their sympathies to try and get them to financially support the periodical. In addition to the unwaged work of raising her children and tending to her dying husband, Carr Clarke is clear that she began the *Tea Tray* as a way to earn an additional income for her family. Reminiscent of the "Glance" that opened this chapter, Carr Clarke was a widow with small children who we can assume would have been in need of charity, but whether the charity was insufficient or unavailable, she was forced to turn to the world of publishing as a way to earn a living for her family. After the dissolution of her

¹⁵¹ Carr Clarke is not credited as the author in the *Tea Tray*, but the novel is marked with an "O." which she states in her preface means original content. In an 1823 publication of *The Benevolent Lawyers; or, Villainy Detected. A Comedy, in Five Acts* the authorship is cited as: "by M. Clarke, Authoress of the Fair Americans and Clermont Herbert &c. &c. Because Mary Carr Clarke is perhaps best remembered, if at all, for her composition of *The Fair Americans* I believe it is safe to assume she is the author of *Clermont Herbert* as well.

¹⁵² Susan Branson has the best account of Mary Carr Clarke's life and writing. There are a few pieces of her writing that are cited by Branson that I have been unable to locate, "Lake Champlain" being one of them. It also appears that there was an extra year's worth of issues of the *Tea Tray* that are not accounted for in any of the archives I have found. My information about Mary Carr Clarke's life comes from: Susan Branson's *Dangerous to Know: Women, Crime, and Notoriety in the Early Republic* and "Gendered Strategies for Success in the Early Nineteenth-Century Literary Marketplace: Mary Carr and the Ladies' Tea Tray," as well as from Carr Clarke's own writings.

periodical, she worked for a time on *The Parterre* and later either moved to New York or had plays published in New York. Her plays might have been another attempt to secure money, but many of them seem to never have been performed. Another piece of writing she published as a way to earn money was the memoir of Ann Carson which, after Carson's death, she expanded and republished under her own name. What Carr Clarke's career demonstrates is that she was an insider to both the maritime industry and the world of publishing and was able to maneuver between both of them as a way to earn money in addition to the money that would have come in from her husband's service in the War of 1812. Across her writing that is available in the archive, it becomes clear how Carr Clarke had a deft understanding of the masculinized world of sailors, the co-constitutive and thoroughly enmeshed worlds of the ocean and the port, and the countercurrents of tropes within the periodicals marketplace. These understandings are demonstrated in even the earliest instantiations of her writing, such as in the very first issue of the *Tea Tray* where Carr Clarke begins her novel *Clermont Herbert; or, Presentiment* which itself begins with a shipwreck.

At the start of the novel, Clermont Herbert travels from Liverpool to Philadelphia in search of new business opportunities.¹⁵³ On the ship to the U.S., he meets Isabella, an American girl whose father is a rich slave owner who sent her to England "to be made a fine lady of" (69). The sailors tease him that Clermont should marry her and inherit the wealth, but he consistently rebuffs anyone who mentions this.¹⁵⁴ During their voyage they encounter a hurricane and are

¹⁵³ While the exact nature of this business is not stated, as Clermont is a merchant in Liverpool where the major industry was sugar and tobacco, it is safe to assume that much of his wealth comes from, at least in part, the slave trade.

¹⁵⁴ Indeed, at the end of the novel, while not going as far as to critique the institution of slavery, Clermont is seen to reject the wealth of Isabella for the poverty of Eloisa. Throughout her writings, Carr Clarke never puts forward a clear embrace of abolitionist politics, but the presence of the prohibited slave trade and plantation slavery are often referenced.

shipwrecked on a desolate island.¹⁵⁵ The crew spends six weeks marooned on the island and, because Captain C is drunk most of the time, Clermont has to quell a mutiny with a moving speech to the sailors. Near the end of their stay, Clermont fears that despair will cause the crew to take their own lives and he institutes morning and evening prayer to keep spirits up and ask for deliverance. Eventually, we learn that Clermont and company are saved by a ship headed to Philadelphia. They all board the ship and Isabella narrowly survives the trip.¹⁵⁶ This event remains one of the major preoccupations of the novel as Carr Clarke tracks how it influences and reoccurs throughout Clermont's time in Philadelphia, New York, and Liverpool. While the novel has many wanderings and subplots, it mostly follows the lives of Clermont, Isabella, Captain C of the wrecked ship, Clermont's family at home in England, and a couple groups of acquaintances in Philadelphia and New York as they work to gain insights about each other's lives in distant ports.

A key scene that dramatized how this event continues to reoccur throughout the novel is when Clermont goes to the theater with Harriet and Phebe, two acquaintances of his landlady in New York. When they get to the theater, they overhear an argument involving a sailor named Jack in the pit, "you are a d—d liar a puppy and a scoundrel; for it's Mr. Herbert from Liverpool that saved the lives of the crew when we were wrecked on that d—d desolate island ... for to go for to tell a sailor that has gone to sea man and boy these five and twenty years that he is mistaken, then he hears the man who saved his life belied by a lubberly rascal whose heart must be as black as tar if that stream comes from it—a swindler indeed— d—n your brass face." Clermont is embarrassed by the attention of the slightly drunk sailor, but, seeing there is no way

¹⁵⁵ *Clermont Herbert* vol. 1, no. 5. The whereabouts of this island are unclear, but it is apparently a desolate and unpopulated island in the middle of the Atlantic.

¹⁵⁶ *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 1, no. 5-6.

to avoid the attention, shakes his hand and listens to the rest of his story. The sailor, noticing Phebe and Harriet, says “he was glad to see him have command of two such little schooners; but neither of them is Miss Isabella. Ah, I see how it went; she was not pretty enough; well, well, all right. But that d—d rascal there who told me a rigmarole story, trying to make you out as big a villain as himself, O dem’me how I’ll wet his jacket when I get him out.”¹⁵⁷ While we don’t learn exactly what this man was saying about Clermont, we can assume it is connected to the rumors that have spread that Clermont has defaulted on loans to the banker, as I discuss below.

The sailor takes it upon himself to correct the false information by being a character witness to Clermont’s heroism. Chiding the crowd for laughing at his ramblings, the sailor insists “if any of you had been on the d—d island in the middle of winter, without victuals to eat, clothes to wear, or fire to warm you, you would not stretch your jaws quite so wide.” After this reproach proves successful, he demands “three cheers for Mr. Herbert who had saved all their lives when their d—d lubberly captain sat like an old woman on a hencoop sniveling. It was then he proved he was a man; and I am sorry [sic] he did not marry that little tawny girl, whom he nursed so well when she had like to have died, and we had no doctor for her.” While the crowds cheer loudly for Clermont, it is not the sailor’s tale of heroism that draws them in, but the question of love and sentiment between Clermont and Isabella.

Phebe, who is falling in love with Clermont, “fancied in Clermont she beheld one of the heroes of romance. How did she wish she had been in the ship! What would she have given to have been Isabella! Who was she? where, or what could she be? Perhaps she was a girl he had seduced, and then abandoned. But no! her heart revolted at the idea; Clermont was incapable of such action.”¹⁵⁸ In the next issue, Carr Clarke illustrates how it was precisely these questions that

¹⁵⁷ *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 1, no. 24.

¹⁵⁸ *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 1, no. 25.

piqued the interest of listeners, “Why Herbert, cried Jackson, you are quite a hero of romance. I have read an account of the wreck; but had no idea you were the man who had preserved the lives of the crew and passengers. But that girl; who was she?”¹⁵⁹ Clermont is then subjected to a flurry of questions about Isabella, their relationship, her current status, her family history, and Clermont’s behavior toward her. The major difference between the two accounts—the one Jack gives in the theater and the one that is eked out of Clermont from his friends and acquaintances—is that Jack focuses on Clermont as a heroic individual while everyone else in the theater seems to care little about individual heroism and fixates instead on his relationship to Isabella. Not once in the following scene does he receive a question about his heroic pursuits, how he quelled a mutiny, or saved the crew and upstaged the drunken Captain C.

Considering her as a highly self-conscious author, it is hard not to read this scene as a jab at the trope of the heroic individual within romanticism by showing how uninterested everyone at the theater seems to be by it. The sailor, it turns out, has buried the lede, and everyone must investigate to get the story they really want. In *Clermont Herbert*, Carr Clarke shows that when it comes to sea fiction, the crowds are not interested in the story of the single hero, but of the relationships between the crew and passengers, especially if there is a possibility of romance.

Additionally, this demonstrates that yarns about craft would have been a prevailing discourse, as Margaret Cohen argues. The sailor’s account of the shipwreck and the know-how employed by Clermont in order to escape the ordeal bores the audience as they demand to know how what they see as a romance plot developed. While Clermont is a merchant and not a sailor by trade, his skillset does not squarely fall within Cohen’s discussion of craft. However, the recapitulation of his ability to quell the mutiny, feed everyone, and flag down a ship for their

¹⁵⁹ *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 1, no. 25.

rescue through the sailor's account is emphatically authorized through this sailor's own experience and know-how. Addressing the crowd, he damns and feminizes Captain C for being too lubberly—indeed Captain C spends most of the rest of the novel on land—he emphasizes how he “has gone to sea man and boy these five and twenty years” and is therefore authorized to speak of Clermont's character, and insists that because those in the crowd have not had the experience of shipwreck they are unable to comment on Clermont's conduct. Therefore, Jack insists on narrating Clermont's conduct as one of heroism and craft.

On top of the way Clermont is rewritten by these various discourses as a hero of romance, a subject for sentiment, and a savvy figure of craft, the experience of shipwreck has material ramifications as well. The fact that the sailor is defending Clermont from the slander of a stranger points to the way that, because of his shipwreck, Clermont has been swindled out of money. While his employer was to have sent money for Clermont to pick up in New York, because he was shipwrecked, he was both late to pick up this transfer and had lost all documentation of this exchange. The banker tells Clermont that because the shipwreck was public knowledge, he cannot be sure that Clermont is really who he says he is. We learn later in the novel that the banker knew the money rightly belonged to Clermont, and out of contempt for the fact that Clermont is eventually able to successfully collect his money from the bank, he begins spreading false rumors about Clermont. These rumors reach Captain C and Isabella and it takes many chapters for the characters to sort out the truth and become reconciled. This dispersal of the novel into many different locales, allows Carr Clarke to track the way misinformation can spread.

The spread of information, whether false, accurate, embellished, or unattainable is one of the major preoccupations of the novel. The main force that drives a wedge between characters is

the unreliability of gossip. In order to establish the way this happens, Carr Clarke follows the trend in the sea fiction of early nineteenth-century periodicals and negotiates multiple focal points of the maritime industry at once. For instance, in Philadelphia, Clermont meets and falls in love with Eloisa and begins trying to navigate information networks between multiple ports. While living in Flatbush, Brooklyn and thinking of Eloisa in Philadelphia, he writes a letter to his parents in Liverpool asking for their approval of his wish to marry Eloisa. Out of fear that Clermont will marry an American girl and not Matilda (the childhood friend his mother wants him to marry), Clermont's mother writes him a letter stating that his father has died. Clermont hastily returns to England and is parted from Eloisa. Overjoyed that his father is actually alive, he neglects to confront his mother about the lie but is unable to contact Eloisa because he does not know her last name or address. As a dressmaker and the daughter of a widow, Eloisa hid her poverty from Clermont by asking that they only ever meet in the woods for walks and conversation. Eventually, Clermont becomes engaged to Matilda, but, having found love letters Clermont wrote to Eloisa, Matilda embarks on her own transatlantic voyage under the pretense of seeing the world before marriage. However, on her arrival in the U.S., she quickly becomes best friends with Eloisa and surreptitiously arranges a marriage party such that Clermont can be reunited with and married to Eloisa while Matilda can marry Clermont's childhood friend George. Finally, the novel closes with the arrival of a letter from Isabella in which she wishes them all the best and is apologetic that she did not attend the wedding but is too afraid of another shipwreck. These relays demonstrate the degree to which everyone in the novel is working to ascertain information about one another while they are living and working in distant ports. While these subplots, narrative meanderings, and precisely-woven character arcs are fairly standard for the sentimental novel, the degree to which the novel foregrounds the spread of information

across ports in the maritime world—drawing on Carr Clarke’s own experience with such networks—calls attention to the way maritime writing was concerned with the act of speculating about and attempting to ascertain information on those in distant ports.

This collision of sentimentalist discourse and maritime writing can be seen during the shipwreck chapters when Carr Clarke does something that Cooper and Melville later abandon in favor of romanticism’s hyper-focus on individual heroic pursuits: she tacks the narrative away from the marooned crew and returns the focus to Clermont’s family in Liverpool. Anabella, Clermont’s sister, is distraught over the news that Clermont’s ship never made it to port in Philadelphia and is assumed to have been wrecked in the mid-Atlantic. Much of the conflict at home revolves around surmising what has happened to Clermont and whether alternative paths (like staying and marrying his childhood friend Matilda) would have been better. This gesture happens again and again as the narrative moves between ports. An example of this narrative tacking is when Carr Clarke writes, “I will now exert the power of fancy, and by a thought, conduct my readers across the vast Atlantic; nor need they apprehend either storm or shipwreck in their passage, for I pledge my honor, that they shall reach the white cliffs of Albion, and be conducted safely to Mr. Herbert’s parlour, where is assembled the whole family: for the post had brought Clermont’s packet.”¹⁶⁰ But as the title of the novel suggests, the major trope of ascertaining impossible forms of information is the practice of presentiment.

Like the tropes I have already discussed in which authors established a type of informal epistemology, Carr Clarke both deploys presentiment as a melodramatic trope to stoke feelings of dark foreboding and build narrative tension and encodes in presentiment the speculative world of the maritime industry. This encoding points to two distinct forms of speculation that I have

¹⁶⁰ *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 2, no. 15.

been tracking thus far. The first is Ian Baucom's discussion of the "actuarial discourse of modernity" in which the speculative world of averages and generalizations subtends the slave trade. This speculation is the dominant mode in the Atlantic zone and would have been practiced by people like Captain C and Isabella's father. Alternatively, and relatedly, David Kazanjian takes Baucom's discussion of speculation and upends it by looking at the philosophical origins of speculation and argues that it was used improvisationally in the Atlantic world as a "recursive mode of thought, one that reflected upon how something has become what it has become, and how that thing could become something else."¹⁶¹ As an author who married a sea captain, Mary Carr Clarke would have been aware of the dominant form of speculation, and this speculation exists throughout the narrative, especially as characters remain preoccupied with matters of money. However, perhaps knowing firsthand of the informal networks that existed in the maritime industry through which information and money was exchanged, Carr Clarke also demonstrates this improvisational speculative practice and encodes it into her novel as presentiment, which offers the possibility to ascertain information that is otherwise unavailable. It represents a type of management of time, much like in "Upon the Sea-Grit Beach She Stands," in which a figure considers how their present came to be and negotiates possible futures. It is also a knowledge that is embodied and felt rather than logically pieced together. It, therefore, offers an apprehension of time in both meanings of the word—both a distinct grasp of the now and the yet-to-come *and* as a feeling of anxiety about a matter of temporality. While this trope is used by characters throughout the novel as a way to gain resolution and a semblance of certainty about the state of others, there is also a danger in orbiting within this informal epistemological method as the constant and tragic spread of misinformation demonstrates.

¹⁶¹ Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom*, 29.

Throughout the novel, this trope is deployed exclusively across the ocean. After Clermont leaves Liverpool for New York, his sister Annabella feels that “there seemed a *presentiment* of some evil impeding over her, for she could not banish the weight that oppressed her heart,” (original emphasis),¹⁶² and it is in the next issue we learn of Clermont’s shipwreck. However, Annabella continues to mull over the possibilities of Clermont’s state and, thirteen issues later, a letter from Clermont finally makes it to Liverpool letting the Herbert family know that he has survived the wreck. Their father exclaims, “I am too overjoyed to think; I can only feel,” and everyone in the family rejoices despite Clermont’s distance from them, thinking, “True, Clermont was in another quarter of the globe; the Atlantic divided them; but that was not the cold hand of death.” Annabella, however, was little changed because she felt she already knew of Clermont’s safety. When her brother Edward asks, “How did you know it, sister?” she replies, “Why by *presentiment*, said she; I felt he was alive; and when I tried to think he was not my heart revolted at the suggestion of my head.” Overhearing their conversation, the father concludes with the question that is more of a statement, “Then this is what you call *presentiment*?”¹⁶³ In one final example, at the close of the novel when Clermont’s friends Isabella and Phebe are unable to cross the Atlantic for Clermont’s wedding, Isabella sends a letter explaining that “they would cross the Atlantic to witness it, could they subdue their apprehensions of being shipwrecked; but as that is impossible, and both have large families to take care of, they content themselves with the hope of meeting in a better world. And this, good Mrs. Wilson says is *presentiment*.”¹⁶⁴ In all of these cases, *presentiment* functions as a corrective to the lack of formal communication networks within the maritime industry. As I discuss in

¹⁶² *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 1, no. 3.

¹⁶³ *Clermont Herbert*, vol. 1, no. 20.

¹⁶⁴ *Clermont Herbert*, vol.2, no. 32

chapter three, while formal networks of information were often vast and reliable, there was an even more extensive network of informal communication in which people in port learned about loved ones at sea and sailors spread revolutionary sentiments and updates on the status of mutinous crews around the Atlantic. In *Clermont Herbert*, presentiment is able to neatly function as a symbol of these informal networks and as a trope right out of sentimentalist discourse.

As Susan Branson notes, Carr Clarke herself participated in forms of speculation in the marketplace as a way to support a family and husband. She states that Carr Clarke's creation of the *Tea Tray* was mainly in response to an injured and dying husband who could no longer support the family. Carr Clarke found herself in the position of being the sole wage earner in the household and made such very clear in her address to her readers of the *Tea Tray*. Often, she appeals to their sympathies and invokes the specter of bankruptcy if she does not receive financial assistance.¹⁶⁵ Thus, we can read the very first chapter of *Clermont Herbert*, which signals to the readers that there will be a happy resolution, as serving a double purpose. In this first installment, the chapter is written from Eloisa's perspective and she only catches Clermont's eye. In the second installment, we are thrown back in time to when Clermont is a young man about to sail to America for business, and we do not meet Eloisa again for 38 issues. This is both a technique to gets readers hooked so they continue to buy issues of the *Tea Tray* to find out if Clermont is ever going to make his way to Eloisa, and it allows Carr Clarke to explore the relationships between characters across the maritime world. By the time we return to Eloisa and the novel wraps itself up, we have experienced and imagined a web of connections between sailors, dock workers, and families in New York, Philadelphia, and Liverpool. Therefore, while Carr Clarke's actual knowledge of speculation and her skill within the marketplace could be

¹⁶⁵ See Branson, "Gendered Strategies."

drawn on to support her family, she could also draw on it as an imaginative resource in her own writing about the networks within the maritime industry. This first novel by Mary Carr Clarke offers a clear start to her investigation into the impacts of the maritime industry on those not at sea.

These preoccupations reemerge when, in 1822, Mary Carr Clarke became the ghost writer of a memoir for Ann Carson entitled *The history of the celebrated Mrs. Ann Carson*. Ann Carson was a notorious figure in Philadelphia during the years Carr Clarke was writing the *Tea Tray* having remarried after her first husband was away at sea without communication for many years. When her first husband returned to Philadelphia, her current husband shot and killed him, was later executed, and Carson herself was sent to prison. In the second edition of the memoir that Carr Clarke wrote after Carson's death, she explains that Carson contacted her to write the story of her life after reading the *Tea Tray*. Not only did she agree to write it, but she housed Carson in her own home for a time. Susan Branson illustrates how this decision signaled a move in her career from writing middlebrow sentimental fiction to much more sensationalized fiction in order to try to make more money. This decision brought on scorn from the literary establishment, as a furious review in the *New Yorker* demonstrates: "This is the most 'unhandsome, slovenly course' of a book that has come 'betwixt the wind and our nobility,' since the Magdalen Report and Maria Monk. It is the abortion of a Mrs. M. Clarke—one of those female, literary Cyprians, who prostitute their small abilities for lucre—one of a class, which to the honor of the sex be it spoken, is extremely small in these latter days." After fuming this way for a while, the review goes on to describe the lengths they went to burn the copy of her book they received.¹⁶⁶ While the reviewers are upset that she uses her writing to try to make money,

¹⁶⁶ "The Memoirs of Ann Carson," 29-30.

Carr Clarke was always clear about this. She discusses her need for financial support in the preface to the first issue of the *Tea Tray*. After her periodical failed, she turned to drama, as she knew people who ran a theater in New York, often dramatizing current events in sensationalized ways.¹⁶⁷ While it is certainly the case that Carr Clarke was looking for money with the publication of this memoir—she says as much in the memoir itself—she gives another, non-monetary reason why she was interested in this story.

After the first memoir failed to sell well, partially because Carson ended up back in prison and public sentiment turned against her, Carr Clarke published *The Memoirs of the Celebrated and Beautiful Mrs. Ann Carson, Daughter of an Officer of the U.S. Navy, and Wife of Another, Whose Life Terminated in the Philadelphia Prison* in 1838. In this version, Carr Clarke reprints Carson's original ghostwritten memoir, but adds a new section to the end of the text that is written from Carr Clarke's point of view. She discusses their original agreement for the memoir, the process of writing it, and her subsequent relationship to Carson. In this new account, Carr Clarke describes how she initially declined to write the memoir after learning that Carson had been stealing from her. Learning of this, she throws Carson out of her house and severs ties with her completely. After narrating this scene, Carr Clarke writes,

I shut the door and rushed into the kitchen, here an hysterical affection seized me, I felt as though I had driven her from me, at a moment when I might have revived better thoughts and feelings, and probably led her back again to the paths of moral rectitude. There appeared to be a chord of sympathy between us, for which I could not account, as if our fates were united by a secret power, and I had ever thought of her more with pity, than that contempt which the females generally expressed towards her in her dark hours of

¹⁶⁷ An example of this is her 1833 play *Sarah Maria Cornell; or, The Fall River Murder. A Domestic Drama in Three Acts*

adversity. I had lost my husband very shortly after Richard Smyth's execution; he too had been an officer in the last war, and lingered for a long time. I had for several months been involved in a pressure of pecuniary difficulties occasioned by my collector's defrauding me, and the failure of payments from numbers of my subscribers, which at length compelled me to close my business¹⁶⁸ about the time Mrs. Carson was shut up by her creditors. Thus I had learned sympathy from mutual distress, and now regretted the hasty manner in which I had driven her from me. At length tears came to my relief, and I wept plentifully, or I really believe reason would have forsaken her throne. (119)

After this, Carr Clarke agrees to help Carson. The only explanation she gives of this connection is that they were both married to men who spent a good deal of their lives at sea and died, leaving Carr Clarke and Carson in the position of having to acquire money on their own. Their relation to creditors came, at least in a large part, out of their relationship to the maritime industry. When Carr Clarke writes "I learned sympathy from mutual distress" she explains this connection succinctly. However, while Carr Clarke is deeply upset at Carson's theft of her money—it is this that causes her to throw Carson out—she is still able to form a bond of mutual recognition of sympathy.

It is notable that when thinking of this connection and the distress it has caused her, she begins to weep. The weeping here is important not just because of the feeling of relief it gives her, but because she thinks that if she did not weep "reason would have forsaken her throne." The "her" in the sentence can be read as the sympathy she feels for Carson, and if she had not begun to weep, she would have reverted to cold reason and stopped feeling sympathy for Carson. The act of weeping here is more than just an embodiment of this mutual distress, it is the very

¹⁶⁸ Here, Carr Clarke references the financial collapse of the *Tea Tray*.

mechanism by which Carr Clarke maintains the sympathetic identification with Ann Carson. This scene is reminiscent of a piece Carr Clarke published in the *Tea Tray* some years earlier. In the second issue of the magazine, a reader's response to the first installment of *Clermont Herbert* appears. The reader, Amelia Levity, writes,

to you, who know our sex, it will be needless to say that "Clermont Herbert's" character will be applied by each of us to the "dear delightful creature we fair would call our own." But, dearest madam, don't give us any melancholy murdering stories, for I had rather a great deal laugh than cry. But, there is Miss C--, that does nothing all day but read "*Horrors of Horrors*," and such stuff, that makes her cry eternally, and for no other reason than because a gentleman happened to say that a woman never looked so handsome as when the tear of pity glistened in her eye. But there was another gentleman, whose name I won't tell you, but a much wiser man than the other, who told me that a smile playing round the mouth, and dimpling the cheeks, always made him wish to press the "cherry pouters" to his lips. So, dear madam, do give us some pleasant stories, and oblige yours, Amelia Levity.¹⁶⁹

After printing this letter to the editor, Carr Clarke prints just below a line break on the same page, presumably in response to Levity, the adage "Whom smiles and tears make equally lovely, all hearts may court."¹⁷⁰ This exchange illustrates how Carr Clarke was clearly aware of the function of tears in the sentimental novel—as well as the degree to which subscribers involved themselves in the development of the plot. However, rather than framing the act of weeping, as Levity does, from the vantage point of the male gaze, Carr Clarke rewrites it in Carson's memoir to be one of sisterly recognition. This moment of mutual sympathy and the embodiment of such

¹⁶⁹ *Tea Tray*, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 25.

¹⁷⁰ *Tea Tray*, vol. 1, no. 2, p. 25.

a recognition of sympathy is a moment when Carson's and Carr Clarke's history of indebtedness and abandonment by the maritime industry ruptures into this present moment of theft.

Recognizing it as such, Carr Clarke is able to speculate both over how this moment came to be and about what actions she will take to better her own position financially. As I will explore in chapter four, this moment of recognition takes a different course in *The Marrow of Tradition* when Janet Miller rejects Olivia Carteret's sisterly recognition after understanding the role Olivia's racism played in her disenfranchisement.

By first beginning my discussion of maritime writing in the U.S. context with Olaudah Equiano's *Interesting Narrative*, and by now offering an exploration of some of the major trends within the port town periodicals marketed to feminine taste, we can begin to see the outline of a countercurrent of maritime writing. From an understanding of these countercurrents, we can grasp the way the raced and gendered formation of what circulates as the genre of maritime writing offers a particular imagination of the maritime industry which obfuscates the articulation of racism with capitalism and invisibilizes feminized labor in port. In my next two chapters, I trace what I call a maritime sensibility—an affective disposition toward a set of tropes and figures—that emerges from this countercurrent of maritime writing that migrates beyond its original historical context. Offering authors recourse to a distinct apprehension of time and space and a way to explore the extra-state processes through which racial capitalism functions within and beyond national boundaries and laws, I track the way a disposition toward this sensibility emerges in distinct historical contexts. In what follows, I look to how Melville imaginatively returns us to a pre-Cooper maritime landscape in his Reconstruction-era novella *Billy Budd* and how authors as different as Willa Cather and Charles Chesnutt find resonances within maritime

sensibility to depict their post-Reconstruction world of territorial expansionist projects and the reorganization of racial capitalism within the postbellum American south.

Chapter 3:
Angel (of History) in the House: Melville's Historicization of the Origins of the American
Maritime Genre in *Billy Budd*

Almost exactly one hundred years after Olaudah Equiano first published the narrative of his life, the failed and mostly obscure writer Herman Melville began composing his final work of fiction. Melville decided to set his novella *Billy Budd, Sailor; an Inside Narrative* one hundred years in the past within the very British navy that Equiano negotiated most of his life. In fact, the wars between the British and French navies that serve as the crucial backdrop to the action in *Billy Budd*, were the very same battles that Equiano actually fought in as a sailor.

The novella follows Billy Budd as he is impressed onto the British warship *Bellipotent* where he comes into conflict with the Master-at-Arms Claggart. Claggart frames Billy, telling Captain Vere that Billy is involved in a mutiny, and Billy, when confronted with this information, semi- or unconsciously strikes out and kills Claggart. The novella's apex comes as Vere must negotiate common sense, maritime law, and his sentimental attachment to Billy in his ultimate decision to execute Billy. However, as with most works by Melville, much of the importance of the text lies outside of the plot, and we also encounter lengthy considerations of the historical surroundings of Billy's short tenure in the maritime world. It becomes apparent that as Melville ruminates on the world of the British navy in and around 1797, he shares many concerns with Equiano's narrative and the world of port-town periodicals. It is because of this unique overlap of two major writers of the maritime world that *Billy Budd* works for me as a privileged text for examining the way the original concerns and negotiations of writing about the American maritime world get remembered and recast by a canonical figure like Melville.

However, it is not only because of this unique temporal overlap that I have chosen to write about *Billy Budd*. In what follows, I argue that as a student of maritime culture and writing,

Melville returned to some of the original concerns of American maritime literature in the content of his final piece of fiction as well. By setting his text a century in the past, he is not returning to the ideas and concepts being worked out in fiction by authors like James Fenimore Cooper, William Leggett, or Frederick Marryat, but is instead returning to the historical moment in which, as I argue in chapters one and two, countercurrents of maritime writing were circulating and were working to imagine the maritime industry. Specifically, Melville's novella imaginatively joins Equiano's narrative in interrogating the role the slave trade played in building up conceptions of maritime nationalism as a way to deconstruct notions of military heroism. Melville's novella also draws out the relays between the world of sailors at sea and the world of periodicals in port. This happens in the way Melville reimagines Billy's life as news and poetry in the pages of a periodical circulating in the port towns, and by the way Melville tracks the gendered forms of labor present throughout the novella.

This chapter is animated by two major arguments. The first is this cashing-out of the work that chapters one and two have done. By re-examining different registers of writing produced and/or circulated within the U.S. literary marketplace that focused on the maritime industry, we can see that there are two interrelated concerns that have been suppressed in later configurations of the maritime genre. The first is what Christina Sharpe calls the asterisking of the slave trade, that is the immense amount work involved in suppressing and misremembering the U.S.'s role in and reliance upon the slave trade.¹⁷¹ The second is the feminization of the labor that went on in port to sustain the maritime industry by refusing to think, as Amy Kaplan has insisted, about gendered spheres of labor as co-constitutive.¹⁷² This chapter illustrates how it is only when we understand how these concerns were central to much of literature produced about

¹⁷¹ Sharpe, *In The Wake: On Blackness and Being*, 26.

¹⁷² Kaplan, "Manifest Domesticity."

the maritime industry that we can see what is at play in a text like *Billy Budd*. In other words, I argue that Melville's text is set in 1797 precisely because he is engaging some of the original concerns of the genre, and that scholars have largely missed this because our conception of the maritime genre obscures other texts that circulated in the U.S. literary marketplace. Secondly, beyond just tracking how the concerns of my first two chapters can be found in a canonical figure like Melville, this chapter also argues that Melville's text is disposed toward a particular maritime sensibility that emerges out of the countercurrents of maritime literature from this period. By imaginatively returning us to a maritime setting before Cooper developed his tenet of maritime nationalism, Melville, in the midst of Reconstruction, reopens some of these originary concerns and maneuvers such as confounding the distinction between the space of the port and the ship at sea, offering a non-linear apprehension of time, and exposing the extra-state gendered and racialized violence that underwrites maritime nationalism. I will continue to explore the application of this maritime sensibility in my final chapter, but here, I am concerned with the way Melville's text might offer a path to understanding what is at stake in the remobilization of such a disposition toward the American maritime world.

It is difficult to offer a near-complete account of the text of *Billy Budd* in part because there are so many allusions, strange passages, and contradictory ideas present in the novella. There is also always the probability that there are aspects of the text that remained incomplete or unrevised when Melville died, as it never went to print in his lifetime. Therefore, rather than offering a complete or definitive account of the narrative, I make my focus the underattended-to way this novella engages history, Melville's theory of historicization, and the way writing a novel about the ocean in the late-eighteenth century allows Melville to return to some of the original concerns of the maritime genre to see what they generate a century later. In what

follows, I explore both Melville's theory of history alongside his extensive historicization of Billy's maritime world. From there, I explore how such an understanding of the history in the novella might open up space for new readings of Captain Vere and the central dilemma of the novel. Finally, I close with an examination of sentimentalism as it functions through the figures of Admiral Nelson, Captain Vere, and Billy and argue that they might be best understood as figures that embody, if only symbolically, the relays between the different types of labor involved in the maritime industry of the late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century maritime world.

Melville's Hanged Angel of History

In trying to nail down the genre of the novella *Billy Budd*, one could do worse than call it a historical maritime novella. From the start of the narrative, Melville meticulously places these fictional characters in a real historical setting. He not only sketches out the historical context leading up to Billy's life, but surrounds the novella with future historical contextualization as well. While Melville admits that his plot has little to do with the movements, campaigns, and strategies of the British empire "restricted as it is to the inner life of one particular ship and the career of an individual sailor,"¹⁷³ he nevertheless includes historical sketches self-consciously. Almost as if he can't limit himself to talking about events leading up to 1797, the year the novella takes place, Melville confesses that "in this matter of writing, resolve as one may to keep to the main road, some bypaths have an enticement not readily to be withstood. I am going to err into such a bypath. If the reader will keep me company I shall be glad. At the least, we can promise ourselves that pleasure which is wickedly said to be in sinning, for a literary sin the

¹⁷³ Melville, *Billy Budd, Sailor and Other Stories*, 303. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

divergence will be.” Beyond merely indulging in the pleasure of historical detours, I argue that considering Melville’s historical framework might offer a glimpse into his formulation of how history interacts with his plots and characters.

Melville’s strange negotiations of temporality make the this question of historicization central throughout the novella. During his discussion of the 1797 mutinies in the British navy and their eventual suppression during the Napoleonic Wars, Melville gives a fascinating turn of phrase that imagines the power of the mutinies in light of the future’s (his present) reorganization of the maritime industry which protected against a similar occurrence:

[Impressment’s] abrogation would have crippled the indispensable fleet, one wholly under canvas, no steam power, its innumerable sails and thousands of cannon, everything in short, worked by muscle alone; a fleet the more insatiate in demand for men, because then multiplying its ships of all grades against contingencies present and to come of the convulsed Continent. (308)

We have an image here of both the indispensable role and demand for mariners at the same time that the phrase “no steam power” invokes Melville’s present and the phrase “more insatiate in demand for men” invites a comparison between 1797 and 1891 to remind readers how this form of insurrection has lost its traction as the maritime industry is no longer insatiate for the labor of sailors. It was quite the opposite, in fact. As steam power began changing the shape of maritime trade and industry, longtime sailors found themselves out of work and out of demand.

Through this odd narrative temporality, we can see how Melville, through a slight revision of Foucault’s adage, makes clear what many historical novels attempt to disavow: all historical novels are actually novels of the present.¹⁷⁴ Beyond just invoking his own maritime

¹⁷⁴ The concept of writing a “history of the present” is a central concept to Foucault’s oeuvre, but he addresses it explicitly in *Archeology of Knowledge*.

present, Melville also discusses in some depth the 1842 *Somers* mutiny and parallels it to Billy's trial. While it has been persuasively demonstrated that the *Somers* mutiny is mentioned because it was the model for the plot of *Billy Budd*,¹⁷⁵ it is of equal importance to consider what Melville uses this mutiny to say. In describing the minds of the three officers who, after hearing Vere's speech in condemnation of Billy, are in charge of making a decision about his fate, Melville argues that their frame of mind is the same as the frame of mind of the *Somers* commander, "[N]ot unlikely they were brought to something more or less akin to that harassed frame of mind which in the year 1842 actuated the commander of the U.S. brig-of-war *Somers* to resolve, under the so-called Articles of War, Articles modeled upon the English Mutiny Act, to resolve upon the execution at sea of a midshipman and two sailors as mutineers designing the seizure of the brig." Therefore, in the text the future functions as a way to understand the anxieties of these officers. Of this, Melville then writes, "History, and here cited without comment. True, the circumstances on board the *Somers* were different from those on board the *Bellipotent*. But the urgency felt, well-warranted or otherwise, was much the same" (365). How do we understand history in these frameworks? Parsing this in a purely biographical fashion, we can say that Melville heard about the affair on board the *Somers* and wrote a novella about it, disguising it as an unknown 1797 British mutiny. As such, we must understand the minds of the captains on board the *Bellipotent* through the minds of those on board the *Somers*. Yet, on the other hand, the Articles of War used in the *Somers* case can only be understood as coming out of the history of the English Mutiny Act, itself established in 1689.¹⁷⁶ Should we understand the *Bellipotent* as a foil to Melville's

¹⁷⁵ Melville's cousin was on board during the *Somers* mutiny and told Melville of the event and many of the details, such as the spreading of a rumor about a mutiny plot, are contiguous with the plot of *Billy Budd*. See: McFarland, Philip James. *Sea Dangers: The Affair of the Somers*.

¹⁷⁶ To make matters more complicated, C. B. Ives discusses how on both the *Bellipotent* and the *Somers*, the Mutiny Act and Articles of War were applied incorrectly. The Mutiny Act at the time of both events only applied to the army and the Articles of War do not warrant a drumhead court, like the one Vere calls, unless in it is needed in an

present, or are we to understand the *Bellipotent* as a historicization for the nineteenth-century maritime world? While certainly these histories are co-constitutive for Melville, their ouroboric construction tangles at every approach.

In the following paragraph, Melville continues to riff on this problematic of historical thinking. The entirety of the paragraph after his discussion of the *Somers* is a quote which the narrator attributes to a “writer whom few know.” Wyn Kelley argues in her biography *Melville: An Introduction* that this descriptor is something Melville “ruefully called himself”¹⁷⁷ and demonstrates how, at this point in his life, it was mostly an accurate statement. Therefore, in an added temporal complexity, Melville has his narrator cite something that Melville, “a writer whom few know,” has supposedly written elsewhere as a way to explain the way the novella treats history:

Forty years after a battle it is easy for a noncombatant to reason about how it ought to have been fought. It is another thing personally and under fire to have to direct the fighting while involved in the obscuring smoke of it. Much so with respect to other emergencies involving considerations both practical and moral, and when it is imperative promptly to act. The greater the fog the more it imperils the steamer, and speed is put on though at the hazard of running somebody down. Little ween the snug card players in the cabin of the responsibilities of the sleepless man on the bridge. (365)

I believe it is a mistake to read this as just apologia for or damnation of Captain Vere, as some scholars have tended toward,¹⁷⁸ precisely because Melville’s engagement with history here is so

emergency such as a mutiny, which Vere is certain is not occurring. See: Ives, C. B. “Billy Budd and the Articles of War.”

¹⁷⁷ Kelley, Wyn. *Melville: An Introduction*, 3.

¹⁷⁸ For instance, Christopher Sten reads it as a justification for the pragmatism of Vere’s actions, while Thomas Claviez reads it ironically as a damnation of Vere’s decision. See Christopher W. Sten, “Vere’s Use of the “Forms”: Means and Ends in *Billy Budd*” and Thomas Claviez, “Rainbows, Fogs, and Other Smokescreens: *Billy Budd* and the Question of Ethics.”

much broader than the occurrences on the *Bellipotent*. Additionally, as critics have pointed out, it is a tactically terrible decision to put on speed in fog as you would risk the lives of everyone on board. We must then either read this ironically, as Thomas Clarivez does, or metaphorically as I do.¹⁷⁹ The act of quoting himself immediately after comparing the actions on board the *Bellipotent* and the *Somers* places at least 1797, 1842, and 1891 all in relationship to each other. As such, I read this quote as issuing a similar insistence to Frederic Jameson's opening phrase of *The Political Unconscious*: "Always historicize!,"¹⁸⁰ or, because the ship is blown forward into the fog, as an image akin to Walter Benjamin's backward glancing "Angel of History."¹⁸¹ Rather than resolving historical conflicts into convenient ideologies, it is important to historicize the different actors and unpack the different tendencies at play. For instance, it is easy to recuperate past naval victories through the ideology of maritime nationalism, but this clears away much of the historical "smoke of it." As I discuss below, in the case of Melville's treatment of the battle of Trafalgar the historical smoke is composed of the fact that the crews in Trafalgar were mostly made up of former mutineers and prisoners and there is historical evidence that there was solidarity between the French and British crews to improve the conditions of wartime labor. Further, when discussing Trafalgar, Melville again returns to his configuration of history to argue that it is through incomplete or sloppy historicizations that people misremember or come to faulty conclusions about Trafalgar. Similarly, I would argue, Melville's formation can be applied to the genre of maritime fiction as a whole. When understood only through the genealogy of James Fenimore Cooper, we are confronted with a historical genre that attempts to remove much of the historical smoke surrounding the initial struggles over the imagination of the

¹⁷⁹ See: Claviez, Thomas. "Rainbows, Fogs, and Other Smokescreens: *Billy Budd* and the Question of Ethics."

¹⁸⁰ Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, 9.

¹⁸¹ Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," 257.

maritime industry. It is these historical origins of the development of maritime writing in the American literary marketplace that I discuss in chapters one and two, and that I argue Melville recontextualizes in his final work of fiction.

In this chapter, I will discuss the four key historical contexts that Melville invokes to contextualize the action on board the *Bellipotent*, the ship on which Billy is impressed, framed, and executed. The first, and most apparent, are the histories of the Spithead and Nore mutinies which shook the British navy and would have only just concluded as Billy boards the *Bellipotent*. The second historical context, though slightly less apparent, concerns the slave trade and colonization of the Caribbean. This context emerges through Captain Vere and his work under Admiral Rodney during the war against the French navy for control of the Jamaica colony. The third context that is important for Melville is the battle of Trafalgar in 1805 in which the British navy defeated Napoleon. In particular, Melville focuses on the heroic role that Admiral Nelson played in both defeating the French and in galvanizing a recently mutinous crew. Finally, it is important to consider the context surrounding the composition of the novella in the 1880s and 1890s alongside the references to distinct temporalities which puncture the narrative concerning the mid- to late-nineteenth century such as the dominance of steam-power in the American maritime industry and the 1842 *Somers* mutiny.

In what follows, I describe the historical framing Melville offers throughout this novella as historical enmeshment as a way to distinguish it from historical context because he gives an account of not just what lead up to Billy's life and death on the *Bellipotent* but also what happened in the years following his death. It is crucial not to lose how this is both a deeply historical text concerned with the late-eighteenth-century British navy and a text that is self-consciously about Melville's world at the end of the nineteenth century. Unlike Benjamin's angel

of history, Melville attempted to create a text that looks not just to the wreckage of the past, but in multiple directions at once. What might a mutiny in 1797 have been like if one had knowledge of 1805 and 1842 and 1891? A primary concern orbiting in the narrative is the attempt to properly understand and act within one's own historical present. In trying to understand his historical present, Melville creates his own angel, one named Billy. But this angel only gets him so far and nowhere is this as clear as when Billy strikes Claggart and Vere shouts, "Struck dead by an angel of God! Yet the angel must hang!" (352).

Mutiny in the British Empire

Just as the action on the *Bellipotent* is getting underway, the forward momentum of the plot is interrupted, in typical Melvillian fashion, for a history lesson. The first historical events Melville explores in the text are the 1797 Spithead and Nore mutinies, which, in the temporality of the narrative, would have been only months old. This context is clearly foregrounded throughout the novella and has received the most attention by scholars. Most traditional historical accounts of the Spithead mutiny consider it a reformist mutiny organized around small- to medium-sized demands, mostly concerning impressment, wage theft, being restricted from going on liberty when docked in port, and the overuse of flogging as punishment, while accounts of the Nore mutiny which followed shortly thereafter are much more varied and are often damning of the mutiny as unreasonable, sloppily executed, and corrupt. In G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Bobrée's 1935 study of the mutinies, *The Floating Republic*, they cite an admiral dispatch and state that, in the Spithead mutiny, "[I]f any revolutionary tendencies poked up their heads, they were crushed: for, as the men had told Fox, "[we] are not actuated by any spirit of sedition or disaffection whatsoever; on the contrary, it is indigence and extreme penury alone

that is the cause of our complaint.”¹⁸² While there were certainly tactics used to suppress the mutiny and delay the negotiations, ultimately the Spithead mutiny was successful and is remembered by Manwaring and Bobrée as “a stimulating because successful mutiny; the Fleet was the better for it, with happier men and worthier officers, and no grudge felt. At least, none was shown on either side.”¹⁸³

On the other hand, Manwaring and Bobrée write that, as the good-feeling spread after the resolution at Spithead, the Nore mutiny was less inclined to rejoice at the resolutions:

What, then, were the mutineers at the Nore to do? Were they humbly to return to duty and crave the King’s pardon? They had to make up their minds, from motives one can only conjecture, and with results which became too horribly apparent to the people of Great Britain. For this mutiny was far worse, more threatening, more violent, and longer maintained, than that at Spithead. If that had been a breeze, this was a full gale.¹⁸⁴

Similarly, James Dugan writes in *The Great Mutiny* that while the mutiny at Spithead was resolved with much celebration “the disturbance at the Nore, now three days old, was bigger and more violent than the breeze at Spithead.”¹⁸⁵ Such accounts, typical of the top-down, traditional understandings of the mutinies, do a few things. First, they center the British empire which causes them to conclude that the Spithead mutiny was the preferable and benevolent mutiny as the resulting reforms arguably strengthened the British navy even as they made the lives of sailors more tolerable. Viewing history from the vantage point of the British empire also prevents them from seeing connections between crews at Spithead and Nore and crews in different ports under different flags. Second, they are written with disdain for the average sailor

¹⁸² Manwaring, G. E. and Bonamy Dobrée. *The Floating Republic*, 36.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, 118.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁸⁵ Dugan, *The Great Mutiny*, 175.

who would have participated in the mutiny and only celebrates certain officers who participated in negotiations with the British government.¹⁸⁶ Finally, by centering the British empire and the panic of few key actors, such historical accounts downplay the role typical sailors played in the mutinies and the spirits that animated the rebellion.

Of the demands of the mutinies, Melville offers an assessment that seems at first in line with accounts like Manwaring and Bobrée and Duggan. He writes, “reasonable discontent growing out of practical grievances in the fleet had been ignited into irrational combustion as by live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames” (303). Yet, if Melville seems to be offering a fairly typical top-down understanding of the demands of the mutinies, when he writes that “reasonable demands” became “irrational” as if “by live cinders blown across the Channel from France in flames,” he also hints toward the possibility of communication networks of a revolutionary, Jacobin spirit. Melville again hints at this connection when he writes that the mutinies were “indeed a demonstration more menacing to English than the contemporary manifestoes and conquering and proselyting armies of the French Directory” (303). Emphasizing both the importance of the average sailor in the maritime world to the British empire and insinuating that the most dangerous threat to the empire might come from within itself, Melville projects the sailor as a figure who the empire both relied upon as a laborer and feared as an insurrectionary. Framing the mutinies this way forces us to consider them through the role the average sailor played onboard such ships, something that would have been absent in most discussions of the mutinies in historical texts at the time, and it is this refocus that we can see playing out on board the *Bellipotent*.

¹⁸⁶ Proof of this distrust of sailors is easy to come by. In their book *The Floating Republic*, G. E. Manwaring and Bonamy Dobrée discuss the crew’s dissatisfaction with flogging: “no doubt men did not like being flogged, but then what could officers do but flog when faced with the insubordinate prison-scum of which the crews were to some extent composed?” (8).

In the traditional histories of these mutinies, such insinuations are decidedly played down. Manwaring and Bobrée acknowledge that “to people endowed with lively imaginations, the [Spithead] mutiny seemed monstrous and sinister, not at all the simple protest of men who felt aggrieved.” They argue that while there is evidence of some official panic around the idea that a Jacobin spirit, of which “monstrous and sinister” serve as a euphemism, animated the mutinies, such suspicions were officially suppressed as imaginary. Of both mutinies Dugan writes, “Participations of Jacobins, if any, with the mutinies is still conjectural. In 1801, the Admiralty destroyed most of the captured mutineer documents from the Nore as “promiscuous papers.” If they contained any clues to republican liaison such would have certainly turned up in that volley of left-wing trivia and right-wing humbug, the Report of 1799 Committee of Secrecy. The Duke of Portland would not have missed one such paper had it existed.”¹⁸⁷ Yet, Melville’s suspicion that there was some information being blown from port to port, a suspicion which probably emerged from his experience of the way information and stories circulated in the maritime world during his years spent as a sailor, has more recently been supported by historians.

Beginning in the 1980s, historical scholarship on these mutinies began to vindicate Melville’s insinuation. Julius Scott’s study of the Haitian Revolution argues that it was through vast communication networks between sailors—whether enslaved, impressed, indentured, or free—that allowed for the mutinies and revolutions at the end of the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁸ Following the work of Scott, there has been a proliferation of historical studies which center the perspective of the sailor among these mutinies. For instance, Niklas Frykman argues that because historians have failed to be properly transnational when studying this period, they have missed

¹⁸⁷ Dugan, 467.

¹⁸⁸ Scott, “The Common Wind: Currents of Afro-American Communication in the Era of the Haitian Revolution.”

the scale at which an Atlantic radical ideology had spread throughout the maritime world. Frykman argues that vast communication networks led to not only the Spithead and Nore mutinies in 1797, but to a whole network of mutinies in the British, Dutch, and French navies almost simultaneously.¹⁸⁹ Building on such accounts, Marcus Rediker makes the argument in *Outlaws of the Atlantic* that, “It is inconceivable that naval mutiny could have exploded with such force and fury and on such a vast scale without the tales that were whispered on the lower decks of naval vessels far and wide, from Britain to France, to the West Indies, to South Africa.”¹⁹⁰ It is, in part, these whispers that Melville brings into focus when he writes about the lives of one crew on one ship amidst the massive system of maritime capitalism and the unwieldy spread of radical sentiments across the Atlantic.

While Melville is clear on how the Spithead and Nore mutinies ended, he leaves certain questions lingering in the narrative. Melville explains that the Spithead mutiny was eventually put down “after parleyings between government and ringleaders, and concessions by the former as to some glaring abuses” (304), and that while the Nore was much more resilient, its suppression was “only made possible perhaps by the unswerving loyalty of the marine corps and a voluntary resumption of loyalty among influential sections of the crews” (304). Loyalty, Melville claims deserves the credit for suppressing the mutiny at Nore. But it is a qualified loyalty. The mutiny forever destabilized and traumatized the British navy so that insubordination was treated more harshly than previously, as we eventually see in Vere’s treatment of Billy. Melville uses the metaphor of embodiment to describe the spreading of resentment and ill-feeling in the Nore mutiny to “the distempering irruption of contagious fever in a frame constitutionally sound, and which anon throws it off” (304-5). That is, what was once seen as

¹⁸⁹ Frykman, “Connections between Mutinies in European Navies.”

¹⁹⁰ Rediker, *Outlaws of the Atlantic: Sailors, Pirates, and Motley Crews in the Age of Sail*.

permanent and inflexible is now forever slightly destabilized, or at least needs to keep this bout of contagion in mind. How effective, then, were appeals to maritime nationalism in later battles? What was the attitude of crews on naval ships after the destabilization at the Nore?

While Melville does trace out this history in terms of major events and major actors, his text is ultimately unconcerned with those figures and, instead, attempts to write a history of this moment in British naval history through the sailors and officers on board the *Bellipotent*. As such, Melville makes a gesture very similar to Marcus Rediker when Rediker writes,

The old history will not do anymore—the exclusive focus on the Nelsons, Rodneys, Hoods, and Drakes, the great and powerful of the world’s navies and merchant shipping industries; the well born and the well heeded; the admirals, the commodores, the captains; the merchants, the businessmen, the entrepreneurs; on their battles by sea and their transoceanic imperial adventures; on the national glories heaped upon them; and on the national mythologies made of and through them ... This kind of history looks from the top down—history, in my view, seen from the wrong end of the spyglass.¹⁹¹

This question of how to understand such an unstable moment in maritime history is paramount for Melville. Since, in the case of the Nore, the spirit of rebellion was not relegated to a protest against particular abuses but was a general rebellion against the British empire and its exploitation of the sailors, it is harder to understand history in terms of admirals and major battles. Instead, because the spirit is generalized, so too does the history need to be. Rather than looking at the lineage of Rodney to Nelson, Melville looks to Billy, Claggart, Vere, and the old Dansker and their negotiations within their small part of the web of the Atlantic world. And it is

¹⁹¹ Ibid., 177.

in this tense historical moment that Captain Vere witnesses Billy accidentally strike and kill a superior officer.

Captain Vere in the West Indies

As if to further his impression that the Atlantic was a space where currents of revolutionary spirit could be blown from port to port, Melville gestures toward Captain Vere's history in the West Indies. Melville writes, "For [Vere's] gallantry in the West Indian waters as flag lieutenant under Rodney in that admiral's crowning victory over De Grasse, he was made a post captain" (309). Taking place in April of 1782, this naval battle between Rodney and de Grasse was a battle over the attempted invasion of Jamaica by the French. This is the second, less obvious historical enmeshment that Melville highlights in the novella. The history of the slave trade and colonization of the Caribbean is precisely the context in which Vere was promoted to Captain, and, as he is the man who ultimately condemns Billy to death, it is crucial to understand the relays between his experience with Rodney's management of British slave capitalism and Vere's knee-jerk reaction against mutiny.

Vere is central to the much-debated moral dilemma that is at the heart of the plot. The combination of Vere's decision to execute Billy despite his fatherly feelings toward him and Billy's final words "God bless Captain Vere!" have tripped up scholars hoping to derive a clear moral from the text. Trying to judge the meaning of the text or Melville's intent has been the subject of much debate in the early criticism on *Billy Budd*. The first critics to write on the novella argued that Melville embraces Vere's decision and thus, at the end of his life, departed from his earlier work which is run-through with strong anti-authoritarianism. On the other hand, critics shortly thereafter intervened to insist that the text must be read ironically, arguing that

Melville actually critiques military hypocrisy and authoritarianism.¹⁹² In short, in light of its 1797 setting during the naval battles following the French revolution, critics wondered whether this text embraced authoritarianism or revolution.

This is such a well-worn and longstanding argument in *Billy Budd* scholarship that later work on the novella which attempts to settle the score is obliged to first comment on the seeming impossibility of determining a textual embrace of either position. Much of this later scholarship instead turns to consider Captain Vere's character to gain insight into how we ought to understand his decision.¹⁹³ In discussing Vere's decision, many critics examine the early chapters on Vere's background as a way to understand his conduct.¹⁹⁴ Surprisingly, however, there are almost no discussions of the historical context in which Melville places Captain Vere. For a writer who understood the highly social and socializing elements of the maritime world, it is hard to overstate the importance of his placing of Vere in relation to Rodney. When historical comparisons are drawn by scholars, Vere is most often compared to Admiral Nelson. This is in part invited by Melville since he follows his first chapter on Vere with two on Nelson and compares the management of their respective crews. However, it is more significant, I believe,

¹⁹² E. L. Grant Watson's essay "Melville's Testament of Acceptance" is characteristic of the former argument, whereas Joseph Schiffman's "Melville's Final Stage, Irony: A Reexamination of Billy Budd Criticism" is characteristic of the latter. For more examples of the former see Mumford, Lewis. *Herman Melville*; Thorp, Willard. *Representative Selections*; Matthiessen, F. O. *American Renaissance*; Weir, Charles Jr. "Malice Reconciled: A Note on Melville's Billy Budd"; Sedgwick, William Ellery. *Herman Melville: The Tragedy of Mind*; Freeman, F. Barron. *Melville's Billy Budd*. For more examples of the latter see: Zink, Karl E. "Herman Melville and the Forms—Irony and Social Criticism in *Billy Budd*"; Withim, Phil, "*Billy Budd*: Testament of Resistance."

¹⁹³ One of the first accounts to look to Vere for a way out of this dilemma is Ives, C. B. "Billy Budd and the Articles of War." For other examples of accounts that simultaneously avoid and embrace this dilemma see: John Wenke's "Melville's Indirection: *Billy Budd*, the generic Text, and "The Deadly Space Between"" and Byron J. Calhoun, "Captain Vere as Outsider and Insider: Military Leadership in *Billy Budd, Sailor*."

¹⁹⁴ For accounts that use Vere's character description to condemn his actions see: Schaak, Douglas. "The Ananias Reference in *Billy Budd*."

that Melville literally places Vere on board Rodney's ship in the West Indies as the place he first is promoted to Captain.¹⁹⁵

While I argue it is crucial context for understanding Vere, it is by no means easy to understand how Melville would have understood Rodney's career and even harder to determine what Rodney signifies for Vere's character. The late career of Rodney is a bit of a joke in British naval history. He had run his naval campaigns on excessive self-interest and nepotism even by standards of the British empire. Even a naval historian like Donald Macintyre, who Marcus Rediker would say views history from the "wrong end of the spyglass," describes Rodney as "the crusty, gout-ridden and undoubtedly self-opinionated commander-in-chief" and "an eighteenth-century aristocrat to his fingertips."¹⁹⁶ This is a very different type of character sketch from the one Melville gives of Nelson, and is further complicated by Rodney's relationship to de Grasse.

During the battle within which Melville places Vere, the American Revolution was raging, and Rodney would have been fighting against the French and the Americans. Having worked closely with George Washington and Rochambeau to defeat Cornwallis at the Battle of Yorktown, de Grasse was popularly considered a hero for Americans even through Melville's time. The Battle of Yorktown in 1781 was historically thought of as a decisive battle in the American Revolutionary War and nearly immediately led to the Treaty of Paris. Is Melville placing Vere's lineage here as a jab at American nationalism? On the other hand, it would be hard to argue that Melville ever expressed in his writing a loyalty to American nationalism over any other nation—if anything, he expressed a loyalty to common sailors over any form of

¹⁹⁵ Further evidence that Vere is closely associated with Rodney is that it is nearly impossible to read a biography or history of Admiral Rodney without coming across comparisons between Rodney and Nelson. Nelson came to power during Rodney's decline and was the admiral who made effective use of some of the new military tactics Rodney invented and less-effectively used. Thus, by making a comparison between Vere and Nelson it would have made sense that Vere was a stand in for Rodney.

¹⁹⁶ Macintyre, *Admiral Rodney*, 211 and 257, respectively.

nationality. More specifically then, this victory for Rodney, and fictionally for Vere, was more than a victory against the French who had recently caused the British to lose the Revolutionary War. It was also a victory in maintaining British dominance in the West Indies and, by extension, in slave capitalism. It is this historical significance that sheds the most light on Vere's actions.

A key part of the strategy of the wars Vere participated in and, we can assume, learned from, was the devastation of the West Indies islands. Donald Macintyre writes, “[De Grasse’s] threats made it clear that defense would have been at the cost of devastation of the whole island, the flames from one of the plantations lending point to their demands. The local inhabitants, offered terms which would leave them in the possession of their property, cannot be blamed if they saw little to recommend heroism.”¹⁹⁷ Macintyre writes, “With the two fleets again at roughly equal strength, the stage was set for the decisive encounter to decide the fate of the British Empire in the west.”¹⁹⁸ In this traditional view, the battle between de Grasse and Rodney was predominantly about empire and maintaining colonial control of the Caribbean.

While Rodney was ultimately successful against de Grasse, it was by no means a battle characterized by Rodney's heroism. On the contrary, there were a great deal of dissenting attitudes during this campaign. Captain Samuel Hood, second in command under Rodney, often voiced his disdain for his superior in naval records. Macintyre writes that Rodney was no doubt “infuriating to Hood, himself by no means lacking in self-esteem and a sufferer from his liver.”¹⁹⁹ Of the specific war for control of Jamaica as a colony, the critiques center mostly around Rodney's lack of strategy and his rigid authoritarianism and self-importance. Hood writes to Middleton, “What Sir George Rodney proposes I cannot say, but from what I hear from those

¹⁹⁷ Macintyre, 179.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 205.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 211.

who have the goodness to come to me ... he seems to have no plan.” Hood continues, “His manner of talking, is to be sure, very extravagant and extraordinary, but without much meaning.”²⁰⁰ The victory itself is interestingly a bit of strategy and luck combined. While riddled with misteps throughout, Rodney was able to lay a trap for the French ships, but historians have demonstrated that it would have been unsuccessful had there not been a change in the winds.²⁰¹

And while Vere learned from this reckless and glory-seeking Admiral in the campaign against de Grasse, he also would have experienced first-hand the way Rodney and other superiors negotiated the task of bringing their crews within proximity to the plantation workers who were enslaved in the West Indies. This proximity was something that was constantly and thoroughly policed. Writing about the way naval military officers in the 1780s and 1790s enforced legislation in the West Indies, Julius Scott writes, “laws regulating the behavior of seamen undoubtedly aimed at driving a wedge between the mariners from Europe and local blacks and browns and at preventing any mutual sharing of interest or information” (64). Scott demonstrates that harsh treatment such as flogging and practices like impressment which forced sailors to work against their will, created such a strong sense of common cause between often impressed sailors and enslaved plantation workers, that an immense amount of resources had to be spent to prevent any solidarity between these groups. The line here between fear of slave revolts and of ship mutinies is blurry at best. But, in the view of officers like Rodney or Vere, the most dangerous force promoting the solidarity between the impressed sailors and the enslaved West Indian laborers was the rhetoric of the French Revolution.

Scott devotes an entire chapter to the way French navies took pains to prevent the rhetoric of the revolutionary spirit to spread to the colonies. He writes, “A revolution which

²⁰⁰ Ibid., 212.

²⁰¹ Ibid., 221.

pitted class against class in a struggle over the ideals of “liberty, equality, and fraternity” presented obvious problems for societies based upon white solidarity and slavery. So even before the fall of the Bastille signalled [sic] the final days of the *ancien regime* in France, officials began to take measures to assure that the spirit of inquiry and change alive in Europe did not affect the French Caribbean.²⁰² A police state and the repression of communication via print material became the norm in the Caribbean. The over-reaction of naval officers and the military figures, whether French, British, or Dutch, became the norm. And it is precisely in this historical moment that Vere is promoted to Captain because, we can assume, he thrived in his ability to help maintain British control of the slave plantations on Jamaica and stave off the communications between sailors and slaves that might lead to slave revolts or mutiny. Is it surprising, then, the degree to which Vere contorts the law to execute Billy, his figurative son?

While this historical lineage is crucial for understanding Vere’s condemnation of Billy, it is not because it gives us insight into the text’s definitive embrace of either the morality or immorality of Vere’s actions. Instead, it is crucial because it shows how Melville’s text draws a relationship between the mutinous rebellion on British ships and the slave revolts in the West Indies which, scholars have since demonstrated, would have been in some degree of communication with each other. Rather than trying to determine Melville’s authorial intent in this novella, something that belongs to an earlier era of literary criticism, a close examination of the historical enmeshment of the characters in the text can demonstrate the genealogies of their actions. By understanding Vere not only through his bookishness, his pedantic tendencies, and his inclination to gaze out at the ocean lost in thought, but instead and in addition to understanding him as a product of military repression and slave racial capitalism, it becomes

²⁰² Scott, 159.

clear how we can read his rationalizations and negotiations of maritime law as drawing a clear genealogical line from the British empire's colonial projects and participation with the slave trade to its abuse, exploitation, and occasional execution of the crews who make up the British navy—two linked projects of racial capitalism.

Freewill is never assumed in *Billy Budd*. From the way Melville constructs his sentences, constantly undermining a reader's ability to understand exactly what drove a character to an action, to the explicit references to agency and fate, Melville puts this concern in the front of the narrative—perhaps best characterized by Billy's reflexive vocal tic which, in part, causes him to strike out at Claggart. This negotiation of freewill and fixed-fate is something that has been thoroughly written about in relation to Melville's writing, and in a novella so concerned with history, it makes sense to understand Vere's decision not through the dialectic between will and fate, but through his interpellation within a particular historical institution. After all, what, if not ideology, describes a system of thought which shapes and constrains the limits of one's own ability to rationalize a situation? Taking *Billy Budd* as a text about the way history and ideology limit what characters can do and think makes the debate about Vere's decision and the morality of the novella entirely beside the point. Instead, we see that it is dramatizing the limits of individual action and systems of sympathetic identification within a system of racial capitalism in a strikingly similar fashion to Equiano's narrative.

Melville's concern with the historical enmeshment of individuals leads him to one of his central questions of the text: if we are so thoroughly interpellated into ideologies of racial capitalism that any sense of freewill is questionable at best, then how do we build alternatives and act in meaningfully resistant ways? One way Melville explores this question is through the workings of sentiment. For Vere, manipulation of maritime and British law would have been part

and parcel of his time spent under Rodney, but the sentiment he feels toward Billy is the biggest impediment to his decision to execute Billy. Not only does he believe in Billy's innocence, he also feels like a father to Billy and calls to attention his own sentimental attachment in order to disregard these feelings in favor of his "Forms." But this isn't the first time sentiment within the maritime world is called to the forefront of the narrative. Earlier in the novella, during Melville's discussion of the Spithead and Nore mutinies and his mention of Vere's lineage, he turns to Admiral Nelson's role in the battle of Trafalgar as an event which allows him to develop a theory of the relationship between sentimentalism and maritime nationalism. That is, by moving to a period before Cooper first developed his version of maritime nationalism, Melville, through a disposition toward maritime sensibility that was developed in the countercurrents of maritime writing I discuss in chapters one and two, is able to explore the relationship between sentiment, heroism, and maritime nationalism.

Trafalgar and Nelson's Poetic Reproach

Before concluding his history lesson and returning to the action on the *Bellipotent*, Melville jumps ahead in time, nearly a decade after Billy's death, to the battle of Trafalgar. The 1805 battle of Trafalgar was a decisive conflict between Admiral Nelson's comparatively under-resourced British navy and Napoleon's navy.²⁰³ It is difficult to find a naval figure more revered in traditional British naval history than Admiral Nelson precisely because his unlikely victory at Trafalgar was also the battle that killed him. As David Brown writes, "His premature death, during the battle which is often regarded as England's finest nineteenth-century hour, turned high

²⁰³ While I argue this battle is essential to understanding the novella, it is important to note that it is not referenced exclusively in *Billy Budd*. Melville was clearly fascinated with the battle of Trafalgar as, in addition to *Billy Budd*, he makes references to Trafalgar and Admiral Nelson in his novels *Omoo*, *White-Jacket*, *Redburn*, *Mardi*, and *Moby-Dick*.

competence and charisma into legend.”²⁰⁴ But rather than focus on Nelson himself, Melville is again concerned with the role the average sailor played in the battle. He draws a clear connection between crews in Trafalgar and the mutinous spirit in the Atlantic world when he writes that the mutineers in 1797 were “some of the tars who not so very long afterward—whether wholly prompted thereto by patriotism, or pugnacious instinct, or by both—helped to win a coronet for Nelson at the Nile, and the naval crown of crowns for him at Trafalgar. To the mutineers, those battles and especially Trafalgar were a plenary absolution and a grand one. For all that goes to make up scenic naval display and heroic magnificence in arms, those battles, especially Trafalgar, stand unmatched in human annals” (305). By framing Trafalgar this way, Melville is insisting on understanding the battle as not just between the English and French, as traditional historical accounts of the battle were conceived, but also as a battle between the sentiments of the sailors and Nelson himself. As he noted by drawing a comparison to the body recovering from an illness, feelings of maritime nationalism after the mutinies were never quite stable again, if they ever were. While such sentiments were forever destabilized, Melville is interested in how Nelson and Trafalgar engendered new feelings of loyalty, even if he is uncertain of the crews’ motivations.

This is essentially a two-part question for Melville: if sentiment was so fractured after the mutinies, where did the laborers come from to work Nelson’s fleet and what caused the appearance of strong feelings of maritime nationalism during and preceding the battle? The first part of the question is easier to answer. Melville gestures to the fact that many of the mutineers continued to serve the British navy out of necessity or “absolution.” Additionally, while the mutinies caused a handful of reforms, the British navy has still never denounced the practice of

²⁰⁴ Brown, Foreword to *Nelson's Battles: The Triumph of British Seapower*, 10.

impressment and it continued well into the second decade of the nineteenth century. Melville's narrator later cites an answer he was once given by a black mariner who fought in Trafalgar. This man explains that "In the case of a warship short of hands whose speedy sailing was imperative, the deficient quota, in lack of any other way of making it good, would be eked out by drafts culled direct from the jails" (315). By centering the mutineers and prisoners who made up the bulk of the crews in Trafalgar, Melville recasts the battle from being one about maritime tactical genius to one about the relationship between crews and captains. The second part of the question is more elusive, but Melville finds an answer in what he calls Nelson's poetic embodiment of maritime heroism.

Melville is not alone in being concerned with the relays between the feelings of the crews and Nelson. For instance, in Nicholas Tracy's study of Nelson, he discusses the role morale played in the battles: "The essential component of the plan was that of morale. The head-on attack exposed the leading ships to injury they could not immediately return, and then placed them in the heart of the enemy fleet where they either had to fight with a skill and courage based in confidence in Nelson and themselves, or perish."²⁰⁵ He brings it up again when he writes, "[Nelson's] death had no apparent effect on the progress of the battle. His role had been to create the moral conditions for victory, and set in motion a battle plan that depended largely on the resolution and creative tactical sense of his captains."²⁰⁶ For Tracy, "Trafalgar had been a seamen's battle, and a captain's battle, and the qualities of both were evidence during the storm. Both the seamen and officers had been able to show their mettle because Nelson's leadership and tactics had allowed them to shine."²⁰⁷ While it is clear such historians have considered the role

²⁰⁵Tracy, *Nelson's Battles: The Triumph of British Seapower*, 215.

²⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 247.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 254.

that Nelson played in building morale among the crew, the large majority of the discussions around the battle concern Nelson's tactical maneuvers and military know-how. Tracy himself frames the battle in terms of Nelson's tactics: "[Trafalgar] is a controversial action because Nelson's tactics were unorthodox and dangerous, and only justified by the outcome. Nelson's dictum that 'the boldest measures are the safest' has left generations of naval historians breathless. Some admire the subtlety of his method, others are shaken by the dangers he faced down, but all have to concede that they worked."²⁰⁸ Melville's discussion of Nelson, however, could not be more different.

Rather than analyzing his tactics and strategy, Melville focuses on how, after two majorly destabilizing mutinies, Nelson inspires what seems like strong feelings of maritime nationalism. To search for insight into the workings of such sentimental attachments, he considers the poetical character of Nelson and his fleet but is faced once again with the issue of temporality. Writing from a historical vantage point in which steam has taken over the maritime world, Melville acknowledges that it is difficult to not let one's knowledge of late-nineteenth-century technological advancement recast the battle at Trafalgar as archaic and clumsy compared to modern day warfare. Again, Melville insists on historicizing the battle and argues that heroism of past sailors have not "become obsolete with their wooden walls" (305-6).

In order to understand how Nelson's wooden ship was a "poetic reproach" to the ugly, though mightier, ironclad war ships, Melville addresses those who scoff at how primitive the past was and insist on how much technology has improved the condition of the present. This belief will lead them to call Nelson "vain" and "foolhardy" and argue that he might have survived this battle with better insights, technology, and less bravado. Melville then rejects these views

²⁰⁸ Ibid., 187.

through more capacious historicizations and writes “the *might-have-been* is but boggy ground to build on. And, certainly, in foresight as to the larger issue of an encounter, and anxious preparations for it—buoying the deadly way and mapping it out, as at Copenhagen—few commanders have been so painstakingly circumspect as this same reckless declarer of his person in fight” (307). Like his passage about the smoke of history, this is another model for how to read history. We must have, Melville implies, painstaking detail as well as an imaginative element in effective historicizations. Melville casts doubt on this boggy ground precisely because he historicizes the event through the perspective of the sailor, whether mutineer, prisoner, or member of the impressed crew. Historicizing the event alongside the radical Atlantic spirit and the Spithead and Nore mutinies, Melville argues that the only way for the mutineers to be persuaded to fight was for Nelson’s poetic presence to exist alongside his strategic presence. Technological advancement that would have perhaps saved Nelson’s life would be of no use. In the words of Melville, Nelson had to be both “painstakingly circumspect” and a poetic “trumpet to the blood.”

Melville’s primary concern in this chapter on Nelson is to investigate how he came to function as a trumpet to the blood of his crew. Nelson’s ability to invigorate his crew functions as the success to Vere’s failure later in the text. In both cases, Melville attempts to unpack how sentimentalism functions in relation to the concept of maritime heroism, echoing the ways Equiano and the marketplace in port-town periodicals have before him. To recall the argument I made in chapter one, Equiano exposes the tenuous innerworkings of sentimentalism by staging certain interactions to demonstrate the limits of sentimental attachment’s ability to garner material changes in his situation at the same time that he is self-consciously engaging the sentimental mode. Likewise, in chapter two, I discuss how presentiment functioned in

periodicals as a melodramatic trope deployed to ascertain knowledge about those at sea. This trope routinely established relays between laborers home at port and laborers at sea. Because many people in port either never saw their loved ones again or waited years and years for them to return, this trope encodes a form of speculation on time. As such, this is both a melodramatic mode par excellence—lost connections may be reconstituted, but often too late²⁰⁹—and a vernacular encoding that functions as evidence of the marital reality of those in port. This is why, for Mary Carr Clarke, the role of presentiment figures so centrally, and scenes of those lost in thought at the sea shore so densely populate such periodicals of the time—faced with a reality in which information about those at sea may be impossible to attain, feelings of presentiment are as secure an attachment as may be possible *and* function as a tool for dealing with the exploitation of the maritime world.

In light of these original concerns found in the early negotiations of the maritime genre in the U.S. marketplace, let us turn to Melville's description of Nelson's death, properly historicized:

If under the presentiment of the most magnificent of all victories to be crowned by his own glorious death, a sort of priestly motive led him to dress his person in the jeweled vouchers of his own shining deeds; if thus to have adorned himself for the altar and the sacrifice were indeed vainglory, then affectation and fustian is each more heroic line in the great epics and dramas, since in such lines the poet but embodies in verse those exaltations of sentiment that a nature like Nelson, the opportunity being given, vitalizes into action. (307)

²⁰⁹ Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," 10-11.

In what follows, I argue that Melville is presenting us with all the aspects that feed into the achievement of successful maritime heroism, but it serves to unpack the quote bit by bit. To begin with, this passage risks being misread to say that Nelson dressed up in his best clothing for death, but if looked at closely we can see that he is wearing “the jeweled vouchers of his own *shining deeds*” (emphasis mine). This voucher, a representation of deeds or goods, adorns his person, not necessarily nice clothing. This is the first hint that this passage is about the collapse of the difference between sentiment and action, so thoroughly problematized in Equiano’s narrative.

The next phrase “adorned himself for the altar and the sacrifice,” follows from the previous phrase to emphasize how his actions are simultaneously actions and poetical adornments. What is curious in this second phrase is that the common phraseology used during Melville’s time would have required him to be sacrificed upon the altar of *something*. For instance, The OED lists “exhorted the advocates for that expulsion, to sacrifice a private resentment ... at the altar of public tranquility” in 1770 from *Gentleman’s & London Mag* and “[t]he public benefit is sacrificed at the altar of personal ambition” from *Med. Times* from 1847 as two examples of usages of the phrase. In both these cases there is a metaphorical or poetic resonance of a concept either “public tranquility” or “personal ambition” which overwrites the previous reality (“private resentment” or public benefit”).²¹⁰ In both these cases the former is discarded for the sustenance of the latter. To drop the qualifier implies that he is sacrificed upon the altar as an act within itself. If it were rewritten to say adorned himself for the sacrifice on the altar of heroism of military prowess the poetical resonances would be subordinated to the actual manifestation of heroism. Instead, the poetical nature of this sacrifice is an end unto itself. He is

²¹⁰ “altar, n.” *OED*.

adorned for the altar *and* the sacrifice. Again, we see Melville confounding the line between the sentimental resonances of the action and the action itself.

At the close of this long sentence that ends this peculiar chapter, Melville writes that if such adornments are considered vainglory, “then affectation and fustian is each more heroic line in the great epics and dramas, since in such lines the poet but embodies in verse those exaltations of sentiment that a nature like Nelson, the opportunity being given, vitalizes into action.” There is a double meaning to the word “line” in which the first usage is a threading of fabric (as in the poetical manifestations of Nelson’s adornments: heroic line or heroic linens), and the second use of “line” implies an enjambed, poetic line. Again, we can see the collapse of meaning and material, of affectation and fustian. Finally, and most significantly, it is this doubled sense of heroic lines that poets “embod[y] in verse” certain “exaltations of sentiment,” whereas Nelson flips the construction so that rather than giving sentiments a body in verse he is taking such verse and “vitalizing” it into action. The poet embodies sentiment, meaning “to put into a body,”²¹¹ and Nelson “vitalizes” such embodiment, meaning “to give life or animation to (the body, etc.)”²¹² In practice, Nelson both acted and demonstrated how these actions held a material poetic resonance since they convinced the mutineers to fight alongside him. Without both the poetic and active resonances of Nelson’s person, Melville argues this heroism would not be possible. However, it is crucial to note that this “action” is an act of war-making and of self-destruction and thus what Nelson is actually embodying is the marriage of sentiment with violence that generates the concept of maritime heroism.

²¹¹ “embody | imbody, v.” *OED*.

²¹² “vitalize, v.” *OED*.

While certainly Melville is playing into the heroification of Admiral Nelson who is better described by Jamaica Kincaid as an “English maritime criminal,”²¹³ it is important to explore what Melville is after in this description. In a similar fashion to Equiano’s own interrogation of the precarity of maritime nationalism as a sentimental attachment that is generated through a marketplace based on his exclusion, Melville gives a description of maritime nationalism that interrogates its own internal logic. Not only does Nelson in this figuration offer appeals to the sentiments of maritime nationalism in his crew, by boarding the ship and dying in battle he is also vitalizing maritime nationalism into a marriage between the sentiment and the violence upon which it is based. This collapse of sentiment and violence, for Nelson, allows him to recuperate the at least potentially mutinous crew into a project of maritime nationalism.

However, in Melville’s discussion of Nelson, the success of the project centers around a very precarious “if.” It is only through “presentiment” that Nelson is able to vitalize the poetic sentiments of maritime nationalism into an act of violence. Presentiment reappears here as a mode of maritime knowledge, just as it did for Clermont Herbert’s sister, Annabella, as knowledge that is highly uncertain. Nelson here has a sort of intuition that allows him to understand that at this moment he must merge the sentiment of maritime nationalism with his own self-annihilation. Without this presentiment and without the presentiment being correct, the project of recuperating his crews into the project of maritime nationalism may not be possible. In other words, Melville is demonstrating that Nelson not only is able to stoke the sentiments of maritime nationalism, but he is also able to tap into the *presentiments* that allow him to understand the importance of an event in the future before it happens. He speculates, it seems,

²¹³ Kincaid, *A Small Place*.

not only that he might die, but that his death is required for Trafalgar to be remembered as the pinnacle of British maritime nationalism.

By meditating on these resonances within Nelson's action, Melville's text allows us to imaginatively return to the relays I discussed in my first two chapters. Nelson, in Melville's discussion, is engaging in the dominant form of economic speculation and management of time. His calculations resemble Ian Baucom's discussion of the "actuarial discourse of modernity" in which, through a calculations of averages and generalizations, Nelson is able to speculate on the different possible futures in the battle of Trafalgar. At the same time, however, Melville is illustrating how the melodramatic trope of presentiment, which encoded this form of speculation, was a necessary component which subtends the project of maritime nationalism. In other words, as Mary Carr Clarke's novel *Clermont Herbert; Or Presentiment* illustrates, the function of presentiment is mobilized as an affective management of time that has the effect of sustaining the dominant forms of speculation that existed in the maritime industry. However, such vernacular encodings of speculation always also offered an insurgent potential for imagining an outside to state-power. By exploring Nelson as the pinnacle of maritime nationalism, Melville limns the ways such a project was integral to sustaining maritime nationalism through the marriage of sentiment and violence.

Moving from this discussion of Nelson's character back into Billy's narrative, Melville creates a situation in which readers occupy their own space of presentiment. That is, we have both an understanding of the mutinies and imperial wars that are the pre-history to Billy's actions *and* we have an understanding of the events that are yet to happen. While Melville writes that the "*might-have-been* is but boggy ground to build on," his establishment of historical surroundings

allows for a type of melodramatic presentiment that has been characteristic of maritime writing since Mary Carr Clarke wrote *Clermont Herbert; Or Presentiment*.

Billy as the Sentimental Figure of Periodicals

There are two main ways Melville returns to the original concerns early-nineteenth-century periodicals forwarded in relation to the maritime industry. First, through the way he characterizes his novella as an “inside narrative,” Melville creates a relay between the action and labor on board ocean-going ships and that of the dockyards and port cities. By both continually invoking the space of the port, and by offering two alternative accounts of Billy’s life that would have circulated in port towns, Melville causes us to consider the relationship between those at sea and those at port who are connected to those at sea, whether through marriage, family institutions, or labor. Secondly, Melville constructs Billy as a symbolic figure who contains at least two forms of labor simultaneously: the labor typical of a sailor in the British navy at the end of the eighteenth century and the labor of maintaining the semblance of family and kinship ties while on board.

In a discussion of the full title of the novella, Lester Holt discusses the difference between an inside and an outside narrative. Holt argues that ultimately the distinction is between the newspaper clippings we have at the end of the novella that deeply mischaracterize Billy’s actions and the poem/song that generalize them from the actual goings-on on board the *Bellipotent*.²¹⁴ It is significant then that Melville, at least as far as Holt is concerned, is setting up a dichotomy between the inside knowledge of sailors and crews and the outside knowledge of

²¹⁴ Holt, “Billy Budd: Melville’s Dilemma.”

land-based print culture.²¹⁵ This would seem at first to be a critique of a novel like *Clermont Herbert* as it is ostensibly about the maritime industry but is written by a land-based outsider. However, if we consider the labor that people like Mary Carr Clarke performed as constitutive of the maritime industry, then, from a particular vantage point, we must understand her as very much an insider to the types of labor that sustain the maritime industry if not entirely an insider to the goings-on below decks.

By extension, in considering the framing of the narrative, it is important to notice how the entire novella can be read as framed from the space of the port. At the start of the narrative we are given a description of an encounter between a handsome sailor at home on liberty and the narrator, presumably a “stroller along the docks.” This handsome sailor, an African sailor on the docks in Liverpool, reminds the narrator of Billy Budd, and thus the novella commences (292). Throughout the rest of the narrative the narrator occasionally interrupts the plot to give history lessons or, once, as I mentioned above, to recount another occurrence on a dock when they talked about Trafalgar with a black sailor in Baltimore. At one point, speaking about the philosophy of history, the narrator even quotes Melville, which can be read as distancing Melville from the narrator of *Billy Budd*. Finally, at the close of the narrative, the narrator gives a hint as to where they got their information when they tell us that Billy’s death circulates in the periodicals of port cities: “Some few weeks after the execution, among other matters under the head of ‘News from the Mediterranean,’ there appeared in a naval chronicle of the time, an authorized weekly publication, an account of the affair” (382). In this account there are a fair number of details that have been changed from the narrative—Billy stabs rather than strikes

²¹⁵ I add the “land-based” qualifier because as Hester Blum’s recent scholarship shows there were occasionally printing press onboard different exhibitions. The print matter of which was not intended to circulate on land. Blum, Hester. “Antarctic Imprints.”

Claggart, the potential of a mutiny is taken as fact, the author insists that Billy must not be truly English, and Claggart's motives are described in purely patriotic terms. By questioning Billy's Englishness and by insisting on Claggart's patriotism, it is clear how this periodical is attempting to rewrite the event in terms recuperable to English maritime nationalism. However, the narrator who we assume has encountered this publication is also privy to two other forms of knowledge.

The first form of knowledge the narrator mentions, in addition to the faulty news report, is the unofficial communication networks across the Atlantic:

Everything is for a term venerated in navies. Any tangible object associated with some striking incident of the service is converted into a monument. The spar from which the foretopman [Billy] was suspended was for some few years kept trace of by the bluejackets. Their knowledges followed it from ship to dockyard and again from dockyard to ship, still pursuing it even when at last reduced to a mere dockyard boom.

(383)

These "knowledges" were the types of unofficial accounts that would have circulated from port to port to more accurately remember Billy and the events on board the *Bellipotent*. Importantly, the dockyards are crucial in this passage making it safe to assume that those living in port cities and town would have had the opportunity to be on the "inside" of the narrative by going down to the docks. The second knowledge that the narrator has access to is through another piece of literature. We are told that another sailor, someone like Billy, eventually composes a ballad to be recited and sung by crews and that it was eventually published in another periodical.²¹⁶

These different accounts illustrate the way the narrator is confronted with different information about Billy and must successfully negotiate it to offer an insider's account of Billy's

²¹⁶ As Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts point out, the original text of *Billy Budd* originated as a footnote to the poem.

execution. However, this information also supports the claim that the novella might have been completely formed through communication networks *in port* rather than at sea. If this is the case, who might the narrator be? It is possible that they are the wife of a sailor who is away for long stints at a time, or a dockworker in the West Indies, or a fugitive slave in the ports of the U.S. Any of these people would have had access to the inside account of Billy's execution through the very same communication networks that made the radical Atlantic with its mutinies, revolts, and revolutions possible.

Just as early-nineteenth-century periodicals explored the role of feminized forms of domestic and affective labor in sustaining the maritime community, and the way the industry left such laborers out of contact with loved ones at sea, Melville also has us consider the imaginative lives of those living in port. By framing the novella from the space of the port, Melville shows how such often unwaged laborers contributed to the maintenance of the maritime industry and participated in the imaginative act of building, sharing, and receiving narratives of this industry. These relays function both through the narrator and symbolically through the figure of Billy Budd.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's historicization of *Billy Budd* as emerging in the moment when homosexuality was solidifying as an identity, has inspired scholars of queer theory to make many generative and insightful readings of *Billy Budd*.²¹⁷ Sedgwick famously argues that there is a homosexual in the text of *Billy Budd*, but that, also, all the actions of everyone on board—being a world exclusively of men—carries a homosexual impulse. In his rejoinder to Sedgwick, Christopher Looby sketches out three homosexuals in the text: Billy, Claggart, and Vere, but eventually argues, “There is a fourth homosexual in the text, of course: the narrator, who, at his

²¹⁷ Sedgwick, “*Billy Budd: After the Homosexual*” in *Epistemology of the Closet*, 91-130.

well-marked historical distance, stages for us this drama of historical non-coincidence or temporal jugglery between three other homosexuals who belong, as it were, and belong differently, to different historical regimes of sexuality.”²¹⁸ However, as I have stated, the narrator seems to be speaking from the space of the port, not the ship, and in addition to being read as queer would have most likely been a woman. The Sedgwick-inspired conversation surrounding this novella is certainly much more generative (and more interesting) than the older and strange obsession over the morality of the practice of corporal punishment that I have rehearsed here. However, I want to illustrate how many queer readings of the sailors on the *Bellipotent* end up reestablishing a severance from the port which the novella is clearly confounding. While not negating the reading of Billy as a queer subject, I draw on this older criticism as a way to add to the consideration of sexuality in the novella by bringing in a discussion of gender and the way feminized forms of labor orbit throughout the narrative.

With this narrator and framework in mind, we can return to the novella’s exploration of sentimentalism and the maritime world as they come to a head in the family drama between Vere and Billy. There are a number of gestures Melville makes to invoke the space of the home, family, and domestic on board the *Bellipotent*. While the largely masculinized genre of sea fiction ignores and suppresses the role and labor of people like Mary Carr Clarke or Ann Carson, Melville’s novel brings the relays between ocean- and land-based labor into the forefront of the narrative. However, it is important to state that while Melville is certainly interested in the way that the labor of the domestic sphere at the home port and the world of the maritime industry at sea are co-constitutive, by bringing the family and domestic into the narrative mostly

²¹⁸ Looby, “Of Billy’s Time: Temporality in Melville’s *Billy Budd*,” 29.

metaphorically, he simultaneously makes it a focal point of the narrative and displaces and silences the people who historically performed this labor.²¹⁹

Moving to this second, more figurative construction of port-based labor, we must see how the family is a key figure throughout the novel. Melville uses a familiar metaphor for his entire understanding of history. When attention to history might be scandalous, he writes that “such events cannot be ignored, but there is a considerate way of historically treating them. If a well-constituted individual refrains from blazoning aught amiss or calamitous in his family, a nation in the like circumstance may without reproach be equally discreet” (303). When Lieutenant Ratcliffe successfully impresses Billy from the *Rights-of-Man* to the *Bellipotent* man-o-war we can see the interplay between nationalism and familial institutions. Captain Graveling of the *Rights* protests Billy’s impressment saying, “before I shipped that young fellow, my fore-castle was a rat-pit of quarrels.” After Billy came aboard, however, he explains that everyone fell in love with him and describes the ship as a functional domestic space: “they all love him. Some of ‘em do his washing, darn his old trousers for him; the carpenter is at odd times making a pretty little chest of drawers for him. Anybody will do anything for Billy Budd; and it’s the happy family here.” In this scene we see two forms of feminized labor that was often neglected by tradition sea fiction. First, the other sailors engage in domestic labor by washing and cleaning Billy’s clothing. Secondly, we see in Graveling’s response, the affective care work that Billy performed on the *Rights of Man*. In this calculation, Billy figures as the angel in the house—he quells disputes, tends to the sentiments of the other sailors, and, we can assume, helps orchestrates domestic tasks.

²¹⁹ On this note it is interesting, though not very useful, to think about his “lost novel” *Isle of the Cross* that supposedly followed the life of a woman married to and abandoned by a sailor. While we do not have this novel to consider, we might assume that this is a relay Melville was interested in.

Lieutenant Ratcliffe's response to the accusation that he is breaking up this happy family is to attempt to excite in Captain Graveling feelings of maritime nationalism. He states, "I pledge you in advance of the royal approbation ... His Majesty, I say, will be delighted to learn that *one* shipmaster at least cheerfully surrenders to the King the flower of his flock, a sailor who with equal loyalty makes no dissent" (296). Ratcliffe is reminding Graveling here that loyalty to nation ought to take precedence over loyalty to family. However, at the same time Ratcliffe is dramatizing how the familial space is drawn on for imperial projects. In other words, this can be read as positing the *Rights* as a metaphorical domestic sphere that is encroached upon by the supposedly separate sphere of the military imperial projects—the primary imperial project for this novella being the colonization of the Americas and the expansion of the transatlantic slave trade. While the space of the ship is not a traditionally domestic space as conceived of by domestic novels of the nineteenth century, Melville's recasting of the ship space as a family space demonstrates the extent to which imperial projects and domestic projects are two sides of the same coin.

Similarly, Billy's status as a foundling figures him as uniquely positioned for exploring these relays. This point is driven home when Melville writes,

No merrier man in the mess: in marked contrast to certain other individuals included like himself among the impressed portion of the ship's company; for these when not actively employed were sometimes, and more particularly in the last dogwatch when the drawing near of twilight induced revery, apt to fall into a saddish mood which in some partook of sullenness. But they were not so young as our foretopman, and no few of them must have known a hearth of some sort, others may have had wives and children left, too probably, in uncertain circumstances, and hardly any but must have had acknowledged kith and kin,

while for Billy, as will shortly be seen, his entire family was practically invested in himself. (298)

What we see in this quote is that the trope of the home port and the family is something that sustains maritime labor, but also that it is something Billy does not have access to in a traditional sense. This demonstrates how the longing for home ports is something that does not extend to Billy. While impressment is certainly not the same as enslavement within the Atlantic slave trade, the sentimental trope of home ports is offered to neither Equiano nor Billy. If the function of a family-based sentimentalism is to allow an individual the ability to form feeling-based attachments with others through the ideology of the family, then it would seem that Billy is an impossible figure for this project of sentimentalism.

This phrase, “his entire family was practically invested in himself” is strange for several reasons. First, the concept of family implies a transindividual unit, and yet this description implies that Billy can be both an individual and a familial unit by himself. This can be read at least two ways, first that there is a multiplicity within Billy that, when considered together might be read as a family group. Or, on the other hand, it might imply the very constructedness of the concept of family on its own. By stating that his family is invested within himself, Billy is acknowledging the degree to which concepts of family are constructed entities and, as Billy does not have “kith or kin” at home ports he is able to build a concept of family within himself and, presumably, on the ship itself. Finally, the term “invested” is important in this phrase. Here again we have the collapsing of market and sentiment. The family, in the nineteenth-century view of things, ought to exist outside of and as a corrective to the marketplace—this is the basis of the “separate sphere” hypothesis. However, here Melville is collapsing these by using marketplace terminology to describe the organization and relegation of family.

As a figure who seems to carry the domestic world within himself, Billy is often described through the language of seduction and sentimental narratives. Of Billy himself we are told, “Billy Budd’s position aboard the seventy-four was something analogous to that of a rustic beauty transplanted from the provinces and brought into competition with the high-born dames of the court” (299). He is described in feminine terms often, of his face, Melville writes, “all but feminine in purity of natural complexion but where, thanks to his seagoing, the lily was quite suppressed and the rose had some ado visibly to flush through the tan” (299). Of Billy’s vocal tic we are told, “Though our Handsome Sailor had as much of masculine beauty as one can expect anywhere to see; nevertheless, like the beautiful woman in one of Hawthorne’s minor tales, there was just one thing amiss in him. No visible blemish indeed, as with the lady; no, but an occasional liability to a vocal defect. Though in the hour of elemental uproar or peril he was everything that a sailor should be, yet under sudden provocation of strong heart-feeling his voice, otherwise singularly musical, as if expressive of the harmony within, was apt to develop an organic hesitancy, in fact more or less of a stutter or even worse” (302). Melville immediately interprets this description for us by writing that this imperfection ought to demonstrate that “he is not presented as a conventional hero, but also that the story in which he is the main figure is no romance” (302). It is these very characterizations of Billy as encapsulating the relay between feminized and masculinized forms of labor within the maritime industry come to head when Vere is confronted with the decision of whether or not to execute Billy.

The only major impediment to Vere’s decision to execute Billy is sentimentality. This, for Vere is the hardest inclination for him to overcome with his “forms, guarded forms.” As C. B. Ives writes, “At Billy’s trial, Vere’s arguments were aimed primarily at making the decision that would be most difficult for human sympathy, most difficult for man as a living being having

a natural love of life. He cited the Articles of War (which did not, in fact, support him), the Mutiny Act (which did not apply), the practicalities of the situation (which to every other judgment called for delay at least), and the necessity, as he said, of doing what no one wanted to do, of suppressing Nature, of injuring the heart—“the feminine in man”—even of violating the conscience.” (37). It is no coincidence that it is not only Vere’s misapprehension of maritime law but his rejection of sentimentalism that kills Billy.

What this demonstrates is that Vere is familiar with the sentimental attachments of family that sustain maritime labor, but that in the final instance, they are only as useful as they are able to further maritime colonial projects. Just as Mary Carr Clarke and Ann Carson were faced with poverty, imprisonment, and abandonment by the state when their roles in the maritime industry became superfluous, so too does Vere force himself to sever any sentimental ties he had with Billy. Unlike Nelson who vitalizes his sentiments into self-annihilation, Vere, as a cog in the wartime colonial machinery of the British empire, displaces this violence onto Billy as a way to sustain the sentimental project of maritime nationalism.

Finally, we must also consider the historical context in which Melville was writing *Billy Budd*.²²⁰ Composed in the 1880s and 1890s, Melville was writing directly after Reconstruction, a time of unprecedented wealth for a handful of Americans that was based on massive wage theft and wealth redistribution along racial lines. Racially exclusive laws, first enforced by militias and the Ku Klux Klan, such as Jim Crow laws and the Chinese Exclusion Act appeared. In *Billy Budd*, this history is not mere backdrop or coincidence. Melville often calls his contemporary moment to attention as he makes references to the future of the American maritime industry and

²²⁰ See Matthiessen, *American Renaissance*, 513-514.

its eventual reliance on steam which disenfranchised many sailors and dock workers, as well as the 1842 *Somers* mutiny. Writing after the Civil War and campaigns of Reconstruction, Melville's disposition toward maritime sensibility in his novella-length rumination on a late-eighteenth-century naval execution ends up offering a rubric for sussing out the complex entanglements of his own historical moment. Ultimately, I find this rumination on a maritime sensibility in the late-nineteenth century allows for later writers to draw on this sensibility as a shorthand or historical-theoretical resource for narratives of other historical moments. This is the argument I forward in chapter four through a discussion of the work of Charles Chesnutt and Willa Cather.

Chapter 4:
American Empire and Maritime Sensibility in Willa Cather and Charles Chesnutt

And now the old story has begun to write itself over there ... Isn't it queer: there are only two or three human stories, and they go on repeating themselves as fiercely as if they had never happened before...

-Willa Cather, *O Pioneers!*

He realized, too, for a moment, the continuity of life, how inseparably the present is woven with the past, how certainly the future will be but the outcome of the present.

-Charles Chesnutt, *The Marrow of Tradition*

This chapter is distinct from the three that came before it in that it moves to a later period of writing in which the dominant form of the maritime genre was no longer popular. In chapters one and two, I looked to the years immediately preceding James Fenimore Cooper's publication of *The Pilot* to explore the countercurrents of discourse about the maritime industry that expose how the maritime genre produced a particularly raced and gendered account of the maritime industry. While Melville's *Billy Budd* was written long after this genre had fallen in popularity, in chapter three I consider it as a text that imaginatively returns us to the late-eighteenth century in which the dynamics I discuss in chapters one and two are being worked out. Therefore, this chapter moves to a decidedly distinct historical period and considers two novels written during the surge in realism, naturalism, and regionalism that seem to have left the ocean behind. The two novels I will examine are Willa Cather's *O Pioneers!* and Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition* which engage the post-Reconstruction period in the U.S. and depict the colonization of the American west and the post-reconstruction disenfranchisement of racialized populations.

This period saw major shifts in political economy, expansionist projects of American empire, a surge in populist movements, and reconfigurations of racial capitalism that underwrote both the colonization of the American west and the systemic disenfranchisement of racialized

populations throughout the U.S. During the 1880s, the maritime industry saw an intense effort to produce new steel battleships marking the dawn of America's "new navy," and the 1890s saw increased colonial efforts in Latin America and the Pacific.²²¹ These overseas expansionist projects were mirrored by territorial expansion in the U.S. mainland as the genocidal Indian Wars continued throughout the turn of the twentieth century.²²² Through the murder and displacement of indigenous peoples, Wall Street bankers swooped in to reap profits off the indebtedness of agrarian farmers and colonists as well as the unpaid feminized labor of such projects.²²³ In the south, a defeated southern aristocracy aligned itself with northern industrial capitalists and with the white working-class in order to reorganize a system of racial capitalism built on the exclusion of newly enfranchised black communities. As Du Bois puts it, central to the overthrow of Reconstruction in the south "was a determined effort to reduce black labor as nearly as possible to a condition of unlimited exploitation and build a new class of capitalists on this foundation."²²⁴

What Willa Cather and Charles Chesnutt, as well as many other authors of the time, were confronted with was a period that at once seemed to witness major transformations of social, political, and material life and, at the same time, was marked by recurrences of the articulation of

²²¹ LaFerber, *The New Empire: An Interpretation of America Expansion 1860-1898*, 60.

²²² As Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz explains, "By the 1890s, although some military assaults on Indigenous communities and valiant Indigenous armed resistance continued, most of the surviving Indigenous refugees were confined to federal reservations, their children transported to distant boarding schools to unlearn their Indigenousness." From this devastation, "With utter military triumph on the continent, the United States then set out to dominate the world, but the Indigenous peoples remained and persisted as the "American Century" proceeded." From chapter nine of *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States*.

²²³ Despite consolidated wealth in investment capitalists, this period saw a depression for agrarian workers. Walter LaFerber points out, "In the three years of 1893 and 1895, almost everything occurred in the way of class conflict... Laborers' wages had dropped drastically since 1890, and in 1894 one out of every six laborers received no wages at all" (173). The growing power of U.S. banks played a role both in the expansionist projects of the U.S. mainland and overseas American empire. LaFerber continues, "The growing power of American bankers also affected United States relations with other countries ... Some American investors, moreover, found the home market too narrow and unprofitable. By 1896 their capital was moving into Caribbean and South and Central American money markets" (177).

²²⁴ Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction*, 670.

racism and sexism with capitalism. I argue throughout this chapter that to narrate and explore these permutations of racial capitalism, both Cather and Chesnut draw on what I have been calling maritime sensibility which emerges out of the maritime writing I have thus far discussed and which affords them a few advantages. I understand this sensibility as an affective disposition, a set of tropes and perspectives, that emerged out of the maritime writing from the turn of the nineteenth century that has largely been obfuscated through the conception of a dominant American maritime genre. Certain dispositions toward space and time that first emerged in this writing as a way to speculate on the well-being of those at sea, to manage long stretches of time, and to knit a web of connections between mariners at sea and those in port, are repurposed in Cather and Chesnut as a way to imagine the relays between territorial and overseas expansionist projects. Additionally, because these earlier forms of maritime writing worked to carve out a space for thinking outside of state-power as mariners engaged in insurgent forms of speculation and established informal networks of communication, Cather and Chesnut are able to draw on these perspectives and tropes as a way to refract the coincidence of state power and the forms of financial capitalism that are in excess to such power. Both authors draw on the extra-legal and extra-state projects to illustrate both the insurgent potential they provide for maneuvering a space out from under state power and the heightened exposure to danger, whether in the form of indebtedness or white supremacist terror.

I chose to look at these two novels for a few reasons. First, and foremost, they are both inundated with maritime culture and imagery despite having seemingly little to do with the maritime industry. The protagonists in both novels, Alexandra and Dr. Miller,²²⁵ have

²²⁵ Admittedly, it is difficult to argue that *The Marrow of Tradition* has a single protagonist. While I do not believe, as some have argued, that Dr. Miller is an author surrogate, I do believe it is possible to position him as a, if not *the*, central figure of the narrative.

genealogical ties to the maritime industry and are the first in their families to leave the industry. Secondly, they both deal centrally with speculative finance and productive connections can be established between the two quite different novels. Indeed, at one point in *O Pioneers!* the Bergson brothers argue with Carl Linstrum about the populist movement and Wall Street finance which Chesnutt portrays as the very preconditions for the white supremacist uprising in his novel. Finally, while both of them, writing in the style of realism and regionalism, exhibit a repudiation of sentimentalism to a degree, they both take recourse to a maritime sensibility that first found expression at the height of sentimentalist discourse. Because I am interested in their disposition toward maritime sensibility, I do not pretend to treat them exhaustively. Instead, I look to them as examples of popular genres like regionalism and realism of the time and consider elements of the novels that have to do with what I have described as maritime sensibility.

At the moment when maritime enterprises of American empire were surging in new ways, I consider how authors of this period drew on maritime sensibility as an imaginative resource. As the maritime genre loses steam in concordance with the rise of automatization and steamships, and as the U.S. navy builds American empire overseas, how might we read this recourse to a maritime sensibility? What happens when maritime enterprises are invoked in discussions of white supremacist sentiments in the U.S., westward colonization efforts, and overseas empire building?

Willa Cather and the Atlantic West

Before focusing on *O Pioneers!*, I believe it is important to see how Cather took ideas from her first novel and redeployed them in her second novel. Cather in fact often called *O*

Pioneers! her first novel because of her distaste for *Alexander's Bridge*.²²⁶ Critics also largely considered her actual first novel to be an outlier in her career. Concerned with high society in the U.S. and England, critics have pointed out that it reads more like a Henry James or Edith Wharton novel than a Willa Cather one.²²⁷ While not disagreeing, I focus instead on the way *Alexander's Bridge* illustrates Cather's comfort within different traditions of writing, namely different strains of maritime writing and melodrama, in order to track how they migrate to the plains of Nebraska in *O Pioneers!*

Thematically, the novel mobilizes some key tropes from the dominant form of maritime fiction, figuring the ocean as a space outside of social constraints and metaphorically pitting Alexander against the cacophony of the oceanic. The first of these moments is when Alexander decides to travel across the Atlantic to end his affair with Hilda once and for all. On the day he decides to leave, Alexander spends his time on the steamer to London out on the deck despite the major rainstorm that is hitting Boston. At the start, the weather was "dark and raw ... the great open spaces made him passive and the restlessness of the water quieted him. He intended during the voyage to decide upon a course of action, but he held all this away from him for the present and lay in a blessed gray oblivion. Deep down in him somewhere his resolution was weakening and strengthening, ebbing and flowing."²²⁸ And, again, that evening, "Alexander came back to the wet deck, piled his damp rugs over him again, and sat smoking, losing himself in the obliterating blackness and drowsing in the rush of the gale" (69-70). Cather here figures the ocean as a space of dispersal and dissolution. Alexander's experience at sea is one of "grey

²²⁶ Cather eventually considered *Alexander's Bridge* "unnecessary and superficial." See: Cather, "My First Novels (There Were Two)," 963.

²²⁷ Often, scholars consider Cather's emulation of popular authors like Henry James in *Alexander's Bridge* as a failure. Raymond Thorberg, for instance, argues that she was only able to hold onto the "Jamesian ideal" and find her own voice once she moved her narratives to the prairies of Nebraska. See: Thorberg, Raymond. "Willa Cather: From *Alexander's Bridge* to *My Antonia*."

²²⁸ Cather, *Alexander's Bridge*, 68-9. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

oblivion” and “obliterating blackness,” into which he can eschew his social constraints such as his marriage and job responsibilities, and he is able to recuperate his enthusiasm for his affair. Cather’s theorization and description of the ocean rhymes with typical characteristics of the sea in fiction like William Boelhower’s argument that “The Atlantic world is fundamentally a space of dispersion, conjunction, distribution, contingency, heterogeneity, and of intersecting and stratified lines and images—in short, a field of strategic possibilities in which the Oceanic order holds all together in a common but highly fluid space.”²²⁹ It is within this fluid, obliterating field that different aspects of Alexander’s life collide and intersect, preventing him from gaining any clarity of reflection. Because of his indecision, this oceanic scene in the novel reoccurs when Alexander’s bridge collapses and he becomes more than just figuratively obliterated as he drowns alongside his workers.

On the other hand, it does not take much work to establish the role of the ocean in the domestic world of the port either. In the first scene, Professor Lucius Wilson travels across the Atlantic and along the Charles river into Boston and, staring at the water, stands in the “watery twilight” among the smell of “saltiness that came up the river with tide” (4). When he arrives to the home of his childhood friend Bartley Alexander, he finds that it looks out on “a fine stretch of silver-colored river” (6). Greeted by Alexander’s wife Winifred, Wilson describes Alexander as someone who “caught the wind early, and it has never left his sails.” This all occurs within the first three pages of the novel. These descriptions and the consonant ones that follow, strongly establish Boston as a port town inundated with the maritime industry. It is hard to think about the different settings of the novel without recognizing the extent to which Alexander’s labor and the labor of his wife and mistress are part and parcel of port towns. As such, it is clear that while her

²²⁹ Boelhower, “The Rise of the New Atlantic Studies Matrix,” 92-3.

novel centers experiences at sea as the crux of the narrative, its attention to the impact of Alexander's decisions at sea—or lack thereof—in the domestic spaces of the ports of Winifred's Boston and Hilda's London illustrates the way this novel incorporated different impulses in depicting the transatlantic maritime world.

The more clearly melodramatic elements of the novel cue us into how, as I will discuss with *O Pioneers!*, Cather was working to narrate the feminized domestic realms of labor without full recourse to sentimentalism. While there is a repudiation of sentimentalism in Cather's first novel, or at least an ambivalence toward this mode of narration, she still at times gestures to certain aspects of the discourse such as the trope of presentiment. In Cather's, as in Mary Carr Clarke's, presentiment functions as a negotiation of temporality that is epistemologically built on feeling. For instance, when Hilda is thinking of Alexander across the Atlantic before receiving a letter for him, Cather writes, "she believed that she sometimes had a kind of second-sight about letters, and could tell before she read them whether they brought good or evil tidings" (331). While this letter ends up bringing evil tidings, Hilda nevertheless travels to New York City with the chance of running into Alexander always in the back of her mind. When they finally encounter each other and discuss Alexander's letter, they expose their own senses of presentiment:

Alexander slipped his arm about her. "I did n't know it before, Hilda, on my honor I did n't, but I believe it was because, deep down in me somewhere, I was hoping I might drive you to do just this. I've watched that door all day. I've jumped up if the fire crackled. I think I have felt that you were coming." He bent his face over her hair.

"And I," she whispered,—“I felt that you were feeling that.” (335)

This scene might easily be read in the register of the melodramatic novel. The two lovers who were destined to be together finally admit their feelings to each other, but it is too late: Alexander has resolved to end the affair and Hilda has decided to marry.²³⁰ At the same time, however, this scene draws on the long tradition of people gaining insight about others across oceans through a type of fusion of feeling and knowledge as a way to imaginatively track material consequences across different spaces—the public world of Alexander’s architecture, which brings him from port to port, and the domestic realms of Winifred and Hilda, who are both laboring affectively to sustain Alexander’s public labor.

Alexander’s Bridge offers us a window into the way Cather was proficient in these discourses prior to writing her prairie novels. It is clear how she engaged the ocean’s vastness and power to obliterate Alexander’s consciousness within the narrative at the same time that she drew on sentimentalist discourse to establish connections between the ports of Boston and London and these experiences at sea. This negotiation of the relationship between different material experiences and realms of labor continue to get worked out when Cather develops her novels of the prairies of Nebraska. Indeed, it seems that for Cather it was less satisfying to examine these relays in a properly maritime setting as a conversation with Sarah Orne Jewett demonstrates.²³¹ As she shifts from Alexander and the oceanic frontier to Alexandra and the landed frontier of the west in *O Pioneers!*, her disposition toward maritime sensibility is sustained.

²³⁰ Linda Williams argues that the dominant temporality of the melodramatic mode is the “too late.” See: Williams, Linda. “Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess.”

²³¹ Maynard Fox points out that Jewett told Cather, “I want you to be surer of your back grounds,—you have your Nebraska life,—a child’s Virginia, and now an intimate knowledge of what we are pleased to call the “Bohemia” of newspaper and magazine-office life. These are uncommon equipment, but you don’t see them yet quite from the outside.” See: Fox, Maynard. “Symbolic Representation in Willa Cather’s *O Pioneers!*,” 187. Fox is citing from Jewett, Sarah Orne. *The Letters of Sarah Orne Jewett*, 248-249.

The Watery Prairies of O Pioneers!

When *O Pioneers!* was first published, regionalism was still a less popular genre than that of a novel like *Alexander's Bridge*, which involved high society and major cities like Boston and London. Cather herself points this out in her discussion of the publication and reception of *O Pioneers!*. She writes "as everyone knows, Nebraska is distinctly déclassé as a literary background; its very name throws the delicately attuned critic into a clammy shiver of embarrassment. Kansas is almost as unpromising. Colorado, on the contrary, is considered quite possible. Wyoming really has some class, of its own kind, like well-cut riding breeches. But a New York critic voiced a very general opinion when he said, "I simply don't care a damn what happens in Nebraska, no matter who writes about it."²³² Confronted with such animosity for setting her novel in Nebraska, Cather opens her novel by establishing referents to the familiar setting of a port. These referents pair speculation, inheritance, the relays between past and future generations, and the relays between physical and mental labor in shipyards and the maritime industry with Cather's narrative of Nebraska.

Reading *O Pioneers!*, one might be struck by the degree to which water plays a significant symbolic role in a narrative about the Nebraskan prairie. Indeed, like in *Alexander's Bridge*, establishing the importance of water thematically in the novel is not difficult. The characters themselves are often described through watery metaphors. We are told Alexandra's consciousness is "like an underground river that came to the surface only here and there, at intervals months apart, and then sank again to flow on under her own fields. Nevertheless, the underground stream was there."²³³ Alexandra's mother often seems desperate for her past life in port, such as when she sends her two sons to the river to catch fish or when Alexandra imagines

²³² Cather, "My First Novels (There Were Two)," 964.

²³³ Cather, *O Pioneers!*, 135. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

her mother living contently on a desert island. Alexandra's younger brother Emil sings a Swedish song about a ship boy throughout Nebraska and Mexico. Marie Shabata imagines herself as a pond during the climax of her character-arch: "She felt as the pond must feel when it held the moon like that; when it encircled and swelled with that image of gold" (168). However, the maritime exists in more than a symbolic register throughout the narrative. It also shapes the way Alexandra learns to speculate against the grain of the market and find spaces outside of state power to attempt to build alternatives to systems of capitalist-patriarchy.²³⁴

In *O Pioneers!* Alexandra's eventual success in cultivating profitable land is simultaneously based on her ability to manage the practical material aspects of the land, (planting alfalfa, caring for the livestock) and her ability to speculate and imagine multiple possible futures (not moving to the river farms, going into debt to buy up neighboring plots of land). As such, she is the figure of the savvy investor. While her brothers and the men in town toil on her land, it is clear that were it not for Alexandra's keen speculative sense, the land would be valueless. This is epitomized in her argument with her brothers over her decision to take out additional loans, anticipating that the land will eventually become profitable. Oscar and Lou are averse to this plan and demand to know details. Alexandra lays out her speculation for them to examine, which, as all speculation and investment does, involves betting on the future value of commodities. Lou finally interjects, "But how do you *know* that land is going to go up enough to pay the mortgages and—" to which Alexandra replies, "I can't explain that, Lou. You'll have to take my word for it. I *know* that's all. When you drive about over the country you can feel it coming" (45, original emphasis). Unlike Lou and Oscar, who have spent their entire lives

²³⁴ Here I am thinking of Maria Mies argument that part of the primitive accumulation of capital is the articulation of the patriarchal system that exploits unwaged feminized labor with capitalism. See Mies, Maria. *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour*, particularly the section "Capitalist-Patriarchy" in chapter one, "What is Feminism."

working the land and seeing little to no change in their economic position, Alexandra has spent her life building informal networks of information, learning Scandinavian folkloric traditions of caring for animals and ecologies, and following marketplace fluctuations. In other words, while she does not know for certain they will make a profit—there is always the alchemy of the marketplace that makes speculation uncertain—she is skilled enough at knitting together these different sources of information to have the presentiment of success. In what follows, I argue that Cather's novel exposes how the form of labor epitomized by Alexandra emerges from the novel's disposition toward maritime sensibility.

It is important to note the ways Alexandra's speculation has a particular maritime quality. After all, Alexandra is acquainted with Charley Fuller, the town's real estate broker, and might well have learned techniques of speculation from him. However, the key difference is in their relationship to speculative finance capital. After telling her brothers that the Linstrums are moving back to St. Louis, Lou becomes indignant and argues that they ought to move away from the prairie like so many others. He tells Alexandra that the Arnson's sold their property to Charley Fuller and moved to a river farm to which Alexandra replies, "Fuller the real estate man? You see, Lou, that Fuller has a head on him. He's buying and trading for every bit of land he can get up here. It'll make him a rich man, some day." Lou replies with the appropriate jab that Fuller is "rich now, that's why he can take a chance," but Alexandra continues, "if only poor people could learn a little from rich people! But all these fellows who are running off are bad farmers, like poor Mr. Linstrum. They couldn't get ahead even in good years, and they all got into debt while father was getting out" (38-9). This comparison to Fuller is a telling one. The state and Wall Street are set up in such a way that Fuller is able to mobilize his already existent capital into different investments all while having enough real estate to hedge against the risk

involved in speculation. The Bergson's on the other hand, are slotted in the state-sponsored capitalist project of westward colonial expansion to be waged and unwaged laborers and rentiers.

This dual position comes to a head when Oscar states that his main objection to Alexandra's plan to take out additional loans is the continuance of their indebtedness. He tells Alexandra, "I dread signing my name to them pieces of paper ... all the time I was a boy we had a mortgage hanging over us," but he ultimately consents saying, "I can see there's a chance that way. I've thought a good while there might be. We're in so deep now, we might as well go deeper. But it's hard work pulling out of debt. Like pulling a threshing-machine out of the mud; breaks your back." While Alexandra tries to assuage him, he leaves by saying "maybe it'll come out right. But signing papers is signing papers. There ain't no maybe about that" (47). This moment exposes a difference between the type of speculation in which Fuller and the Bergsons engage. For Fuller, who is already rich, using his capital to buy up land, hope it appreciates, and, as a real estate broker, resell it for a profit in the future or mortgage it to farmers, the market in speculation is a way to continue to amass capital and expand his territorial reach. For the Bergsons, this speculation offers both the potential for a reprieve from state subjection and the risk of new, deeper indebtedness. For Oscar, the state is the only certainty, even if there is a chance for wealth. While they may risk their livelihoods for more wealth, he feels a certainty to their subjection to state power. For Alexandra, however, her maritime sensibility allows her to see speculation's oblique relationship to state-power and the opportunity therein. Thinking about this risk, Alexandra turns to the night sky and thinks of the "vastness and distance" of space and then looks out to the land and, "under the long shaggy ridges, she felt the future stirring" (47).

Throughout my discussion of maritime writing, I have worked to distinguish between these two practices, the dominant form of speculation in finance capitalism and the practice of an

insurgent speculation that engages a quotidian speculation on futurity that is encoded in tropes throughout turn-of-the-century vernacular print culture. Ian Baucom has done much to illustrate the dominant “speculative discourse of modernity” as a logic in finance capital in which a generalizing and averaging force is set to work in the market as a way to hedge against risky investments and amass capital all while the moments of immense violence engendered by such generalizing are “empt[ied] of local significance.”²³⁵ Speaking of the late-eighteenth-century Atlantic slave trade, he argues that the discursive concept of the “typical” is “an abstract commodity in its own rights, an investment vehicle in whose fortunes commercial society (with the assistance of the insurance industry) taught itself to speculate.”²³⁶ It is this version of speculation the figure Charley Fuller engages when, seizing on the idea of the typical lot, he buys up people’s land and lets them appreciate before reselling. Conversely, David Kazanjian notes that in Baucom’s reading of the archive, he simultaneously elaborates this speculative discourse of modernity and “posits an excess that cannot be speculated upon, a kind of living potentiality that can lead us out of the cruel logic of “the typical and the average,” beyond finance capital’s reach.”²³⁷ Acknowledging this potential to exist outside of the vast reifying force of capitalism, Kazanjian returns us back to the concept of speculation itself to argue, “the word *speculation* primarily meant both the contemplation or consideration of an existing subject, *and* the conjectural anticipation of a subject to be. It thus named a recursive mode of thought, one that reflected upon how something has become what it has become, and how that thing could become something else.”²³⁸ It is this latter form of speculation that is foundational to what I have been calling the insurgent speculation encoded within maritime sensibility. That is, as Baucom

²³⁵ Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 225.

²³⁶ *Ibid.*, 71.

²³⁷ Kazanjian, *The Brink of Freedom*, 28.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

illustrates, the Atlantic zone became inundated with a dominant discourse of speculative finance, yet because speculation functioned, at least partially, outside of state-power, there was opened up a possibility to engage in what I have been calling insurgent speculation to better ones material condition. Therefore, I argue that rather than seeing Alexandra's speculation on her family's future as part and parcel of the dominant mode of Wall Street speculative finance, we can instead see how she uses her disposition toward maritime sensibility to explore informal networks of information to eke out a space within speculative finance to better her family's position.

As chapter three demonstrated, those subjected to the maritime industry were especially adept at drawing on informal networks for spreading information about mutinies, revolutionary politics, or the severity of different captains at the same time that they drew on official accounts like marketplace reports and periodicals. This same strategy of information gathering can be seen in the way Alexandra navigates and defends Scandinavian folklore traditions and mobilizes their insights as a supplement to her negotiations of the marketplace. Old Ivar is the primary example of Alexandra's informal network. While her brothers Lou and Oscar believe that Ivar "was crazier than ever and would never be able to prove up on his land because he worked it so little," Alexandra sees his knowledge as offering a valuable perspective outside of agrarian capitalism. This distinction between their perspectives can be seen when we are told that Lou and Oscar "were meant to follow in paths already marked out for them, not to break trails in a new country. A steady job, a few holidays, nothing to think about, and they would have been very happy," whereas Alexandra believes "A pioneer should have imagination, should be able to enjoy the idea of things more than the things themselves" (32-3). Rather than trusting the path laid out for families like the Bregsons, which would have inevitably led them into continued indebtedness and wage labor, Alexandra draws on Ivar's folkloric traditions for insights into land management

and animal care. Rather than trusting agrarian norms for how to care for farm animals and plant crops, Alexandra often takes Ivar's advice and engages in practices that the brothers fear will make them the laughingstock of town. Time and again, however, Alexandra is able to draw on such informal networks to continually better her family's position within the marketplace.

The particular maritime quality to these practices is made evident through Alexandra's family history in the shipyards of the maritime industry which is often credited as the source of her proficiency in speculative discourse. Throughout the novel, Alexandra's skill in this most crucial task of speculation is described through her eyes and her similarity to her father and grandfather. She is described as resembling them more than do either of her brothers. Throughout the novel we are often reminded that Alexandra has her father's eyes, and they become a major symbol of her speculative intelligence as they always seem to be fixed on the future. As readers, we first encounter her through Emil's perspective and are told "[s]he had a serious, thoughtful face, and her clear, deep blue eyes were fixed intently on the distance, without seeming to see anything, as if she were in trouble" (5). Similarly, a crayon portrait of John Bergson that hung on the wall of their home held his "wondering, sad eyes that looked forward into the distance as if they already beheld the New World" (70). When Carl and Alexandra ride in their cart back to their homes, the sun shone "upon the eyes of the girl, who seemed to be looking with such anguished perplexity into the future" (10). Importantly, we learn that both Alexandra's father and grandfather grew up working in the maritime industry, and as the novel progresses this genealogy becomes more and more meaningful to Alexandra.

It is clear that Alexandra learns to practice speculation from her father and that he learned from his father. Readers are given a portrait of John Bergson as man who spent the last eleven years of his life trying to work the land into profitable farmland and ultimately failing or, at best,

breaking even. As he thinks over his life on his deathbed and tries to make a decision concerning his inheritance and the future of his family, we discover that what is crucial to making the land profitable is the ability to manage time. Cather writes, “Bergson went over in his mind the things that had held him back. One winter his cattle had perished in a blizzard. The next summer one of his plow horses broke its leg in a prairie-dog hole and had to be shot. Another summer he lost his hogs from cholera, and a valuable stallion died from a rattlesnake bite. Time and again his crops had failed ... Now, when he had at last struggled out of debt, he was going to die himself. He was only forty-six, and had, of course, counted upon more time” (14). The key phrase in this passage, that he had “counted upon more time,” makes plain the temporal gamble central to systems of indebtedness and investment. As I discussed in chapter two, the temporal gamble of shipping out on a voyage which, through unforeseen circumstances, could keep a mariner from home for years at a time, often put the entire family at risk as wages earned would only be accessible on the mariners return. As such, sailors needed to practice a type of quotidian speculation to ensure the sometimes-multi-year voyage would pay out accordingly. Similarly, this temporal gamble is also central to the task of presentiment—simultaneously a trope of sentimental fiction and a device to manage temporality through feeling. It should be no surprise at this point that we learn in the next couple paragraphs that his ability to anticipate finances and investments comes from when “Bergson himself had worked in a shipyard” (15). Not only is Bergson able to make a wager that five-years’ worth of taking loans out from the bank would eventually be repaid and made profitable through his family’s labor, but he would have been familiar with and learned to wager through similar types of ventures prevalent in the shipyards. Ultimately, these ruminations and John’s final actions preform a type of speculative labor

uniquely characteristic of sailors and dockworkers which is here being translated to colonial projects of Westward expansion.

Her father's past has a clear influence on Alexandra's strong attachment to maritime culture. At one point, she teaches her niece a book of songs that John Bergson used to sing and tells her, "I can remember hearing him sing with the sailors down in the shipyard," (70). She also has memorized maritime narratives like the "Frithjof Saga" and often reads "The Swiss Family Robinson" aloud (41-2). Beyond her interest in maritime culture, though, Alexandra's father recognizes a skill in her that he attributes to his and his father's time in the maritime industry and works to nurture it. On his deathbed, his mind moves between the future of his family and the struggles of the present. Bergson thinks about how

Before Alexandra was twelve years old she had begun to be a help to him, and as she grew older he had come to depend more and more upon her resourcefulness and good judgement. His boys were willing enough to work, but when he talked with them they usually irritated him. It was Alexandra who read the papers and followed the markets, and who learned by the mistakes of their neighbors. It was Alexandra who could always tell about what it had cost to fatten each steer, and who could guess the weight of a hog before it went on the scales closer than John Bergson himself. Lou and Oscar were industrious, but he could never teach them to use their heads about their work. (15-6)

While we are told he would have "much rather, of course" trusted a son with his inheritance, it is Alexandra's grasp of markets and her skills in investment and commodity valuation that cause John to leave the farm in her hands.

This knack for using her head in her work, John believes, comes from her grandfather and he often told her that she “was like her grandfather; which was his way of saying that she was intelligent” (16). Naturally, Alexandra’s grandfather also came out of the maritime industry:

John Bergson’s father had been a shipbuilder, a man of considerable force and of some fortune. Late in life he married a second time, a Stockholm woman of questionable character, much younger than he, who goaded him into every sort of extravagance. On the shipbuilder’s part, this marriage was an infatuation, the despairing folly of a powerful man who cannot bear to grow old. In a few years his unprincipled wife warped the probity of a lifetime. He speculated, lost his own fortune and funds entrusted to him by poor seafaring men, and died disgraced, leaving his children nothing. But when all was said, he had come up from the sea himself, had built up a proud little business with no capital but his own skill and foresight, and had proved himself a man. In his daughter, John Bergson recognized the strength of will, and the simple direct way of thinking things out, that had characterized his father in better days. (16)

This portrait sketches her grandfather as the quintessential Smithian entrepreneurial worker who is the progenitor of Alexandra’s clear-headed, intelligence. In John Bergson’s formulation, Alexandra is able to make profit through “skill and foresight” without the later-in-life failure of extravagant speculations that lead to poverty and disgrace. It is crucial that this skill emerges out of the maritime industry, since, as I have shown, this logic was fundamental to the type of labor and industry at sea.²³⁹ Importantly, the lack of a large inheritance is seen as either a character flaw in her seafaring grandfather or a misogynistic jab at his second wife’s supposed money-

²³⁹ In an interesting oceanic intrusion, the narrative points to speculation and land management’s inheritance from maritime culture a second time when we learn that as John Bergson is in his final days, Carl Linstrom brings him a magic lantern that projects illuminated images from Robinson Crusoe, famous fictional mariner and agrarian laborer, upon the walls of their Nebraskan home.

hungriness. In both instances, the failure to invest profitably is rationalized as individual folly rather than seen as part and parcel of the project of investment and finance speculation in the first place in which a portion of investors are necessarily bound to indebtedness. As such, it is something that John Bergson believes he can fix by nominating the right person for the job.

However, it is important to sit with this portrait for a moment longer to understand how Cather is exposing that maritime labor and speculation like that of her grandfather was co-constituted by unpaid feminized labor at home. Rather than accepting the given reading of his second wife as a gold-digger, as we are supposed to, I believe we can see her as a figure who perhaps demanded a wage for her labor, or, at the very least, refused the unpaid affective labor of sustaining his maritime endeavors. As I illustrated in chapter two, the sentimental fiction in port town periodicals worked to make visible the enmeshments between the masculinized world of the sea and the feminized world in port at the same time that it instantiated a subjection to those relays. This portrait of the second wife paints her as a figure who is unable to fulfill sentimentalism's compensatory relationship to the maritime marketplace. An alternative compensatory relationship is invoked soon after, when John Bergson tells Alexandra that he is leaving the farm to her. Afterward, they revert to these earlier scenes in their relationship when they lived on the docks rather than the prairies: ““*Dotter,*” he called feebly, “*dotter!*” ... His daughter came and lifted him up on his pillows. She called him by an old Swedish name that she used to call him when she was little and took his dinner to him in the shipyard” (17). This tender moment exposes the degree to which Alexandra served as sentimentalism's proper compensatory figure, bringing her father dinner that we can assume her mother cooked. However, by being left the inheritance and control of the land, Alexandra's position shifts and she begins to occupy both roles.

After her father's death, Alexandra becomes, simultaneously, the person who engages in the marketplace and the sentimental compensatory figure to that marketplace. This collapse exposes the degree to which Alexandra's sympathetic bonds and her marketplace transactions are co-constitutive of her role in the family. While the realist style of the novel offers a degree of repudiation of sentimentalism, its maritime sensibilities invoke the way sentimental periodicals did much work to try to imagine feminized forms of labor in port at the same time that, as Lori Merish demonstrates, they instantiated a subjection to this labor.²⁴⁰ When Cather moves away from sentimentalism, she is still dealing with the world of feminized and unpaid labor that sentimentalism was both exposing and instantiating. Once Alexandra's sympathy, which would have been portrayed as compensatory to the marketplace in sentimentalism, is seen as an extension of her success in the speculating within the marketplace, this project of sympathetic attachment is exposed as itself a marketplace transaction. As such, having been exposed to the light, like a sunbaked rope, such forms of sympathetic attachments become brittle and frayed and begin to disintegrate.

Emil gestures to this at one point when he thinks that Alexandra's eyes saw "so far in some directions and were so blind in others" (117). At this juncture in the novel, we have learned that Alexandra is able to see "so far" in her anticipation and speculation upon land value, while her ability to build intimacy with those around her is apparently where she is "so blind." The degree to which her success in land speculation increases is directly correlated with the degree to which her interpersonal relationship shift into merely distant, sometimes dependent, sympathetic attachments. In other words, her success leaves her wealthy, but also desperately alone. When Emil brings up the rumor that she feels romantically toward Carl, she confesses to him, "I've had

²⁴⁰ See: Merish, *Sentimental Materialism*.

a pretty lonely life, Emil. Besides Marie, Carl is the only friend I have ever had” (118).

Conversely, while Carl fails at marketplace speculation—he fails first as a farmer and is only able to succeed in the goldrush because he partners with someone more astute than himself—he has a type of presentiment for people’s feelings and attachments that mirrors Alexandra’s knack for market speculation. At the end of the novel, after Marie and Emil have died, Carl returns to town and tells Alexandra he sensed there was a connection between Emil and Marie despite only seeing them once as adults. When she demands why he neglected to tell her, he explains, “My dear, it was something one felt in the air, as you feel the spring coming, or a storm in summer. I didn’t *see* anything. Simply, when I was with those two young things, I felt my blood go quicker, I felt—how shall I say it?—an acceleration of life. After I got away, it was all too delicate, too intangible, to write about” (207). This mirroring of Alexandra’s feeling toward the future and Carl’s feeling of the air between two people lays bare the double function of presentiment as inimical to the marketplace calculations involved in risk management when betting on futures and the trope of sentimental fiction par excellence.

Additionally, by being the most profitable investor in town, the relationships those in town have with Alexandra is simultaneously one of sympathetic attachment and financial dependence. For instance, Frank Shabata is able to exist somewhat autonomously as a renter on her land, but Alexandra’s nostalgia clearly has some influence on how he builds and what old structures he keeps out of Alexandra’s nostalgia. The Linstrums end up having to move to St. Louis and lose their land completely as Alexandra buys it up for a cheap price, but she feels sympathy for their early lives on the land and tries to preserve certain aspects of their farm. Most revealing, though, is Ivar who has lost his land due to “mismanagement” and ends up living with Alexandra through her own generosity. At one point, Ivar confesses to Alexandra that he has

heard talk in town that people want to put him in the asylum at Hastings because he occasionally has “spells” which frighten people in town. While he and Alexandra previously had a separate but intimate relationship in which she helped support him by buying his wares and he helped her by giving insights into caretaking for her farm animals, Ivar acknowledges how now their relationship is one of dependence.

While he is despondent when he approaches her to talk, Ivar has an exceptionally strong understanding of his “spells” and is evidently unconflicted about their meanings and origins. He explains that they were fairly common for people back home in Norway and that they represent, for him, the fact that he has been “touched by God.” Likewise, he has a good understanding of the social function of asylums in the U.S. as institutions that isolate difference. The uncertainty that worries him the most is not the meaning of his spells or the function of asylums, but of the status of his dependence on Alexandra and the power she has to protect him from asylum. He tells her, “I should not wish you to keep me if, as they say, it is against your *interests*,” (emphasis mine) and admits that “Only your great prosperity has protected me so far. If you had had ill-fortune, they would have taken me to Hastings long ago” (62-3). Alexandra assures him that she likes having him around and that she will not allow the people in town to send him to Hastings. She acknowledges that “Sympathy always cleared his mind,” but Ivar’s confrontation highlights just how precarious sympathy is as a contract.

There are a few things this interaction demonstrates about the innerworkings of Alexandra’s success in speculation and investment. First, we are told that Ivar lost his land due to mismanagement. What exactly mismanagement means is never clarified. However, because early scenes in the novel demonstrate that Ivar was entirely self-sufficient and able to maintain his own rustic home, we can assume that as the valuation of land increased, as Alexandra

anticipated, Ivar became displaced. This reality is only briefly hinted at in the novel, but Alexandra's role as a caretaker for people in town is seen throughout the second half of the novel as the result of her ownership over large swaths of property. That is, because she accurately anticipated and invested in the lands of the prairie, she not only gained wealth from her ownership of the land, she also gained rentier status through these properties. Ivar's displacement from his pond-side dwelling is only one example of this arrangement; she also feels sympathy for the young Swedish girls who work in her kitchen and for her in-laws who miss the practice of their folklore traditions.

Secondly, precisely because the land he inhabited was privatized and he lost his claim to it, Ivar's relationship with Alexandra transforms from being one of friendship to one of dependence for a place to live and a job. This dependence in turn demonstrates that it is the flimsiest promise of sympathy that keeps Ivar out of the asylum. Ivar's worry over his situation orbits around the fact that should Alexandra no longer feel sympathetic toward him or should something happen to her or her wealth, he would have no recourse to support and be sent to Hastings. Again, this flimsy contract of sympathetic identification is exposed as both precarious and strategic in a way that echoes with both Equiano's engagement of sentimentalist discourse and Vere's fatherly sympathetic feelings toward Billy.

Alternatively, this collapse of sympathetic attachments and marketplace speculation into the figure of Alexandra also exposes the patriarchal exploitation of feminized labor. During Alexandra's final falling-out with her brothers, they get into an argument about the origin of their family's newly acquired wealth. Lou is upset at the prospect that Carl, who he now sees as a coastal elite, might take part of Alexandra's property through marriage. Alexandra insinuates that she has the right to give Carl her land if she wants, to which Lou contends, "Didn't all the land

come from the homestead? It was bought with money borrowed on the homestead, and Oscar and me worked ourselves to the bone paying interest on it,” to which Alexandra asks “what about my work?” While Lou is only able to recognize physical farm work as labor, Alexandra insists that her work in market speculation and the affective labor of maintaining relationships with those in town as compensatory to this marketplace speculation has generated the majority of their wealth. Despite her argument, Lou and Oscar insist that “Good advice is all right, but it don’t get the weeds out of the corn” and says of Alexandra that “if she tells you to put in a crop, she thinks she’s put it in.” They conclude, “This is what comes of letting a woman meddle in business ... The property of a family really belongs to the men of the family, no matter about the title” (112-3). These threatening scenes illustrate a new form of exploitation of feminized labor. Unlike sentimentalism, which instantiates a subjection to the very compensatory relationship it invokes as a form of agency, Cather’s novel illustrates that even when Alexandra moves out of this subjection into the masculinized realm of speculative finance, there is always the threat of having this position taken away through a nascent misogyny. As new recruits to the populist movement, Lou and Oscar represent the potential for the reactionary misogynist bent to populism at the time. Understanding that they are being taken advantage of by the financiers on Wall Street, they begin to suspect the culprits to be newcomers to capital like women or, in the case of Chesnut’s novel, the newly the enfranchised black population.

Finally, before moving to Charles Chesnut’s novel, *The Marrow of Tradition*, I want to say one final word about the way maritime sensibility tracks throughout Cather’s novel and the stakes in attending to these concerns. As I discussed in chapter two, the circulation of periodicals worked to establish relays between the space of the ship and the space of the port such that it became almost meaningless to describe an occurrence in one space without thinking about the

ramifications and reverberations in the other. Through real material connections such as exploitation at home and at sea and through more imaginative means like hauntings and feelings of presentiment, the ship and port became heavily inundated with one another. Similarly, such fiction carved out a distinct apprehension of time through these same means. Past events consistently haunted current endeavors and quotidian forms of speculation were used to think through long stretches of time at once. By building maritime sensibility into her narrative, Cather also brings these unique apprehensions of time and space.

Often, when Alexandra looks at the land with her speculative eyes, it becomes rendered as water, as “brown waves of the earth” (208-9). At one point, Alexandra encourages the timid Emil to ask Ivar about his “big pond, where so many birds come” and Ivar excitedly remembers, “Oh, yes, yes! A big white bird with long wings and pink feet ... She was going over to the other ocean, maybe, and did not know how far it was ... She saw the light from my window and darted up to it. Maybe she thought my house was a boat, she was such a wild thing” (27). In its attempt to travel from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, the way the sea gull mistakes Ivar’s dwelling for a ship, effectively inverts the land/water opposition momentarily and we are made to imagine the vast prairie as an ocean. Further, having made her decision to not move down to the river farms, perhaps the one most crucial to the novel, Emil looks at Alexandra’s happy face and we’re told “for the first time, perhaps, since that land emerged from the waters of geologic ages, a human face was set toward it with love and yearning. It seemed beautiful to her, rich and strong and glorious. Her eyes drank in the breadth of it, until her tears blinded her” (44). In this description, the landscape wavers between land and water twice. We are first made to imagine the prairies emerging out of the ocean, and then, once the land itself is solid and strong, we see it again through Alexandra’s teary eyes and the vision of land becomes immersed in a second type of

saltwater. Through these liquifications of the land, Cather draws on the tradition of writing I discuss in chapter two in which authors who published in periodicals were working to establish discourses that would stitch together the relay between the domestic space and the space of the ocean.

Finally, Alexandra also exhibits a particular apprehension of time that emerges from the disposition of maritime sensibility. Throughout the entire novel, Alexandra justifies her life's work on the farm as offering Emil a better future. In a way, Emil is her riskiest investment. She bets everything, including her relationships with Oscar and Lou, on the idea that wealth will generate future happiness and opportunity for Emil. As Maynard Fox points out, the major dilemma with Emil centers around his future: "Loved by Alexandra and despised by his untalented brothers Lou and Oscar, the Hamlet-like Emil has not been able to make up his mind about the future" (191). Because Alexandra has so totally invested her life's work into the promise of a wealthy future for Emil, part of the tragedy of his graphically depicted murder is the failure of Alexandra's entire wager on the future.

After the death of Emil and Marie and her falling-out with Lou and Oscar, Alexandra goes to the cemetery in a storm and we get one final intrusion of the oceanic metaphors. As Ivar heads out to find her, he notices that "the sky and the land were a dark smoke color, and seemed to be coming together, like two waves" (190). When he finally finds Alexandra, she looks like a "drowned woman," and she tells him,

Ivar, I think it has done me good to get cold clear through like this, once. I don't believe I shall suffer so much any more. When you get so near the dead, they seem more real than the living. Wordly thoughts leave one. Now that I've been out in it with him, I shan't dread it. After you once get cold clear through, the feeling of the rain on you is sweet. It

seems to bring back feelings you had when you were a baby. It carries you back into the dark, before you were born; you can't see things, but they come to you, somehow, and you know them and aren't afraid of them. (191)

In this drowned state Alexandra begins to think within a different temporality—she is simultaneously in the graveyard and back to a time before she was born. This invocation of the past ruptures time such that both Alexandra's childhood at the docks and Alexandra's seafaring ancestors seem to emerge into the space of the Nebraska prairies. This turning point for Alexandra is clear when, at the very close of the novel, Alexandra is reunited with Carl, the last friend she has in the world, and they decide to marry. As they walk after making this decision, they stop at a pond and Alexandra reflects upon her life and asks Carl if she can come with him to Alaska in the spring. She says, "I haven't been on the water since we crossed the ocean, when I was a little girl. After we first came out here I used to dream sometimes about the shipyard where father worked, and a little sort of inlet, full of masts" (208). Thinking about the past in this way, Alexandra concludes, "You remember what you once said about the graveyard, and the old story writing itself over? Only it is we who write it, with the best we have." In this moment, Alexandra is realizing that because she has inherited the skills of investment and a way to view the world from her father and grandfather, she has brought with it an apprehension of time that allows for the present to be ruptured with the past and future and an apprehension of space that confounds the distinction between the sea-space her ancestors navigated and the prairies she works.

In this moment of maritime sensibility, Alexandra has a some clarity about her own historical conjuncture and, speaking of her inheritance, says to Carl, "Lou and Oscar can't see those things ... suppose I do will my land to their children, what difference will that make? The

land belongs to the future, Carl; that's the way it seems to me. How many of the names on the country clerk's plat will be there in fifty years? I might as well try to will the sunset over there to my brother's children. We come and go, but the land is always here. And the people who love it and understand it are the people who own it for a little while" (209). Alexandra, reflecting on the land and, perhaps, her grandfather's indebtedness, realizes that there is nothing that guarantees the value of the land within a marketplace. Something may happen to make the land monetarily valueless. In this light, her aside that she might as well will the sunset to the next generation cuts both ways: if the land is able to be speculated upon and profited from, surely features like a view of the sunset might generate value as well, but in neither case does value signify any actual relationship to the land or the sunset. This is perhaps the closest the novel gets to acknowledging that the historical condition for the Bergsons' entire project of land cultivation was the U.S. military's war on indigenous people. By arguing that those who "love and understand" the land only own it for a "little while" naturalized the presumption of native disappearance and collapses the distinction between Alexandra's understanding of the land as a commodity and indigenous understandings of ecology.

By attending to the presence of a maritime sensibility throughout the novel, especially in the way it confounds the land with the ocean and opens up space for thinking through the continuities and ruptures between multiple historical moments, I believe we can gain purchase on the way the genocidal Indian Wars which haunt Cather's novel are coterminous with the overseas imperialist projects that were happening simultaneously. In other words, by continually confounding the prairie space and the ocean space, the narrative also invites comparison between the logics of displacement and colonialism (the precondition of Alexandra's land prospecting) and the imperial logic of American empire building in Nicaragua, Cuba, the Philippines, Puerto

Rico, the Hawai’ian islands, and elsewhere. As Nikhil Pal Singh illustrates, the colonization of the American west was often invoked—and is still invoked in American war-making—as a justification of American imperial projects. He notes that Theodore Roosevelt, who assumed office at the same time the novel takes place, “mocked the anti-imperialists of his day who opposed U.S. counterinsurgency wars in the Philippines and Cuba as sentimentalists who would give Arizona back to the Apaches,” and that “Metaphors of “Indian country” routinely emerge in the rhetoric of U.S. militarism overseas, from the Philippines at the start of the Twentieth century the Pacific battlefields of World War II to Vietnam in the cold war and Afghanistan and Iraq today.”²⁴¹ That is, while the ongoing history of colonization which surrounds Cather’s novel is used as a justification and logic for overseas imperial projects, the novel seems to illustrate how this connection is backward-reaching as well, and her situation as a settler-colonist draws on a sensibility emerging out of the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century maritime industry. Attending to the development of maritime sensibility during the turn of the nineteenth century and the way this sensibility is mobilized in distinct historical conjunctures to imagine the relationships between far-reaching spaces that exist in excess of state-power and the ruptures between different historical iterations of racial capitalism, we can look for distinct ways these relationships were understood as well as how people imagine resistance to such forms of power. Maritime sensibility is, then, a form in which these relays become particularly visible.

Making Themselves Heard—Drawing Connections between Cather and Chesnutt

Similar to how Cather drew on the maritime industry to reflect Alexandra’s life and work in the Nebraska prairies, Chesnutt, too, builds out his own historical moment by engaging

²⁴¹ Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, 24.

maritime institutions, cultures, and sensibilities. Based on the town of Wilmington, North Carolina, Chesnutt's novel takes place in a port town and many of the principle characters have connections to the maritime industry. Dr. Miller's father was a stevedore and was able to generate a fair amount of wealth after emancipation by running his own stevedore company. This stevedore company employs Josh Green, another principle character, who often fights with prejudiced white sailors and functions in the narrative to offer Dr. Miller different perspectives on history and Wellington society. The novel also contains maritime lore and references to the presence of buried treasure from a carnival held by the famous pirate Blackbeard in the mid-eighteenth century. Furthermore, the chapter titles leading up to the climax of the plot—the white supremacist coup d'état—mirror that of a storm out at sea and coincide with Olivia Carteret's shipwreck nightmare that seems to jump right from the pages of an early-nineteenth-century periodical. More crucial for my purposes here, however, is that, like Cather, Chesnutt's disposition toward maritime sensibility affords him the ability to negotiate the boundaries between state-power and extra-state forces like finance capital, knit connections between the white supremacist take-over of Wellington and American imperial projects overseas, and conceive of time in a way that shows how this one explosive moment of violence is inundated with past structures of exploitation and struggle.

While Willa Cather strived to publicly present herself as apolitical, Charles Chesnutt took a more deliberate approach to politics in his novel. There is, however, one distinct moment when politics are brought up in *O Pioneers!*, even if only to portray them as an embarrassing preoccupation, and it illustrates the complicated world of politics and finance capital that both authors, in their own ways, represent. The first time Carl Linstrum returns to the Bergson place as an adult, he and his childhood friend Lou have a quick political spat. Lou, being aware of his

own rural manners and customs, is threatened by Carl's new "urban appearance" from his time in New York. Because it is brief and the only moment in which politics of the time were discussed in the novel—and because it serves as a transition to the subject-matter of Chesnut's novel—I will quote its entirety:

"Well, what do folks in New York think of William Jennings Bryan?" Lou began to bluster, as he always did when he talked politics. "We gave Wall Street a scare in ninety-six, all right, and we're fixing another to hand them. Silver wasn't the only issue," he nodded mysteriously. "There's a good many things got to be changed. The West is going to make itself heard."

Carl laughed. "But, surely, it did that, if nothing else."

Lou's thin face reddened up to the roots of his bristly hair. "Oh, we've only begun. We're waking up to a sense of our responsibilities, out here, and we ain't afraid, neither. You fellows back there must be a tame lot. If you had any nerve you'd get together and march down to Wall Street and blow it up. Dynamite it, I mean," with a threatening nod.

He was so much in earnest that Carl scarcely knew how to answer him. "That would be a waste of powder. The same business would go on in another street. The street doesn't matter. But what have you fellows out here got to kick about? You have the only safe place there is. Morgan himself couldn't touch you. One only has to drive through this country to see that you're all as rich as barons."

"We have a good deal more to say than we had when we were poor," Lou said threateningly. "We're getting on to a whole lot of things." (75-6)

Despite the fact that Carl is obviously wrong that “Morgan himself couldn’t touch you” since the Bergsons were often in debt to the bank, this spat illustrates the tension over the populist movement organized around William Jennings Bryan’s run for president and his eventual loss to William McKinley. The silver struggle Lou gestures to is over Wall Street’s 1896 panic over a silver standard being introduced which destabilized the ruling class reliance on the gold standard. During this time, there were massive political reorganizations and shifting party loyalties. For a while there was a proliferation of independent candidates running for office as democrats and republicans scrambled to win over the newly enfranchised black voters. Eventually, “fusion” tickets started to become common as a way to try to consolidate power.

The fusion ticket for black Americans also offered some key advantages, such as being able to send black representatives to the state legislature and other positions of power. However, as Steven Hahn notes, “fusion clearly altered the dynamics of local politics, limiting the grassroots mobilizations that had marked the Reconstruction period, empowering black political bosses and brokers who had learned to work with white Democrats and who had chief responsibility for negotiating the deals, and loosening black allegiance to the Republican party.”²⁴² Hahn continues that, “Mobilizations among the freedpeople during Reconstruction followed by a decade of Greenback and Independent insurgency during the 1880s composed the foundations of Populism in the 1890s” entailing a “coalition of whites and blacks who struggled together to attain and discharge local power. It was a coalition that depended on shared hostility to Democratic rule, on mutual political educations, on the opportunity to occupy the same social and political spaces, and on the fashioning of new political identities.” (439) However, these coalitions were short lived. After the assassination of President McKinley and the rise of

²⁴² Hahn, *Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration*, 387.

President Theodore Roosevelt, the working class became largely divided along race and gender lines.²⁴³

While the national election dealt a blow to the fusion ticket, in many western and southern towns, there was a fair amount of local success. Staunch supporters of a democratic party vacant of leftists and populist movements began organizing take-overs of local governments. The most famous of such take-overs was the 1898 white-supremacist uprising in Wilmington, North Carolina, dramatized in *The Marrow of Tradition*. The riot and coup of the local government was a backlash against the relative success of the black community in Wilmington both politically and economically. And while certain strains of the populist movement fused with local political power to address the historical inequity that emerged from slavery, white elites protested what they saw as an unfair taxation on their wealth. Throughout the 1890s, fusion populists began rising to local and state positions of power, predominantly due to the enfranchisement and voter support of black residents of North Carolina. However, invigorated by the success of William McKinley in 1896, Wilmington's elite white democrats organized a coup of what they claimed was "negro rule" in city politics.²⁴⁴ The massacre has the dubious title of being the only successful coup d'état in American history. Tasking himself with representing these massive reorganizations of state-power, political alliances, and finance capital that nonetheless re-articulate racism and sexism with capitalism, Chesnut writes a novel that is

²⁴³ For a discussion of the role Roosevelt played in promoting a type of white masculinity which prompted the continued theft of feminized and racialized labor power see Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*.

²⁴⁴ Furnifold M. Simmons, the figure upon which General Belmont is likely based, played a major role in orchestrating the white supremacist riot in Wilmington, NC and moved it from a public debate about fusion tickets, republicans, and democrats to one about race. As H. Leon Prather Sr. writes, "Simmons decided, therefore, to make "Negro rule" and "white supremacy" the watchwords in the effort to return Democrats to power. The Democrats leveled charges of corruption, scandals, and extravagance against the Republican-Populist coalition but always gave them secondary consideration. The campaign was to be increasingly centered around the issue of blacks' sharing government. The color line would be so sharply drawn that, ultimately, little else would be talked about" (29).

both the epitome of the trend in literary realism²⁴⁵ and one that is disposed toward maritime sensibility.

Chesnutt and the Shipwreck of Disenfranchisement

Written only three years after the white supremacist uprising and take-over of Wilmington, North Carolina, Chesnutt's novel reads very much like a historical novel, dramatizing a thinly veiled (if veiled at all) version of the events in Wilmington. Published only five years after the actual uprising, it is impressive to witness the clarity with which Chesnutt narrates the various ingredients that fed into the massacre, including speculative finance capital, the marriage of southern aristocracy with northern industrial capitalism, the building of an overseas American empire, and the tenuous alliance of elite and working-class whites against the newly enfranchised black population.²⁴⁶ Approaching the political moment of the post-Reconstruction south and the rise of populism, fusion tickets, and the reorganization of racial capitalism, it is hard not to think of Gramsci's famous formulation that history deposits an "infinity of traces, without leaving an inventory."²⁴⁷ In what follows, I read Chesnutt's novel as an attempt to sketch out an inventory of the white supremacist uprising in Wilmington by fictionalizing it in novel form and drawing on maritime sensibility. Narrating these different

²⁴⁵ Chesnutt was favored by W. D. Howells to be a great talent in literary realism, but Howells was upset by the tone Chesnutt used in his critique of southern white supremacy saying, "The book is, in fact, bitter, bitter. There is no reason in history why it should not be so, if wrong is to be repaid with hate, and yet it would be better if it was not so bitter" (832). For further discussion of this response, see: Joseph R. McElrath Jr., "W. D. Howells and Race: Charles W. Chesnutt's Disappointment of the Dean." Beyond Howells's offended sensibilities, other scholars have debated the genre of the novel. See: Gregory E. Rutledge, "All Green with Epic Potential: Chesnutt Goes to the *Marrow of Tradition* to Re-Construct America's Epic Body"; John Sampson, "'A Catalogue of Wrong and Outrage': Undermining White Supremacist Discourse and Spatial Practice in Charles Chesnutt's *The Marrow of Tradition*"; and Joyce Pettis, "The Literary Imagination and the Historic Even: Chesnutt's Use of History in *The Marrow of Tradition*."

²⁴⁶ For a discussion of the way southern democrats, almost exclusively made up of white elites, aligned themselves with northern republicans and the white working-class to support the American empire and to disenfranchise black populations, see: Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America*, particularly chapter XVI "Back Toward Slavery."

²⁴⁷ Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 324.

elements of the new organization of racial capitalism, Chesnutt often exhibits a maritime sensibility that offers a way to think about the resonances between distant campaigns—such as the disenfranchisement of the black population in Wellington and the empire-building projects in Nicaragua—as well as a way to apprehend the way past forms of violence rupture into the present. By attending to the disposition toward maritime sensibility throughout the narrative, I argue that Chesnutt’s novel dramatizes the way, in the midst of major reorganizations of political economy, extra-state forces work to establish a new form of the “constitutive exclusion” from the promise of new marketplace mobility.

In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Charles Chesnutt depicts the massive reorganization of wealth that was taking place as the promises of northern industry created new markets in speculation and investment that opened tenuous access for opportunity for the working-class. However, as Chesnutt thoroughly and vividly depicts throughout the novel, this period exposes a reorganization of racial capitalism in which white men were offered access to the wealth of northern industry at the exclusion of racialized populations. As the state transitioned out of slavery, new articulations of racism with capitalism began to emerge. As I cited in chapter one, David Kazanjian argues that in the late-1700s, Equiano’s attempts to engage in the mercantile world as a way to gain “formal and abstract equality” promised by the marketplace leads him to continued obstruction and failure. Kazanjian writes, “his mercantile failures are neither incidental nor unique, but systematic and constitutive of the logic of “formal and abstract equality.” That is, Equiano does not encounter simply an exclusion from such equality, but a *constitutive* exclusion ritually iterated and reiterated in the Atlantic zone at least in part by a mercantilist system.”²⁴⁸ During the fallout from the promises of Reconstruction just over a

²⁴⁸ Kazanjian, *The Colonizing Trick*, 59.

century later, Chesnutt describes the way the southern white aristocracy reiterates the constitutive exclusion of racialized populations in this new historical context by forming alliances with northern industry and engaging in extra-legal violence against Wellington's black community.²⁴⁹ However, in this historical context, the narrative illustrates how characters draw on the mode of speculation derived from the mercantilist system of the Atlantic zone that Kazanjian discusses at the same time that they draw on contemporaneous maritime projects of American imperialism.

The figure who most clearly illustrates the dynamics of this new constitutive exclusion is Major Carteret. Carteret's character arc throughout the novel centers mainly on his desire to rearticulate his aristocratic lineage into the new arrangements of postbellum capitalism. Prior to the Civil War, the Carteret family "had owned an estate of ninety thousand acres of land and six thousand slaves," (230) but when Major Carteret returned home, he found "his family, one of the oldest and proudest in the state, hopelessly impoverished by the war" (209). While still part of southern aristocracy, Major Carteret found himself without capital, and quickly took steps to reemerge as part of the wealthy in Wellington, first, by marrying Olivia Merrell and absorbing her inheritance and, second, by investing that inheritance in infrastructure and the stock market.

These maneuvers are most often seen through his obsession over the future glory of his newborn son, Theodore Felix Carteret. The day he returns to work as editor of *The Morning Chronicle* after his son's birth, we are told that "the first subject he took up was one bearing upon the future of his son. Quite obviously the career of a Carteret must not be left to chance,—it must be planned and worked out with a due sense of the value of good blood." Deciding that, because his family's wealth from generations of slave-owning Carterets had been vanquished during the

²⁴⁹ For a discussion of the way extra-legal violence functions in the novel see: Andrew Hebard, "Romance and Riot: Charles Chesnutt, the Romantic South, and the Conventions of extralegal Violence."

Civil War, he needed to secure new wealth to make sure his son's bank account matched his family's pedigree. Major Carteret looks at a letter on his desk

from a well-known promoter, offering the major an investment which promised large returns, though several years must elapse before the enterprise could be put upon a paying basis. The element of time, however, was not immediately important. The Morning Chronicle provided him an ample income. The money available for this investment was part of his wife's patrimony. It was invested in a local cotton mill, which was paying ten per cent., but this was a beggarly return compared with the immense profits promised by the offered investment,—profits which would enable his son, upon reaching manhood, to take a place in the world commensurate with the dignity of his ancestors. (230)

It is important to track Major Carteret's different phases of wealth accumulation through this passage. After the wealth accumulated by a vast history of slave ownership was wiped out, he accumulated new wealth through the patriarchal system of dowry and marriage contracts.²⁵⁰ Because Olivia was unable to hold her own wealth under patriarchal law, Major Carteret assumed the inheritance her father, Sam Merrell, left her in his will. Not only does he absorb Olivia's inheritance, he also, as is shown later in the novel, absorbs the inheritance of Olivia's mixed-race, half-sister Janet Miller through the extra-legal maneuvers of Polly Ochiltree to suppress this part of Sam Merrell's will. This first step back to wealth for Major Carteret is built on both the legal disenfranchisement of women in the late-nineteenth century and the illegal disenfranchisement of the Miller family's right to part of the Merrell estate through racial

²⁵⁰ See Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.

prejudice. Finally, unsatisfied with the size of the Merrell inheritance, he turns to finance capital and invests in future returns.

Importantly, as for Alexandra in *O Pioneers!*, the main barrier to wealth is the issue of temporality. For Alexandra, she must bet that the future of the land holds the returns she anticipates, otherwise her family will fall into poverty. Major Carteret, who is less concerned with “the element of time,” still must hedge his investment against a future in which his investments are less valuable. As is clear throughout the novel, Carteret is mainly fearful that the black population in Wellington will be positioned to compete for this wealth. In order to hedge his bet, he partners with two other white supremacists, General Belmont and Captain McBane, and begins a campaign to disenfranchise any member of the black community who had acquired a modest amount of property. This way, as the sole investors in industry and stocks, these white southerners would be in a position to acquire the vast majority of the available capital after the major redistributions of wealth after the Civil War. The racialized and feminized populations of Wellington, in this configuration, are the hedge against white male investment—Major Carteret and others form an alliance to disenfranchise black people precisely as a way to ensure the success of their own investments.

By depicting the orchestration of the white supremacist uprising in Wellington as a constellation of labor by these three figures, Chesnutt exposes the violence present throughout Major Carteret’s entire speculative project. Captain McBane came from the working-class white community which “had done the dirty work of politics, as their fathers had done that of slavery.” While Belmont and Carteret are able to rest on their aristocratic lineages, McBane has only recently generated wealth through his whiteness by attaining a “contract with the state for its convict labor, from which in a few years he had realized a fortune” (233-4). Captain McBane is

continually distasteful to Carteret because his racial prejudice manifests in feelings of violence toward the black population. Because Carteret likes to voice his racial prejudice in an aristocratic inflection, McBane's bare racism makes him bristle, but again and again he realizes that he has "nothing to say by way of dissent. McBane's sentiments, in their last analysis, were much the same as his, though he would have expressed them less brutally" (273). While this alliance lays bare the violence of his speculative projects, the way the violence is distributed is highly stratified. For instance, Major Carteret is seen as a white supremacist with the most refined sensibilities and "In serious affairs Carteret desired the approval of his conscience, even if he had to trick that docile organ into acquiescence" (233). Of Belmont, we are told that he "was not without a gentlemen's distaste for meanness, but he permitted no fine scruples to stand in the way of success." Finally, with a father who was an overseer and his own work in leading a chain gang and Ku Klux Klan raids, McBane's hateful racism most accurately captures what is involved in their campaign of white supremacy. When Major Carteret is taken through town during the white supremacist riot, he denies his condonement of violence, "'My God!' replied [Major Carteret], with a gesture of impatience, as he continued to elbow his way through the crowd; 'I meant to keep them in their places,—I did not intend the wholesale murder and arson'" (430). It is clear, however, that this violence was present the entire time Major Carteret, General Belmont, and Captain McBane conspired and orchestrated this uprising, but in more forms than one.

By illustrating the orchestration of this coup through military figures, Chesnutt invokes the American navy and its contemporaneous projects of overseas empire building. Much like the way the maritime fiction I discuss in chapter two works to confound a distinction between the space of the port and the ocean, Chesnutt illustrates how the reorganization of racial capitalism

within the south was contiguous with these overseas projects of American empire. So far, I've discussed how Chesnut's novel reflects the innerworkings of speculation and wealth reorganization in the postbellum south through projects of white supremacy, patriarchy, and paramilitary violence, but, as Du Bois notes in *Black Reconstruction*, not only was the reorganization of the south a way to defeat the rising black professional class, it was also a way to position the American empire globally. As Moon-Ho Jung notes, "For Du Bois, [plutocracy] marked the lasting tragedy of Reconstruction, the inability of Americans to grasp its national and worldwide implications. Eighteen seventy-six marked the beginning of a new era of labor exploitation, race hatred, and empire, tying America to Europe in the project to subjugate the darker peoples of the world."²⁵¹ This is refracted in the narrative through the character General Belmont who brings his experience in naval and maritime industry imperialism to the American south.

In a novel concerned with small-town relations, genealogies, and history, it is understandable critics have yet to spend much time discussing the mention of General Belmont's history.²⁵² We are told briefly when he is introduced that "He had once been minister, under a Democratic administration, to a small Central American state" (233). He also states, much later in the novel, "I was in Nicaragua, ten years ago when Paterno's revolution drove out Igorroto's government" (389). When Major Carteret and Captain McBane argue about the use of violence in their campaign, Belmont, clearly the most experienced in military takeovers of governments, plays interference between these two by explaining that "In Central and South American ... none are hurt except those who get in the way" (390). This scene shows that Belmont most accurately

²⁵¹ Jung, "*Black Reconstruction and Empire*," 468.

²⁵² An exception to this is Frederick Wegener's article "Charles W. Chesnut and the Anti-Imperialist Matrix of African-American Writing, 1898-1905."

understands, as Frederick Wegener puts it, “the essential and ominous kinship that linked domestic campaigns of racial terror and repression with the nation’s swiftly multiplying expeditions overseas.”²⁵³ Further, Wegener illustrates that the campaign Belmont references was run by the U.S. navy and maritime industry, and was based in the “hemispheric dream of the period, that of a canal connecting the Atlantic and the Pacific through the Central American isthmus ... With the incorporation of the Maritime Canal Company in the late 1880s (roughly corresponding to the period of General Belmont's ministerial service), the nation finally set out to achieve such a goal in earnest.”²⁵⁴ Thus, Belmont’s resumé presents him as a figure who understands the relays between the nationalist projects of American empire and the maneuvers of global capitalism.

At one point, the narrative zooms out to momentarily position Wellington in this global nexus. Just before the uprising, “While little was said in Wellington, public sentiment all over the country became every day more favorable to the views of the conspirators. The nation was rushing forward with giant strides toward colossal wealth and world-domination, before the exigencies of which mere abstract ethical theories must not be permitted to stand. The same argument that justified the conquest of an inferior nation could not be denied to those who sought the suppression of an inferior race” (381). This passage, dropped into the narrative briefly, links the logics of colonization and empire to the internal politics of white supremacy. Crucially, these “giant strides” that remain undefined at this point in time were the very same projects that General Belmont participated in when he was involved in the takeover of Nicaragua. The U.S. navy was the key instrument by which Latin American, Pacific Island, and Caribbean colonization efforts took place. This is the crucial backdrop to understanding how maritime

²⁵³ Wegener, 478.

²⁵⁴ Wegener, 477.

nationalism, as discussed in the first two chapters of this dissertation, transformed into a residual maritime sensibility despite the fact that overseas military efforts were taking place.

Josh Green and Janet Miller as Insurgent Figures

Beyond the way Chesnut's disposition toward maritime sensibility allows him to imagine the way the reiteration of racial capitalism in the American south is a project of both state and extra-state forces, it also opens space, as I have been tracking throughout this dissertation, for imagining insurgent forms of speculation. In the novel, the port continues to serve as a space that offers relative protection against state-power. When the conspirators of the white supremacist uprising are talking about who they want to remove from positions of power, they think briefly about the port commissioner who is black, but they decide "We'd better not touch him. It would bring about the government down upon us, which we want to avoid" (391). When they talk about Dr. Miller, whose father was a stevedore in the port, they also think, "He 's a very good sort of negro, does n't meddle with politics, nor tread on any one else's toes. His father was a good citizen, which counts in his favor" (391). Besides black preachers who they want to blackmail into writing supportive editorials for them, these are the only two figures they decide not to disturb. This demonstrates the degree to which proximity to the maritime industry insulated black workers, to a degree, from white supremacist violence. But it is a highly tenuous and partial protection as white sailors and workers from the wharves, originally absent from the political demonstration, are later seen to participate in the riot out of drunkenness and excitement.

In addition to offering tenuous protection from white supremacist violence, the maritime elements in the novel also open space for thinking about insurgent forms of speculation. This can

be seen in the relationship between Dr. Miller and Josh Green. Green works in the port for Dr. Miller's brother who owns the Miller family stevedore company. When we first meet Josh Green, he has a broken arm from fighting a racist sailor who had insulted him. While mending his arm, Dr. Miller begins to lightly chastise him for using violence and encourages him to use civility to get ahead in life. Green politely rejects Miller's worldview and knits for him a web of connections between this insult from the sailor, the Ku Klux Klan's past murder of his father and terrorization of his mother, and his future violent death, which he anticipates will occur when he meets the man who killed his father. Having knit this together, Miller looks at him and "realized, too, for a moment, the continuity of life, how inseparably the present is woven with the past, how certainly the future will be but the outcome of the present. He had supposed this old wound healed" (290). While Dr. Miller figures throughout the novel as the liberal figure who trusts that state institutions, even when he recognizes prejudice within them, will generally improve and become more equal and just, Green does not view his family history in the same way. Instead, Green consistently is connecting past events to present ones and it is through this collision of Green and Miller that Miller is able to grasp an alternative view of time and history in which it is not gradual improvement, but entanglement.

During the rising tension in town and in the midst of the riot itself, Dr. Miller and Green consistently disagree about how best to respond to anti-black racism. The fundamental difference is one of time. When Green tries to recruit Dr. Miller to join his group of men who are going to defend themselves against the rioters, Dr. Miller insists that they wait out the riot saying, "Our time will come,—the time when we can command respect for our rights; but it is not yet in sight. Give it up, boys, and wait. Good may come of this, after all." To this, Green replies, "all dem reasons ain' got no weight wid me. I'm gwine in dat town, an' ef any w'ite man 'sturbs me, dere

‘ll be trouble” (415). After disagreeing with Dr. Miller, Green asks him to collect his wages from the port if he should die and give them to his mother. Thus, even at the height of endangerment, Green is speculating about possible futures while Dr. Miller trusts that progress is inevitable. It is not clear which approach the novel endorses. The fact that Miller’s hospital is burnt to the ground and his son is murdered leaves very little room to agree with his viewpoint. Green’s position as well, leaves little to support its veracity. In order to participate in the riot and get revenge on his father’s murder, Josh himself ends up dying. In a passage that reflects this division, we are told that the black residents of Wellington “with the exception of Josh Green and his party, had not behaved bravely on this critical day in their history; but those who had fought were dead, to the last man; those who had sought safety in flight or concealment were alive to tell the tale” (438). This is an odd bind that the narrator illustrates, at once seeming to endorse the actions of Josh Green while recognizing the responsibility of those who survived to narrate the event. The narrative itself seems to insist on the question of temporality in asking us to consider how history is remembered.

While there has been much criticism around this dilemma in the novel,²⁵⁵ I argue that considering this moment through the novel’s association with maritime sensibility allows us to see something beyond the conundrum of “progress.” Josh Green’s enmeshment within maritime culture allows him to speculation on an outside to both the white supremacist violence and to the promise of state and legal protections. A clue to this perspective is seen when Old Mr. Delamere goes home to his estate. We are told that his family has had the estate since the 1750s, and that, “Along the bank of the river which skirted its domain the famous pirate Blackbeard had held

²⁵⁵ For scholarship that centers around a “dilemma” in the novel, see: John M. Reilly, “The Dilemma in Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition*”; P. Jay Delmar, “The Moral Dilemma in Charles W. Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition*”; and Charles Hackenberry, “Meanings and Models: The Uses of Characterization in Chesnut’s *The Marrow of Tradition* and ‘Mandy Oxendine.’”

high carnival, and was reputed to have buried much treasure, vague traditions of which still lingered among the negroes and poor-whites of the country roundabout” (350). While this is a passing detail, it is important to note the way such maritime lore might have informed the distinction between Dr. Miller and Josh Green’s response to the white supremacist violence. Existing outside of state power, Marcus Rediker explains how piratical institutions during the eighteenth century often provided a much more egalitarian distribution of labor and wealth.²⁵⁶ Carnivals in particular offered the opportunity for major redistributions of wealth, of which the buried treasure exists as a symbol. Rediker mentions Blackbeard (Edward Teach) specifically after discussing how Cotton Mather had “delivered thunderous sermons at several pirate hangings, [and] wondered in exasperation why so many regarded these criminals as heroes.” Rediker offers an answer to Mather, stating “The motley pirate crews that plagued the North American coast included many Africans and African Americans, beginning in the seventeenth century, when buccaneers marauded on the Spanish Main and people of color ran away from Caribbean plantations to join them, and continuing through the 1710s and 1720s, when, for example, Blackbeard’s crew of one hundred had sixty black members.”²⁵⁷ It is important to note how the violence in town is a violence that is based in articulating racist hate with finance capital. Unlike Blackbeard’s carnival, the state-sponsored project of Reconstruction offered meager to no redistributions of wealth away from the slave holding class of the southern aristocracy. As such, it would make sense that compared to the maritime lore, Josh Green would hold little hope in the state or financial institutions for “formal and abstract equality.” While it is a minor moment in the text, Josh Green would have no doubt been aware of this history, as

²⁵⁶ In *Outlaws of the Atlantic*, Marcus Rediker writes, “A core value in the broader culture of the common tar, egalitarianism was institutionalized aboard the pirate ship” (68).

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.

maritime lore would have been particularly strong in the world of the docks. By gesturing to this maritime lore, Chesnutt opens up a consideration of a possible alternative to the reinvestment in state-protections and the promises of marketplace-based freedom. I believe we must consider this mention of maritime lore alongside the narrative's simultaneous emphasis on Josh Green's direct condemnation of white supremacy and distrust of state-protections as brave and its insistence on the responsibility of survivors to narrate this historical event. Rather than reinvest in state-protections and marketplace promised freedoms, the maritime embrace of carnival and wealth redistribution alongside a fierce rejection of white supremacy, which Josh Green represents, might be an imaginative resource for alternative world-making.²⁵⁸

The other insurgent figure in the novel is Janet Miller who confronts Olivia Carteret in the middle of what she calls a "storm of blood and tears." The chapters leading up to the uprising and this confrontation are titled to reflect the build up of a storm. Between the chapters "Mutterings of a Storm" and "The Storm Breaks," Olivia Carteret has a nightmare that a storm causes her to become shipwrecked. Just before this dream, Olivia Carteret is coming to terms with the fact that her father, Sam Merckell, had a legitimate marriage to Julia Brown, a woman who was formerly enslaved by the Merckell family, that Janet Miller was their daughter, and that Sam's will allotted money for Julia and Janet and would have been legally valid had Olivia not impulsively burned it. Thinking through her role in suppressing her father's will, Olivia begins to unpack the innerworkings of racial capitalism, and wonders, "If the woman had been white,—but the woman had *not* been white, and the same rule of moral conduct did not occur, *could* not, in the very nature of things, apply, as between white people!" (402). The fact that Major Carteret, the main orchestrator of the white supremacist uprising, has acquired Julia's inheritance through

²⁵⁸ For an interesting discussion of Chesnutt and the imagination of a utopian South see Marlene Allen, "*The Colonel's Dream* and Charles Chesnutt's Afrofuturist Vision of a Utopian South."

his marriage to Olivia illustrates the double-bind Julia and Janet face as black women. Not only is their inheritance, which itself rests on the whim of the husband and father, the only way to gain material wealth for their unpaid affective and domestic labor, the way Olivia articulates her racism with the patriarchal system of capitalism excludes them from any legal protections.

Coming out of this reflection, Olivia goes into a fitful sleep and has her shipwreck nightmare, much like the ones from the periodicals of the early-nineteenth century. In her nightmare, she and her son are sailing when a great storm shipwrecks their boat. While they are floating, trying to survive, “she saw in the distance a small boat approaching over the storm-tossed waves. Straight toward her it came, and she had reached out her hand to grasp its side, when the rower looked back, and she saw that it was her sister. The recognition had been mutual. With a sharp movement of one oar the boat glided by, leaving her clutching at the empty air” (404). Once Janet passes her by, the child becomes too heavy and Olivia drops him causing him to drown. This dream is reminiscent of how, in the early-nineteenth-century periodicals I discussed in chapter two, the narratives of shipwreck nightmares, fictional shipwreck narratives, and accounts of actual shipwrecks were published as a way of knitting a relationship between the endangerment of mariners at sea and the ramifications of tragedy at home in port. Through a disposition to maritime sensibility, this scene repurposes the trope of the shipwreck, not to knit together connections between the port and the sea, but to expose the intertwined lives of Julia, Olivia, and Janet.

This scene clearly foreshadows the moment at the end of the novel when Olivia’s son actually becomes ill and his fate rests in the hands of the Miller family. Janet, after her only child has been killed by a stray bullet in the uprising, is tasked with deciding whether her husband, whose own hospital has just been burnt to the ground, will go to operate on the Carteret’s only

son. Major Carteret had previously refused to allow Dr. Miller to enter his home but, being in a desperate situation, is now begging his assistance. While Miller initially refuses to operate out of grief for his child's death and his hospital's destruction, Olivia goes to beg that he reconsider, to which he leaves the decision with Janet. As a way to persuade Janet, Olivia finally admits that they are sisters and begs her to allow Dr. Miller to operate for their "father's sake." At this admission, "Janet's eyes slowly filled with tears—bitter tears—burning tears. ... [this recognition] had come, not with frank kindness and sisterly love, but in a storm of blood and tears; not freely given, from an open heart, but extorted from a reluctant conscience." This storm of blood and tears brings us back to Olivia's shipwreck nightmare in which Olivia first realized her own culpability in Janet's disenfranchisement. Recalling my discussion in chapter two of Mary Carr Clarke's confrontation with Ann Carson, unlike the way Carr Clarke's own tears allow her to recognize their "mutual distress" from which she can build a sympathetic bond, Janet here recognizes that despite the fact that she and Olivia are biological sisters and that they have both lost or are at risk of losing their only child, their distress is not mutual. The sympathetic bond Olivia is beginning to form for Janet is entirely self-serving, even as she offers to retroactively honor the will of their father. Instead of allowing Olivia to sympathetically attach herself to Janet's grief and disenfranchisement, Janet instead "dash[es] her tears aside" and forces Olivia to confront her own role in Janet's situation, saying, "I have but one word for you,—one last word,—and then I hope never to see your face again. My mother died of want, and I was brought up by the hand of charity. ... Now when this tardy recognition comes, for which I have waited so long, it is tainted with fraud and crime and blood, and I must pay for it with my child's life!" To this, Olivia begins to try to continue apologizing but Janet continues "imperiously" without crying, "I throw you back your father's name, your father's wealth, your

sisterly recognition. I want none of them,—they are bought too dear! ah, God, they are bought too dear!” (447). After which, Janet allows her husband to operate to demonstrate that she is capable of acting justly even to someone who has wronged her.

This scene demonstrates that Olivia’s shipwreck nightmare allows her to knit a set of temporal connections between herself, her son’s status as the male heir of the Merrell and Carteret wealth, and the racist, extra-legal disenfranchisement of Julia Brown and Janet Miller. What Olivia is attempting here is to play the role of the sentimental compensatory figure by offering an affective bond of sympathy with Janet as a way to make up for the violent incursions of the market both through her “father’s name” and her “father’s wealth.” But Janet rejects this attempt at “sisterly recognition” by explaining how they are bought “too dear,” and refuses to reinvest herself in the very attachments that have injured her. Janet recognizes how it took a “storm of blood and tears” to theoretically shipwreck Olivia’s worldview enough to see her own complicity in Janet’s disenfranchisement. Recognizing this, she decides, unlike her husband, not to embrace the promised protections of the legal and financial institutions Olivia extends to her. This is a speculative act in the insurgent sense—she is both able to grasp how this “storm of blood and tears” came to be and can wager on an alternative possible future.

Chesnutt’s novel abruptly ends as Dr. Miller rushes to save the Carteret child, and we are not made privy to their lives in the aftermath of the massacre. Throughout the novel, Chesnutt ruptures the violence of this particular white supremacist massacre with the history of slavery and the distant but contemporaneous imperial projects which themselves articulated American racism with global capitalism. By the time readers get to the storm of blood and tears within which Olivia extends an olive branch, albeit a bloody one, it is clear that the sisterly recognition Olivia is offering is a recognition within a system that would largely sustain the project of

gendered and racialized disenfranchisement. While we do not learn what becomes of Janet, Dr. Miller, or anyone after this massacre, by rejecting this system of recognition, Janet opens an alternative space for world-making.

As I stated at the outset of this chapter, this fourth and final chapter functions as a bit of an outlier in this dissertation. Chapter one offered an alternative starting point for considering the way the maritime industry in the U.S. has been imagined. Chapter two discussed the countercurrents of writing that existed alongside the dominant form of American maritime literature as a way to work out what tendencies, tropes, dispositions, and concerns circulated within this mostly neglected body of literature, while chapter three recast a well-known text against those countercurrents. This chapter, however, functions as a bit of an experiment, asking: what becomes visible when we track the way these concerns, signified as “maritime sensibility,” reemerge in texts from later historical periods? Throughout this chapter, I have attempted to explore the way that attending to the disposition toward maritime sensibility in Willa Cather and Charles Chesnutt might help make visible the connections and relays between different forms of power that might otherwise be difficult to track. Attention to maritime sensibility can make visible the way racial capitalism and its gendered exploitation of labor is imagined in moments that exist beyond the period of the slave trade in the Atlantic zone. It can make visible the relays between the development and emergence of a Jim Crow era in the South, the colonization of the American west and displacement of indigenous peoples, and the overseas imperialist projects of American empire. Finally, as Janet Miller and Josh Green demonstrate in *The Marrow of Tradition*, maritime sensibility can also be an imaginative resource for thinking about forms of resistance that are simultaneously skeptical of state-power and of the promises made by sites of

extra-state power like finance capital. I am interested in how these forms of resistance might extend in our own era of massive capital mobility, decades-long wars, neoliberal privatization, and ecological devastation that threatens people around the world. Attending to the ways people in the past have imagined immense networks of power and exploitation and have worked surreptitiously and boldly against such power might offer us the imaginative space to think about our current historical conjuncture and how thoroughly it is shot through with the past in an attempt to imagine a better future.

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