

INTRODUCTION

Seafaring Odysseus

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

—G.W.F. Hegel, *Hegel's Philosophy of Right*¹

AT THE DAWN OF WESTERN NARRATIVE, Homer's Odysseus sets sail. In his voyages, this intrepid hero explores unknown waters and coasts, like the rocks Scylla and Charybdis or the island of the Sirens, and ventures down the river Styx to Hell and out to the Pillars of Hercules (Straits of Gibraltar) that marked the edges of the flat classical world. Surviving extreme conditions, Odysseus evinces his consummate practical resourcefulness, calling on his ability to assess situations and manipulate the psychology of men, of monsters, and of the gods. He also utilizes his knowledge of the environment and of technology; Odysseus is "[t]he first seaman of whom we are actually told that he steered by the stars," in the annals of Western navigation.²

The descendants of Odysseus people an enduring, international form of modern fiction, which spans from the beginning of the eighteenth century to our present. This lineage dates to Defoe's *Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* (1719), about a mariner whose practical resourcefulness enables him to survive a twenty-eight-year exile on a desolate island at the edge of the charted world. Descendants of the capable Odysseus include Defoe's pirate hero of *The Life, Adventures & Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton* (1720), as well as the buccaneer of Alain René Le Sage's *Les Aventures de Monsieur Robert Chevalier, dit de Beachêne, capitaine de flibustiers dans la nouvelle France* (1732). To the family of Odysseus the seaman belong the self-made Captain Robert Lade, an English hero conceived by the French novelist Abbé Prévost in his *Voyages du Capitaine Robert Lade* (1744) and the picaresque Roderick Random, who is buffeted around the British maritime empire in *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748) by the Scot, Tobias Smollett. Odysseus is the forbear of the American James

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Fenimore Cooper's expert pilot John Paul Jones in *The Pilot* (1824) and the dashing pirate of *The Red Rover* (1827); the agile harpooners on Herman Melville's *Pequod*; and the hardworking captains and seamen of novels written at the turn of the twentieth century by Joseph Conrad. Odysseus's descendants include action heroes in popular fiction by Captain Frederick Marryat, Eugène Sue, Robert Louis Stevenson, Jules Verne, C. S. Forester, and Patrick O'Brian, among many others.

If Odysseus applied his practical resourcefulness in an enchanted cosmos, his descendants use their practical skills to survive amidst the risks and dangers of a world "abandoned by God."³ I take this phrase from the argument about the cultural significance of the modern novel made by Georg Lukács whose *The Theory of the Novel* (1920), set the terms for novel studies as we know them today. While the epics of antiquity portrayed heroes at one with their society and the cosmos, Lukács pronounced the novel to express the "transcendental homelessness" of modern consciousness in a disenchanting world, where heroes, sundered from nature and community, set off in quest of interiority, psychology and "essence."⁴ For Lukács, Odysseus was within the epic tradition; however, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer noted how Odysseus suffered from the homesickness of the moderns, when they took Odysseus as the harbinger of Enlightenment rationality. Diagnosing Odysseus as the proto-modern individual, they made the telos of his journey "attaining self-realization only in self-consciousness." They also placed Odysseus at the threshold of the modern novel in his abstraction from the physical world and nature, calling him "*homo oeconomicus*, for whom all reasonable things are alike: hence the Odyssey is already a *Robinsonade*."⁵

But there is nothing interiorized or abstract about the agency of Odysseus the seafarer who survives storms, shipwrecks, and other saltwater dangers, and the same can be said of his modern descendants, from Robinson Crusoe to John Paul Jones, Jack Aubrey, and beyond. In celebrating the practical skills of oceangoing adventurers, sea fiction explores an aspect of modern consciousness as constitutive as transcendental homelessness and abstraction. This aspect is a capacity: a distinctively modern form of practical reason, which is the philosophical term for the intelligence distinguishing people who excel in the arts of action. Practical reason is an embodied intelligence, drawing on the diverse aspects of our humanity. Rationality is one of its tools, but so are the senses, intuitions, feelings, and the body. The arenas for practical reason are specific shifting situations, often harboring unruly forces that can be negotiated but not controlled. As a situation-specific capacity, practical reason has historically taken many different forms. There are both continuities and differences in the competences needed by doctors, parents, teachers, politicians, coquettes, and generals, as well as mariners who contend with

the might of the sea. While for Lukács and the Frankfurt School thinkers, the disenchanting cosmos is steeped in melancholy if not despair, in sea adventure novels, disenchantment, though painful, yields opportunity. Unmoored from divine authority as well as assistance, the heroes of sea fiction perform their capacity to negotiate the edges of an unknown, expanding, chaotic, violent, and occasionally beautiful sublunary realm relying on human agency alone.

The protagonists in sea adventure fiction battle life-threatening storms, reefs, deadly calms, scurvy, shipwreck, barren coasts, sharks, whales, mutinies, warring navies, natives, cannibals, and pirates—in short, they have *adventures*, as many such novels emphasized with the wording of their titles. To understand the celebration of practical reason in sea fiction, it is necessary to take seriously adventure forms. In Lukács's *Theory of the Novel*, as in many subsequent influential accounts, “the Novel” implies some version of the novel of manners (novel of education, historical novel, domestic novel, etc.), while adventure fiction has been devalued as mere popular fiction. One notable exception to this trend is Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of adventure.⁶ In an essay included in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin argued that adventure fiction subjects its protagonists to dangers to test and thereby affirm their identity—an identity that expresses a culture's constitutive values. Prominent among the values tested across the history of adventure forms are different forms of practical reason, including the *metis* of Odysseus, the *virtu* of the knight in medieval romance, and the popular cunning of the early modern *picaro*.⁷ The secular resourcefulness of Crusoe and his brethren is one more value that the adventure pattern vindicates through trial.

Across the lineage of sea adventure novels, novelists modeled the heroism of their fictional protagonists after the historical seamen of Western modernity. The figure of the mariner was imbued with a gritty glamour during four centuries, stretching from the navigations of Vasco da Gama and Columbus to the race across frozen seas for the poles at the turn of the twentieth century. This span was defined by two distinct but interrelated histories: the working age of global sail and the era of global exploration. The mariner's glamour was inseparable from the prominence of the oceans across this span as one of modernity's most dynamic, productive frontiers. A century before *Robinson Crusoe*, philosopher Sir Francis Bacon cited the nautical compass enabling cross-ocean travel as one of three technologies, along with gunpowder and the printing press, that had changed “the whole face and state of things throughout the world,” more influential than any “empire . . . sect . . . [or] star.”⁸ Bacon was not overstating the impact of saltwater transport networks that functioned as the circuitry of global capitalism and European imperialism. Ships transported information, along with people and goods,

and remained the most efficient means of global communications until the invention of the telegraph. The oceans of the globe were also a frontier of science and technology. The immense wealth and power at stake in maritime transport led governments and companies to pour resources into exploration, ship technology, navigation, and other research and development.

The profitable work of global ocean transport was a dangerous and difficult enterprise. The oceans are wild spaces, ruled by great forces beyond human control. Wooden sailing ships were sophisticated but imperfect technologies that progressed through “yielding to the weather and humouring the sea.”⁹ For much of the era of global sail, technologies of navigation were sophisticated yet imperfect as well. Until 1759, for example, no instrument existed with the ability to calculate accurately longitude at sea, and hence to let sailors know where they were in the course of a traverse; a lack that also impeded accurately charting the world. Adding to the dangers of global seafaring were the facts that scurvy was not understood for the first three hundred years of global navigation and that the high seas were in large measure a zone beyond the reach of law. Might made right, and the only freedom was the “freedom of the seas,” an amoral freedom of movement without regard for the purpose of such travel.

Amidst such hostile conditions, the “perfect” or “compleat mariner,” as he was called, achieved iconic status for his ability to navigate a path safely through the marine element of “flux, danger, and destruction,” to cite Hegel from this chapter’s epigraph. The perfect mariner exhibited this demeanor in the ordinary work of global ocean transport and achieved international celebrity for path-breaking explorations, yielding a cultural narrative that Jonathan Lamb has called “the romance of navigation.”¹⁰ Romance is an enduring literary mode plumbing an enchanted world. In literary history, it has been the name given to many premodern adventure forms, where protagonists test their practical reason against supernatural powers. The romance of navigation, in contrast, was a thoroughly secular romance of men at work; a romance of human practice.¹¹

The Novel and the Sea begins by reconstructing the contours of the mariner’s heroism across the global age of sail. This heroism would fascinate novelists and comprised the figure’s cultural mystique. Though the mariner’s capacity once would have been common knowledge, it has been largely forgotten today, more than a century after the demise of “the wooden world.” Throughout my study, I shall follow Joseph Conrad, master mariner as well as master novelist, in calling this capacity “craft.” To reconstruct the mariner’s capacity in a chapter titled “The Mariner’s Craft,” I use a nonfictional corpus of writing spanning the working era of sail that detailed the practices of seamanship and that

played an influential role in work at sea. This corpus is also essential to understanding how novelists, starting with Defoe, transferred craft from contemporary history and cultural mythology into fiction.

Global ocean travel took off with the printing press, and print culture was an important element in its success. Since overseas voyages occurred in a remote space, their vital information and events were known only to their participants and depended on writing to be passed on. The first writings of the maritime corpus took the form of manuscripts, often based on oral report. Relations of historical navigations began appearing in print as early as 1523, when *De Moluccis Insulis*, the first account of Magellan's circumnavigation of the globe (1519–1522), was published. By the seventeenth century, the maritime corpus included accounts of notable voyages by mariners from across the oceangoing nations of Europe, as well as accounts of shipwreck, dating to the mid-sixteenth century anonymous Portuguese *Account of the very remarkable loss of the Great Galleon S. João*. Other genres in the flourishing maritime corpus were practical manuals of seamanship, pilot's guides, and sea atlases, and by the eighteenth century, sensationalized pirate biographies, a form that soared to European celebrity with *The Buccaneers of America* by the Huguenot Alexandre Exquemelin, first published in Dutch in 1678.¹² By the middle decades of the eighteenth century and into the nineteenth century, the maritime bookshelf also included genres illuminating other aspects of the sailor's experience beyond purely professional capacity; such as accounts that justified behaviors in mutinies, like the accounts arising from the wreck of the *Wager* (1741) in the squadron of Lord Anson during his circumnavigation; narratives by black seamen like Olaudah Equiano, showing the horrors of the Middle Passage and black sailors' struggles for freedom; and narratives recounting the hard life of the ordinary sailor before the mast, to echo the classic *Two Years Before the Mast* (1840) by Richard Henry Dana Jr., who tasted life at sea for two years following his graduation from Harvard.

Across its different forms, the maritime corpus depicted the exploits and techniques of work—the profitable and difficult work of sailing and navigation.¹³ The primary audience for most of its texts was hence initially professional. Along with seamen, these professionals included politicians and government officials, as well as scientists, engineers, entrepreneurs, and merchants. But the maritime book also quickly appealed to armchair sailors. Some readers looked to the news of the sea to be up-to-date on the modernity of their present. Yet others savored historical explorers, castaways, and buccaneers for entertainment. Nonfictional narratives were the most popular form with armchair sailors, but pleasure readers also possessed books of sea charts and treatises on seamanship; indeed, some of these books were published in large formats, with

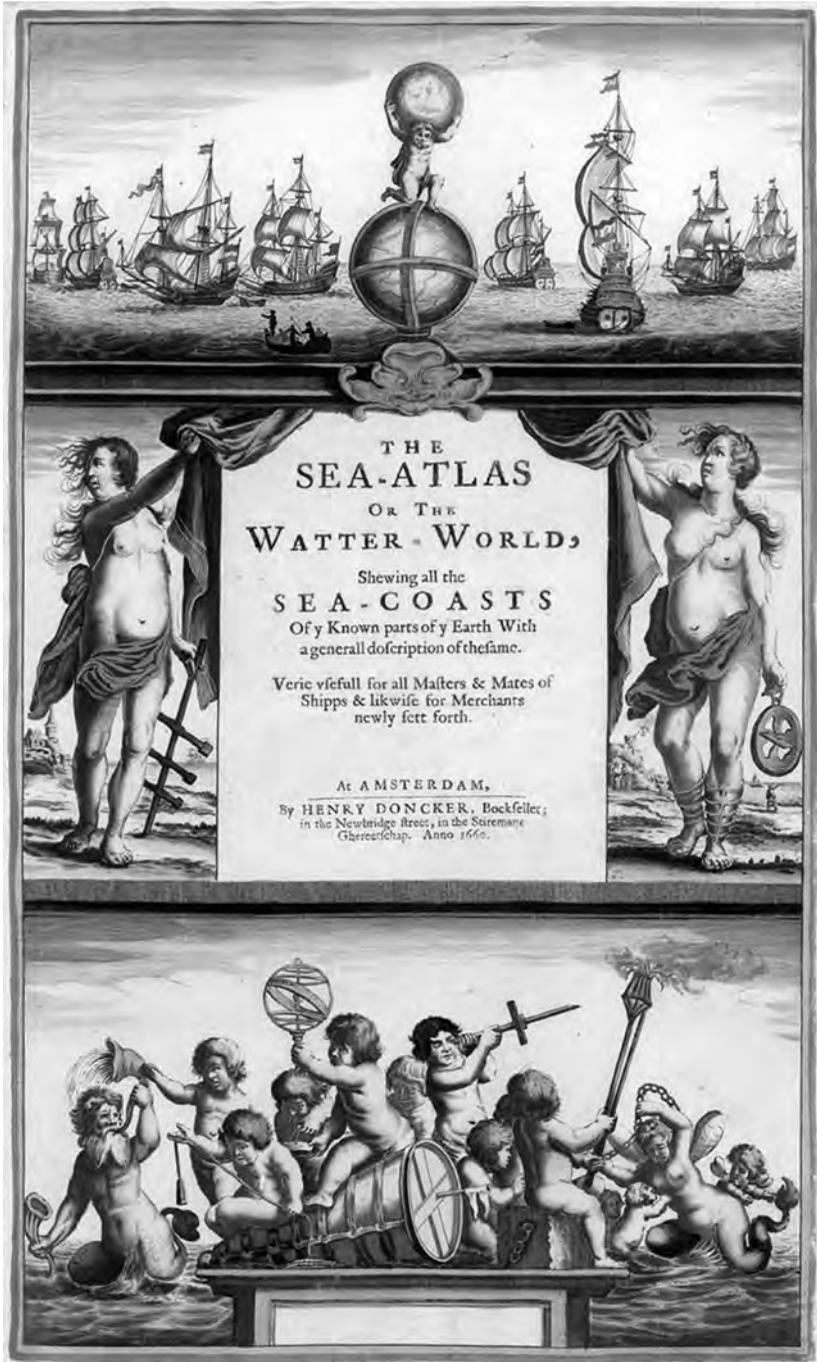


Figure I.1. The lavish frontispiece to this first edition of Doncker's *Sea-Atlas*, more suitable for a merchant's study than a working ship, presents the terraqueous globe as a theater to admire the power of maritime modernity. Henry Doncker, *The Sea Atlas Or The Watter-World, Shewing all the Sea-Coasts of y Known parts of y Earth* (Amsterdam: Henry Doncker, 1660). Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library at Brown University.

lavish ornamentation more appropriate for a luxurious study than the ship's deck (figure I.1).¹⁴

We are used to drawing a distinction between practical and entertainment literature. But in the case of the maritime book, the very same literature that served a practical function for professionals also entertained general audiences. This overlap gave a technical and practical cast to the culture's romance with the mariner's heroism.

In England, at the time of Defoe, the maritime corpus was thriving. Publishers of practical nautical literature like Richard Mount counted scores of volumes in their lists, and nonfictional overseas voyage literature outstripped even devotional literature in its popularity.¹⁵ In chapter 2, "Remarkable Occurrences at Sea and in the Novel," I explain how Defoe devised a new poetics of adventure in *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner*, in competition with the success of the maritime book. The key to Defoe's invention was his appropriation of a kind of episode that figured prominently in best-selling nonfictional sea voyage literature. This episode was what was called "the remarkable occurrence," which made its way into sea voyage narratives from the written protocols of work at sea.

Historians of science have shown how the use of "remarkable" in the early modern era was part of the transformation from a theological to a secular worldview, designating phenomena that fall outside recognized explanations but that are not subsumable to sacred wonder. But "remarkable" had another, technical use in the ship's log, which is a form of written narrative essential to work of the sea. In the ship's log, "the remarkable occurrence" was a category where mariners recounted any unusual events of the voyage, and in particular extraordinary dangers and the measures they took to survive. When mariner-authors consolidated accounts of their travels, writing for a mixed audience of professionals and general readers, these episodes of danger took pride of place. The account of remedies for unexpected dangers served the welfare of navigation, potentially of use to voyagers who might navigate the same waters. Such "remarkable occurrences" were also the most thrilling parts of sea voyages and valued by readers seeking entertainment. Captain Cook subtitled the journal of his voyage that he penned for posterity, "Remarkable occurrences on board His Majestys Bark Endeavour."

Even as Defoe modeled Crusoe's strange and surprising adventures on the remarkable occurrences in sea voyage literature, he wrought some significant formal changes. Defoe was critical of such narratives, along with their seamen authors, for a diffuse organization and for their understated enumeration of dangers. Defoe, in contrast, dramatized the search for a solution as part of the action, including mistakes as well as the successful expedient. In addition, while sea voyage authors set down events

as they had occurred in the chronology of a voyage, Defoe tightened up this organization. Dangers and remedies were yoked in cause-and-effect fashion, and problems were immediately followed by solutions, which became new problems in their turn. Finally, Defoe unified problems and solutions according to a single action or concern—how to make a raft, how to hunt goats, what to do about the cannibals, etc.

The result was a well-oiled narrative chain of problem-solving. With this innovation, Defoe devised a plot mechanism where the reader could exercise her ingenuity as well. While Crusoe struggled for survival with the full might of his embodied craft, the reader enjoyed the cerebral, low-risk pleasures of applying and manipulating information, drawn both from within the novel and without. Information thus enjoys a prestigious role in sea adventure fiction, stimulating the reader's creativity. The creative act of reading in sea fiction solicits a pragmatic use of the imagination, as the reader searches for expedients that do not violate the laws of nature, that could be performed, and that could plausibly work. This plausibility of performance contrasts with a plausibility of mimesis, which measures events and characters according to their historical and social verisimilitude.¹⁶

Across the next two centuries, Defoe's adventure poetics became a popular, adaptable "traveling genre." *The Novel and the Sea* proceeds to describe sea fiction's travels, focusing on the traditions of the United Kingdom and France, and adding the United States, because of American authors' formative contribution in the nineteenth century. These three nations were where the poetics of sea adventure fiction was first forged and where the form flourished, before it spread to other traditions later in the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Even as sea fiction was first practiced in these three nations, however, it was popular with readers across a transatlantic literary field.

The first stop in the travels of Defoe's pattern is the proliferation in the 1720s–1740s of novels I call the *maritime picaresque*. These novels were penned by Defoe as well as William Rufus Chetwood, Alain René Le Sage, the Abbé Prévost, and Tobias Smollett. As I describe at the end of chapter 2, the maritime picaresque portrays the adventures of roving protagonists buffeted around the globe. In their varied adventures, writers tested the contours and flexibility of craft. Craft became the province of heroes identified with different social groups—aristocratic or democratic, female as well as male, collective rather than individual, engineers as well as mariners—and was put in the service of motives ranging from pillage and profit to humanitarian reform.

As sea fiction traveled, it had a complex, sometimes surprising relation to contemporary developments at sea. The maritime picaresque was, for example, dormant in the era of Pacific exploration, when nonfictional

accounts of the pioneering voyages of Anson, Bougainville, Cook, and La Pérouse captivated international audiences. Was the market for maritime books so saturated with nonfiction that there was no demand for novels? I speculate on this and other reasons for the discrepancy between the prestige of global ocean travel in this era and the absence of sea adventure fiction in an abbreviated chapter 3, “Sea Adventure Fiction, 1748–1824?”

At other moments, maritime history catalyzes generic innovation. As I explain in chapter 4, “Sea Fiction in the Nineteenth Century: Patriots, Pirates, and Supermen,” James Fenimore Cooper forges a new kind of sea fiction, what contemporaries would call the “sea novel,” with *The Pilot* of 1824. Cooper penned this work in competition with Walter Scott, seeking to draft a kind of historical novel suited to the postcolonial American nation. If Cooper used sea adventure literature as the framework for his enterprise, the choice was shaped not only from his own experience at sea, but also by the American “maritime nationalism” of the era. Cooper celebrates American prowess on the seas as the United States aspired to overtake Great Britain’s global saltwater empire. At the same time, Cooper’s sea fiction continues to depict the mariner’s craft as an ethos beyond conventional ethics and one that knows no national borders (viz the Scottish John Paul Jones, crafty mariner of *The Pilot*, who serves the American Revolution but ends up, in history, as Cooper’s final pages make clear, an admiral to an absolute ruler, Catherine the Great). Juggling nationalist and internationalist imperatives, Cooper scales sea fiction to the U.S. sense of its destiny as “a nation among nations,” to quote Thomas Bender’s resonant phrase.

The specific impact of maritime history on the novel continues when Cooper’s sea novel achieves international success and catalyzes what I call a “traveling genre,” turning back across the Atlantic to be taken up by writers in Europe. Cooper’s innovative poetics is indeed, I believe, the first new kind of novel invented outside of Western Europe that returns to alter decisively practices in the literary regions where the modern form first appeared. His sea novel is introduced into France by Eugène Sue, with the explicit goal of revitalizing French naval prestige, in shambles following France’s maritime defeats in the Napoleonic wars. While the challenge to rebuild the navy proves too great for sea fiction to accomplish, Sue’s project has unintended consequences that benefit French fiction. Instead of translating the crafty mariner to France, Sue takes craft to the drawing rooms of French society, and in the process invents supermen above the law, who will inspire Honoré de Balzac’s Vautrin and Alexandre Dumas’s Count of Monte Cristo, aka the seaman Edmond Dantès.

One transformation in maritime labor and technology decisive for the fortunes of sea fiction in the later nineteenth century is the routinization

of the work of the sea. This routinization is an ongoing process that occurred across centuries and that accelerated after John Harrison perfected the marine chronometer permitting the calculation of longitude at sea in 1759. Navigation became more accurate, followed by the conquest of scurvy, and throughout, mariners continued to fill in information completing the charts of all the world's oceans. With the supersession of sail by steam in the mid-nineteenth century, routinization was accomplished. In the words of Conrad, "your modern ship which is a steamship makes her passages on other principles than yielding to the weather and humouring the sea. She receives smashing blows, but she advances; it is a slogging fight, and not a scientific campaign."¹⁸

After the routinization of seafaring, craft was on the wane, as was the mariner's cultural prestige. With the demise of craft as well as its mythology, the sea novel could no longer glorify the work of navigating modernity's dynamic frontiers. At the same time, the poetics of sea fiction was in splendid working order. This study's fifth and concluding chapter, "Sea Fiction beyond the Seas," discusses how innovative novelists transported the adventures of craft to other historical and imaginary frontiers of the later nineteenth century, including the frontiers of speculation and art. Herman Melville, Victor Hugo, and Joseph Conrad, among others, disrupted sea fiction's poetics to create a maritime modernism challenging the writer and reader to the difficult work of navigating the foggy, uncharted seas of language and thought. Jules Verne, in contrast, left sea fiction's poetics of problem-solving intact. He transported sea fiction's patterns to frontiers as of yet unachieved by science and technology, and invented an influential form of science adventure fiction. Detective fiction and spy fiction are two other forms of the novel that flourish at the turn of the twentieth century, using sea fiction's adventures in problem-solving to explore the expanding frontier of information. Sea fiction is visibly morphing into spy fiction in Conrad's *The Secret Agent* (1907) and Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903).

Even as the sea adventure novel transforms into other genres, sea fiction remains alive into our present. *The Novel and the Sea* concludes with an afterword, "Jack Aubrey, Jack Sparrow, and the Whole Sick Crew," sketching sea fiction's continuing legacy. While the ethos of craft continues to appeal into the twenty-first century, its significance is now nostalgic. Rather than modeling the capacity needed to practice modernity's emerging frontiers, sea fiction yearns for embodied, multidimensional human agency in an increasingly abstract and specialized world, dominated by vast forces of society and technology beyond the individual's comprehension and control, which are the man-made equivalents to the world's oceans. With this last nostalgic turn of craft, path-breaking Odysseus becomes exiled Odysseus longing to return home.

As I have reconstructed the history of sea adventure fiction over centuries, I have observed a decisive cultural shift in how European culture imagines the ocean. I tell the story of this shift in a more interdisciplinary “interlude” set between chapters 3 and 4. This shift is a process I call “The Sublimation of the Sea,” occurring across the eighteenth century in visual arts and literature, as well as aesthetic theory. In this process, ships and sailors were progressively erased from imaginative depictions of the sea, as Enlightenment aesthetics cordoned off instrumental reason and work from the noninstrumental realms of the arts. The sublimation of the seas culminated in the empty seas of the Romantic sublime. Cleared of historical mariners, the sea was then open to imaginative repopulation by poets, novelists, and artists. In literature, its imaginary denizens included archaic figures, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner or the demonic, one-eyed, Mephistophelean pilot Schriften of *The Phantom Ship* (1838–1839) by Captain Frederick Marryat, a retelling of the legend of the Flying Dutchman. Among the diverse and fanciful cast of nineteenth-century sea adventure novels, one even finds female epitomes of the crafty mariner, like Fanny Campbell, heroine of Lieutenant Murray Ballou’s *Fanny Campbell, or The Female Pirate Captain* (1844).

Novel scholars will recognize that sea adventure fiction does not correspond to our dominant accounts of the rise of the novel, though it belongs to the same era, and is, indeed, practiced by a number of familiar authors (Defoe, Prévost, Smollett, etc.). Sea adventure depicts action rather than psychology, its organization is episodic, and it measures plausibility by performance rather than mimesis. The heroism of skilled work substitutes for education and love, and sea fiction gives pride of place to communities of laboring men, bonded in the struggle for survival, rather than communities of private sociability, strongly associated with women, shaped by passion, virtue, and taste. (Robinson Crusoe is the exception making the rule when Defoe imbues a single individual with skills and capacities elsewhere distributed throughout the ship’s crew, including in Defoe’s own *Life, Adventures & Piracies of the Famous Captain Singleton*.) If virtue appears in sea fiction, it is as an afterthought; motives of characters range from survival, power, money, or knowledge, to the sheer thrill of the new. Rather than civic or liberal freedom, the ruling freedom in sea fiction is the amoral freedom of movement corresponding to the juridical notion of the “freedom of the seas.” Wild terraqueous environments “beyond the line” replace salons, city streets, and country taverns, and when sea adventure novels unify the nation as an imagined community, it is always with an eye on the horizon of the globe. Rather than a centripetal pull inward toward the metropolis and closure, a centrifugal movement outward to the edges of the known world and beyond, as well as plots that conclude with the

promise of a “farther account” of “some very surprizing Incidents in some new Adventures.”¹⁹

The Novel and the Sea focuses on a single adventure lineage. However, in putting sea adventure fiction back on the map of the novel, I hope to encourage critics to reexamine the cultural significance of adventure forms more generally. The case of sea fiction suggests, specifically, that this examination could resolve a conundrum challenging novel scholars. The conundrum involves the novel’s seeming lack of interest in work. Work is a consuming aspect of our daily lives, yet it occupies disproportionately little space in the genre of the novel, if critical accounts are to be believed.²⁰ In *Resisting Representation*, Elaine Scarry speculates that work, such a constant in human life, is “a deeply difficult subject to represent. The major source of this difficulty is that work . . . has no identifiable beginning or end. . . . It is the essential nature of work to be perpetual, repetitive, habitual.”²¹

But sea adventure fiction is an exception to such neglect. Work does appear in the guise of craft, a capacity that Conrad called “the honour of labour.”²² If the novel has seemed to have so little to do with work, it may reflect less the absence of work in the novel than that novel scholars do not attend to novels where work appears. The forms that showcase work are not the novels of manners that trace character growth and development, but adventure forms like maritime fiction, where work can be dramatized and distilled into an ethos, giving it transcendence beyond the bare struggle for subsistence. That sea adventure novels glorified work was evident to Hugo in his comments framing his own contribution to the genre. Drafting his preface for a novel tellingly titled *Les Travailleurs de la mer* [Workers of the Sea], Hugo declared that “work could be epic.”²³ As he described his aim in the final draft, his epic of labor portrayed humans wrestling with “the *ananke* [fatality] of things,” “nature,” and the material world, “obstacles . . . under the form of the elements,” comprising the struggle for subsistence: “it is necessary for him to live, hence the plow and the ship.”²⁴

The mariner’s craft is only one kind of practical reason displayed in the long lineage of adventure narrative. Across its varied genres, there are other versions of heroic performance in dangerous zones, often at the edges of existing knowledge and society. Though these performances of practical reason are not salaried work in the modern sense of the term, they nonetheless heroize different kinds of skills necessary to win food, clothing, and shelter. I have mentioned the *metis* of Odysseus, the *virtu* of the knight, and the popular cunning of the *picaro* on what Giancarlo Maiorino calls “the margins” of his society, which is another application of practical reason to survive.²⁵ So too is the cunning of rogues, con men and women, and outlaws in the eighteenth-century urban picaresque,

practiced by Defoe, Le Sage, Prévost, and Smollett, who were also novelists of sea adventure.

The lovely serving girl who is the heroine of Samuel Richardson's *Pamela* (1740) better her situation financially using feminine wiles, finesse and social tact. Would *Pamela*, too, then, be a form of adventure novel? While sea fiction performs the masculine heroism of craft at the edge zones of the globe, eighteenth-century domestic novels like *Pamela* and Fanny Burney's *Evelina* (1778) test their heroines' mastery of a kind of feminine practical reason that permits them to negotiate the edges of class society. The analogy with sea adventure fiction may well apply to the domestic novel's narrative poetics, as well as its ennoblement of feminine labor. If the remarkable occurrence from the mariner's log is the basis for Defoe's poetics of craft, the poetics of domestic fiction similarly builds on nonfictional textual genres of middle-class women's work. Indeed, critics have already explored how such feminine workaday genres as the letter, the diary, and the household account fed into the form of the domestic novel, from the time Richardson started off composing a letter-writing manual and ended up with *Pamela* instead.²⁶

The novel of social climbing is another subset of the novel of manners that may well prove to be about work when read through the lens of adventure. These novels, too, test a protagonist's capacity for survival at the margins—which, as in domestic novels, are the margins of class society. Protagonists of these novels are often aristocrats, or pose as such, and hence belong to a class that, like middle-class women, is not supposed to work. But the impoverished Rastignac in Restoration Paris uses his micropolitical skills of social manipulation to survive. So too does William Makepeace Thackeray's female adventurer, Becky Sharp in Victorian England, pursuing self-advancement through a deft, remorseless application of the techniques mastered by the perfect young lady.

The Novel and the Sea invites novel critics to revise the dominant narrative about the rise of the novel in a second way, along with making a place in its pantheon for adventure fiction. This revision involves the need to move beyond our long-standing prejudice that those processes and events defining the modern novel occur on land. In his lyrical opening to *The Theory of the Novel*, Lukács set the tone for novel studies' indifference to the maritime world. "Happy are those ages . . . whose paths are illuminated by the light of the stars," Lukács declared, contrasting the ancients to the modern period when "Kant's starry firmament now shines only in the dark night of pure cognition . . . [and] no longer lights any solitary wanderer's path."²⁷ Lukács's lyricism notwithstanding, his figure makes no sense. Odysseus may have steered by the stars, but it was only with the development of scientific navigation that mariners used the heavens to find their way across the entire globe.

Following in Lukács's wake, novel critics across the twentieth century treated even those novels with oceangoing themes as allegories of processes back on land. *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* is read as the memoirs of a capitalist *homo economicus*, or of a colonialist; the sailors on the *Pequod* in Melville's *Moby-Dick* offer an image of factory labor; and Conrad's "The Secret Sharer" becomes the portrait of a narcissist ripe for a Freudian case study, rather than representing a novice captain using his practical skills to master the fears that accompany his first command.²⁸ This disregard for global ocean travel, even when a novel portrays nautical subject matter, is so spectacular, it might be called hydrophasia. Such hydrophasia is part of a more pervasive twentieth-century attitude that the photographer and theorist Allan Sekula has called "forgetting the sea."²⁹ We have seen Bacon single out the compass as a world historical event in 1620, and two centuries later, Hegel treated cross-ocean travel as the theater of global capitalism. By the time of Lukács, for all his respect for Hegel, the modernity of seafaring had been obscured, and *The Theory of the Novel* projected celestial navigation into the mists of antiquity.

As we begin the twenty-first century, however, such hydrophasia is starting to ebb. Walter Benjamin famously observed that historiography is a constellation that the present makes with the past; put another way, the present is able to seize upon aspects of the past that are in some way resonant with its own urgent concerns. Our ability to perceive the importance of the maritime frontier may be an example of such a constellation between an earlier era of intensive globalization and our own. Today, reporting on the front page of U.S. newspapers and websites concerns pirates off the coast of Somalia and on the South China seas, the need to enhance our Navy to protect against global terrorism by sea, the problem of freedom of movement and the threat of piracy on the high seas of the Internet, as well as the uncontrollable forces of terraqueous nature unleashed in global warming. Such topics are just a few aspects of our current era of globalization that hearken back to the global age of sail.

In the university, too, scholars are rediscovering the importance of oceanic regions and transport for social and economic history, of course, but also for understanding culture, aesthetics, and epistemology. Within literary studies, postcolonial or transnational paradigms paved the way for a new interest in maritime transport, sociability, and culture. Initially, these paradigms passed over the sea as a dead zone between histories that unfolded on land. But in the first decade of the twenty-first century, salt-water networks heave into view.³⁰ My literary history of sea adventure fiction, too, invites novel critics *to leave the land and to embark*.