# Toward a Blue Cultural Studies: The Sea, Maritime Culture, and Early Modern English Literature

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## Abstract

This article explores the cultural meanings of the maritime world in early modern English literature. Placing English literary culture in the context of the massive ocean-bound expansion of European culture that began in the 15th century, it suggests that the sea's ancient meanings shifted in the early modern period as geographic experience and knowledge increased. The article examines some recent developments in maritime studies, sometimes called a 'new thalassology' (from the Greek thalassos, the sea); distinguishes these trends from now-traditional New Historicist and Atlantic studies; and suggests how these methods can contribute to a 'blue cultural studies'. The new maritime humanities speaks to a series of modern discourses, including globalization, postcolonialism, environmentalism, ecocriticism, and the history of science and technology. The article provides two examples of how these maritime discourses can change our interpretations of early modern English literature, first by examining a canonical poem – Milton's 'Lycidas' – and second through reconsidering a historical context, the 'Bermuda pamphlets' on which Shakespeare seems to have drawn in *The Tempest*.

> O what an endlesse worke haue I in hand,
> To count the seas abundant progeny,
> Whose fruitfull seede farre passeth those in land,
> And also those which wonne in th'azure sky.
> *The Faerie Queene* (4.12.1)

The new millennium is bringing humanities scholarship back to the sea. Renewed interest in the oceans informs interdisciplinary programs like HMAP (History of Marine Animal Populations) and Duke University's 'Oceans Connect' initiative. It influences new thinking in the ecological sciences, public policy, and even international law. In the humanities, the leading edge of these discourses emerges out of the thriving and influential discipline of 'Atlantic history', but other types of history have also been turning to the sea, including economic history, imperial history, the history of ideas, the history of science, and historical geography. These discourses seek out the maritime in order to reconsider standard discursive models. Looking closely at the sea, rather than just the land, challenges established habits of thought. This article examines some new developments in maritime studies, including the so-called 'New Thalassology'; distinguishes these trends from now-traditional New Historicist and 'Atlantic' scholarship; and suggests how these new methods can contribute to what I call a 'blue cultural studies'.[1] This new maritime perspective does not view the oceans simply as bodies to be crossed, but as subjects in themselves. Reconsidering the ocean as ocean can open up new analytical frames for scholars of early modern English literature, including a newly dynamic (and disorderly) sense of ecological relationships and a different way of articulating multicultural connections in the early modern global world. After summarizing these trends, I will briefly

explore two practical examples of early modern maritime literary criticism. Re-reading Milton's 'Lycidas' with an oceanic focus, I suggest, can revise our understanding of the early modern poetics of nature. Exploring the Bermuda pamphlets and *The Tempest* with direct emphasis on the sea and maritime geography offers new perspectives on the colonial project and its cultural consequences.

The idea of a global and extra-territorial sea was a distinctive cultural development in the early modern period.[2] As historians like John Hattendorf have shown, the 'boundless deep' defined a new global reality for early modern culture.[3] The oceans have represented resistance to containment at least since Hugo Grotius's *Mare Liberum* (1609) assailed the Portuguese monopoly of the East Indies trade.[4] The 'freedom of the seas' was always contested, and John Seldon's counterblast *Mare Clausum* (1635) forcefully argued for legal control of maritime routes and resources, as had the Papal pronouncements against which Grotius argued.[5] Oceanic freedom functioned in the early modern period as a compelling cultural fantasy, in which the ceaseless change and instability of the sea countered human existence on land.[6] This sense of the ocean's challenge to landed order has ancient roots. Plato in the *Laws* celebrates the location of a new city 11 miles inland:

> had the city been on the sea … no human power could have preserved you from corruption. Even the distance of eleven miles is hardly enough. For the sea, although an agreeable, is a dangerous companion, and a highway of strange morals and manners as well as of commerce.[7]

It is precisely these 'strange morals and manners', not to mention 'commerce', that now draw scholars to the sea.

Powerful trends in late capitalism and postmodern culture made the maritime world less present in Western culture during the second half of the 20th century. The literary scholar Robert Foulke has described the 'missing context' of the maritime in late 20th-century Anglophone culture as a 'historical…linguistic…and experiential' gap in our collective understanding.[8] The typical reader today has lost much of the specialized information, language, and first-hand experience of the sea that were once common in Western culture. Except as a space for recreation, the sea seems less present to early 21st-century English and American readers than it did to our ancestors. Airline travel, containerization, the automation of ports, and even the romance of outer space have all contributed to the decreasing centrality of the maritime world in the Western imagination.[9] The modern era has also witnessed the discovery of maritime recreation, including such things as weekend beach-going and recreational swimming.[10] But by turning the sea from a vision of chaos into a playground, the modern world has lost part of its cultural history.

Despite (or perhaps in reaction against) this diminution, the ocean is proving particularly amenable to 21st-century academic discourses and concerns. The scholarly benefits of the sea for many fields hinge precisely on its unfamiliarity, and on the shock of novelty that comes from jolting one's mental habits and practices into a new structure. Historians explain the appeal of maritime scholarship through its reconfiguration of materials across and beyond national and linguistic borders. The oceans also connect the physical sciences with historical and cultural studies, as efforts to 'historicize the oceans' are currently bringing together historians, ecologists, marine biologists, environmentalists, and activists.[11] As Kären Wigen recently noted in an *American Historical Review* Forum, 'Maritime scholarship seems to have burst its bounds'.[12] Wigen's introduction lists multiple sub-fields that have been drawn to the sea, including the histories of science, ideas, labor, business, the environment, colonialism, and slavery (717). She also identifies several 'common properties of ocean-oriented histories', which include a shared interest in maritime regions as modern and imperialist constructs, attention to emic (i.e., culturally distinct)

conceptions of the sea, an understanding of maritime regions as 'fractured, [and] frag-mented', a vision of them as 'intrinsically unstable' spaces, and interest in their capacity to 'connect at a global as well as regional level' (719–21). These features show historical scholarship substituting new structures for existing hierarchies.

Current trends in the maritime humanities are emerging out of, and in critical dialogue with, the recently-established discourse of 'Atlantic history'.[13] Recent scholarship, while championing the Atlantic's challenge to the traditional division of 'European' and 'American' histories, has begun to articulate a critique of the Atlantic model.[14] Of course, Atlantic history has always come in many shapes and colors, from the 'Black Atlantic' defined and explored by Paul Gilroy to 'Red' (i.e., Marxist) histories of maritime labor by Marcus Rediker.[15] As Paul Cohen has recently observed, however, Atlantic history as it is currently constituted risks hardening into a new Anglo-American orthodoxy.[16] Literary scholarship can influence ongoing responses to the Atlantic world by insisting on the abiding role of poetic forms and fluid spaces. An understanding of Western culture in which the 'seas were shifted from the margins to the center of academic vision' can significantly transform traditional land-based, national histories.[17]

The contribution of Anglophone literary scholars has thus far lagged somewhat behind other fields in the maritime humanities. Despite abiding interest in figures like Melville and Conrad, literary scholars have been slow to announce a 'maritime paradigm' or to constitute 'maritime literature' as a subgenre.[18] New theorizations of the maritime in literary culture have begun to appear recently, often drawing explicitly on recent historiography. Projects like Margaret Cohen's exploration of the 19th-century international maritime novel, Joseph Roach's investigations of 'circum-Atlantic performances', and Ian Baucom's specter-filled Atlantic have begun to revitalize our ideas of maritime English literature.[19] Within early modern studies, Bernhard Klein's work suggests possible new directions.[20] For early modern literary scholars, the place of the sea remains wide open.

### What is the New Thalassology?

The term 'new thalassology' (from the Greek *thalassos*, the sea) was coined by the historians Nicholas Horden and Peregrine Purcell as part of their ambitious project to revise Mediterranean history for a new generation. Their paradigm-announcing work is a jointly-authored book, *The Corrupting Sea* (2000), which updates and responds to Fernand Braudel's massive study, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II* (1972).[21] Horden and Purcell's work, which takes its title and an epigraph from Plato's already-cited fear of the sea, has generated renewed debate about the role of the Mediterranean in ancient and modern history.[22] In connecting Horden and Purcell's work to my own hopes for a blue cultural studies, I emphasize that, as Horden and Purcell rely on and extend Braudel, so early modern literary thalassologists should engage and critique influential New Historicist scholars from Stephen Greenblatt to Richard Helgerson to Mary Fuller.[23] Horden and Purcell complicate Braudel's Mediterranean by focusing on 'microecologies' and local variations in maritime trade, aiming, in their words, to 'close the gap…between the specialist interests of the ecologist and modern traditional political, social, and economic concerns in the study of the past'.[24] Parallel efforts by early modern literary scholars can move beyond the now-established narratives of New Historicist and Atlantic history toward the cultural meanings of the oceans themselves. Horden and Purcell, focusing on the quickly-crossed Mediterranean, suggest that the distinctive feature of its maritime culture is 'connectivity'.[25] A transoceanic (not merely transatlantic) perspective can modify this concept to reimagine the cultural break of the Renaissance as

the replacing of the Mediterranean basin – with its relatively short crossings, small tides, and easily connected city-states – with a global oceanic world, punctuated by vast deeps, dangerous long voyages around the horns of Africa and South America, ocean currents, and seasonal weather patterns. Braudel's assumption that Mediterranean sailors operated largely through 'coasting' from landmark to landmark is probably exaggerated, but the challenges of navigating deep waters in comparison with the Mediterranean seem undeniable.[26]

In the early 21st-century academic discourses, four major factors, separately and together, underlie the new maritime turn: globalization, environmentalism, technology studies, and postcolonialism. Each of these concerns influences multiple disciplines in the humanities and sciences, and each connects directly to the oceans. My own primary interest is in using the oceanic environment to rethink early modern nature poetry (as here with 'Lycidas') and to reconsider paradigms of early modern globalization (through the Bermuda pamphlets), but I will briefly sketch all four possibilities.

Postcolonial scholarship, whose steady inroads into pre-modern studies have recently been supplemented by the 'postcolonial middle ages', helps remind us that early modern imperialism and colonial resistance to it are both transoceanic histories.[27] Many recent developments in early modern history reflect the ongoing integration of postcolonial theory into all areas of humanities scholarship.[28] A variety of different articulations of post-colonial history have maritime resonance, and some also emphasize early modern origins.[29] Integrating postcolonial claims into our literary histories should also include new emphasis on early modern transoceanic culture and the structuring role of the maritime world.

Students of the history of technology also point out that innovative technologies like cartography and navigation underwrote early modern expansion.[30] In literary scholarship, the study of technology has most recently meant reinvigorated forms of 'book history' and 'print culture studies', which treat Gutenberg's invention as the key to early modern cultural transformations. But technologies outside the printing house fueled the radical expansion of European culture between the 14th and 17th centuries. The Portuguese carrack, which enabled the exploration of southern Africa and pioneered the sea–route to India in the 15th century, was a machine that might rival Gutenberg's in terms of its worldwide impact. While Western literary culture has treated shipbuilding as an essential technology since Homer, the constant presence of ships has also muted our awareness of the dramatic expansion of nautical technologies in the early modern period.[31] The compass and many essential tools of navigation were medieval technologies – Chaucer wrote a *Treatise on the Astrolabe* – but new applications of these technologies at sea guided European ships after the 15th and 16th centuries.[32] Transoceanic shipping changed the European understanding of the world, and the early modern ship, as Josiah Blackmore has cogently argued, should be understood as a cultural icon. In fact, as Blackmore puts it, printed books and wooden ships are suggestively alike: 'each is made of boards and cords, iron (bosses and nails); there is paper and writing in each'.[33] Both, also, are infor-mation-moving devices that spread European culture and colonies around the globe.

The sea is also, in Rachel Carlson's phrase, all around us, the largest element in our natural environment.[34] In our current cultural moment of ecologism, environmentalism, and ecocriticism, what seems surprising is not a new interest in the sea, but that maritime concerns have taken so long to penetrate literary ecologies. Environmentalists recall that over 70% of the earth's surface is covered with water. Despite the realities of our terr-aqueous globe, most major studies of literary ecocriticism to date have engaged pastoral and terrestrial themes. Following either the English tradition of Wordsworth (Jonathan Bate) or the American school of Thoreau (Lawrence Buell), 'green' literary scholarship has mostly been dry as well.[35] To some extent, this focus on the land has also occupied

environmental historians to the exclusion of the seas. As the historian Jeff Bolster notes, however, the 'ocean may be the next frontier for environmental historians'.[36] Literary scholars may wish to consider this advice also.

The globalization paradigm, finally, reminds us that long-distance trade and travel, historically and even today, operate largely by sea.[37] Growing interest in early modern empires, including Barbara Fuchs' call for 'imperium studies', need not confine itself exclusively to land.[38] Armitage's provocative recent distinction between the imperial elephant – the symbol of British India – and the maritime whale suggests the benefits of considering sea-borne empires in dialog with landed polities.[39] Innovations in cartography have long been considered key parts of early scientific innovation, but the maritime resonances of globes and navigational materials remain to be fully explored.[40]

One possible objection to this call to investigate the symbolic force of the early modern ocean may be that the sea has not always meant the same things to all people. W. H. Auden's influential study, *The Enchafèd Flood, or the Romantic Iconography of the Sea,* insists that modern literary ideas of the ocean emerge uniquely in the Romantic era.[41] Jonathan Raban, following Auden, states in his introduction to *The Oxford Book of the Sea* that the sea is 'taken for granted' and not written 'directly about' between the Anglo-Saxon lyric poem 'The Seafarer' and the first stirrings of the Romantic sensibility in Addison and Defoe.[42] Early modern literary scholarship should challenge Raban's and Auden's widely-shared assumptions. While it is true that the sea takes on new resonance in the Romantic period, Raban's quest for proto-Romantic excursions makes him miss the place of the sea in the early modern imagination. The early modern sea was not (yet) the sublime theater of crisis and catastrophe that it became in Byron's poems and Turner's paintings. Rather, as my readings of 'Lycidas' and the Bermuda pamphlets will show, early modern literary culture responded to the transoceanic turn of European culture by exploiting the sea's symbolic opposition to and inversion of the orderly world of land. For many early modern writers, the land is orderly and human; the sea chaotic and divine.

Ariel's song in *The Tempest*, which Ian Baucom has bracingly re-read as 'the anthem of postmodernity', captures this early modern understanding of sea as pure alterity.[43] Raban might also have found this representation of the sea-as-other in a passage he quotes from *Richard III*, in which Clarence's vision of submarine opulence – 'Wedges of gold, great anchors, heaps of pearl, / Inestimable stones, unvalued jewels' – presents these objects of desire as tokens of fearful mortality: 'Methought what pain it was to drown!'[44] Seeing the sea as simultaneously wealth and death highlights two early modern patterns of maritime symbology: the sea is a highway to commercial prosperity and also a vision of God's torment. Raban and Auden overlook the bifurcated worldly-and-theological understanding of the sea in early modern culture. The literary sea would change by the time Melville and Conrad came to describe it, but as early modern European sailors circled the globe, the sea became crucial to Western culture's sense of itself and its place in the world.[45]

In physical as well as cultural terms, the sea is a very different place from the land. Although our bodies are approximately two-thirds water, water is a hostile element that threatens human life. Many ancient texts define the sea through its basic inhospitability to human life, especially in traditions that link the sea to primeval chaos. Visions of paradise that strongly influenced early modern literature, including both Hesiod's *Works and Days* and the Book of Revelation, hail an utopian future when 'there will be no more sea'.[46] As the fishermen in *Pericles* know, however, the ocean is also a space of abundance and recovery.[47] When the waves cast up Pericles, the fishermen insist that their maritime labor provides everything he needs: 'flesh for holidays, fish for fasting days, and moreo'er puddings and flapjacks'.[48] They even find armor in which Pericles can joust. The

combination of hostility and fertility that the fishermen describe captures the sea's role as a metaphor for the contingencies of mortal life from classical and Biblical culture through (and beyond) the early modern period.

The meanings of the ocean in early modern literature reveal themselves through the symbolic opposition between the sea and the garden. As I will consider shortly through 'Lycidas', gardens, and the pastoral tradition from Theocritus and Virgil forward, represent a fantasy of a happy, orderly coexistence between humanity and the natural world. Maritime literature from *The Odyssey* to *The Tempest* to 'Lycidas' shows that mortal life becomes tenuous at sea. The opposition between the sea and the garden appears in one of early modern England's favorite classical poets, Ovid. In the *Tristia*, which Ovid wrote after being exiled from Rome in 8 CE, he laments that his new verses 'were not written, as formerly, in my garden, / while I lounged on a favourite day-bed', but instead were composed 'at sea, / in wintry light, rough-tossed by filthy weather, spindrift / spattering the paper as I write'.[49] Banished from his city and its gardens, Ovid sees shipboard versifying as an emblem of the estrangement of mankind from the watery world. Book 1 of the *Tristia*, with its repeated depictions of near-shipwrecks and stormy seas, suggests that this maritime topos provided a poetic focus for Ovid after his urban life was cut short. For early modern literary authors from Shakespeare to Milton, the sea serves precisely as this other-space, a way to refigure traditional formulations about human beings in the world. It is with the sea's alterity in mind that I now turn to 'Lycidas' and the Bermuda pamphlets.

## 'The Remorseless Deep': Lycidas Reconsidered

The standard critical understanding of 'Lycidas' connects it to Milton's renovation of the traditions of English nature poetry and the pastoral elegy.[50] Critics have explored the poem's classical resonances (especially its echoes of Virgil and Theocritus); its revisionary relationship to the earlier pastorals of Jonson, Sidney, and Shakespeare; its prefiguration of *Paradise Lost*; and its ideological attack on the corrupt clergy of Milton's day.[51] That a poem about Edward King's death by drowning should have something more specific to say about the ocean has been less emphasized.[52] Scholars have long noted the influence of Sannazaro's 'piscatory eclogues' (themselves indebted to Virgil) but almost always with the assumption that the claims of imperial epic or Christian humanism were paramount.[53] David Quint has influentially suggested that for Milton and his tradition, boats and sea travel were associated with romance's doomed struggle against epic.[54] A renewed focus on the waters themselves – as cultural symbol, physical setting, and emblem of inhospitable nature – seems overdue.

The opposition between land and sea defines the poem's symbolic landscape. Its opening movement contrasts the landscape of pastoral poetry – 'O ye Laurels…Ye Myrtle brown' (1–2) – against Lycidas' 'wat'ry bier' (11). The poem's dramatic climax juxtaposes a flower catalog, including 'Primrose that forsaken dies, / The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Jessamine' (142–3) with a stark vision of Lycidas' corpse on 'the bottom of the monstrous world' (158). (Monstrous, in this context, seems synonymous with marine.) One of the poem's most deep classical moments relates pastoral fantasies of the 'Laureate Hearse' (151), in which 'our frail thoughts [can] dally with false surmise' (153). The reality-principle that intrudes on this rhapsody is explicitly maritime: 'Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding Seas / Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd' (154–5). The distinction is not only between a hospitable shore and an unwelcoming ocean; it is between the familiar and comforting landscape of classical pastoral on the one hand and the unknown Irish Sea on the other.[55] Even the famous appeal to nautical powers to

rescue the corpse – 'And, O ye Dolphins, waft the hapless youth' (164) – emphasizes the foreign space of the waters, which limits even the powers of the homeward–looking 'Angel' (163).

The poem's depiction of marine alterity is more nuanced than the monster-filled blank spaces on medieval maps. 'Lycidas' carefully distinguishes between fresh water that is healthy for humans and salt water that is hostile. Fresh water, like the 'sacred well' (15) of the Muses, the pastoral 'fountain' (24) by which the poet once sat with Lycidas, and even the 'fresh dews of night' (29) in which the two young poets labored, makes the world safe for classicized English verse. This landscape, dominated by such figures as the river-God Camus (103–7), the legend of Arethusa and Alpheus, and the Virgilian river Mincius (86), represents an utopian world of hospitable water that vanishes when Edward King drowns in the 'remorseless deep' (50). The struggle between Arethusa and the river–god Alpheus suggests that even fresh water contains violence, but the fantasy of union between the river and the fountain which Arethusa becomes – which early modern mythographers read as an allegory of the union between truth and justice, or imperfection and virtue[56] – suggests that fresh waters can produce through conflict a livable, interpretable world. This group of images models a complex but finally sustainable water-world.

Against land-based pastoral, presided over by Phoebus (76–84), the frequent allusions to Virgil and Theocritus, and the help-meets of fresh water, Arethusa, Camus, and the Muses's well, the poem juxtaposes Poseidon's salty kingdom. But even the sea–god deflects responsibility for King's death; his Herald Triton protests that neither 'the Waves, [nor]…the Felon Winds, / …hath doom'd this gentle swain' (91–2). Poseidon blames not his ocean but the faulty human tools that failed to navigate it: 'It was that fatal and perfidious Bark / Built in th'eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark, / That sunk so low that sacred head of thine' (100–2). The emphasis here is on the ship as hubristic technology, its rigging no match for the alien world of the sea. The oceans thus figure the boundaries of human transgression; they function symbolically as places in the world into which mortal bodies cannot safely go. Human failure rather than divine hostility introduces the attack on the corrupt clergy of England; both suggest the incapacity of human-ordering systems to match the divinely-created natural world.

Images of redemption in 'Lycidas' come not from classical poetry or human technology but from Christian revelation, first through St. Peter, 'The Pilot of the Galilean lake' (109), and later through 'the dear might of him that walk'd the waves' (173). The turn toward Christian triumphalism – 'Weep no more, woeful Shepherds, week no more, / For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead' (165–6) – clearly prefigures the transumptive attitude Milton will take toward classical precedent in *Paradise Lost* and other poems. But oceanic and maritime symbols define the natural powers that resist Christian redemption; both Peter and Christ remain at odds with the Sea of Galilee. Their struggles against the ocean, Peter with partial success as Pilot and Christ supernaturally by walking on water, represent victories over a hostile nature. The imagined recovery of Lycidas' body parallels the nightly descent of the sun into the ocean: 'So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed, / And yet anon repairs his drooping head, / And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled Ore, / Flames in the forehead of the morning sky' (168–71). This image of the sun's daily combat with ocean, which the poet will repeat in the final stanza ('And now the Sun… / …was dropt into the Western bay' [190–1]) emphasizes Christian revelation's triumph over salt water. Thus the description of Lycidas 'sunk low, but mounted high' (172) explicitly counters the 'oozy Locks' (175) of the waterlogged corpse. With his body 'beneath the wat'ry floor' (167), Lycidas needs all the force of Christian prophecy. The power of God to control and defeat the ocean – what Christopher Connery calls the

'suppression of the ocean' in Western culture[57] – makes it possible for the 'uncouth Swain' (186) to return to poetic concerns at the poem's end. For readers with a maritime perspective, it will not seem coincidental that the natural and poetic spaces that conclude the poem, 'fresh Woods, and Pastures new' (193), are land-locked. Milton's poem about drowning has, by its end, dried up the sea.

### Isle of Devils and Somers Island: Bermuda in the Early Modern Imagination

Perhaps the most famous maritime scene in early modern English literature is the opening of Shakespeare's *The Tempest*.[58] Although the geographical contexts of the play have been expanded lately, with arguments advanced for New World and Mediterranean contexts, as well as for the relevance of Africa, Ireland, and even Ovid's exile on the Black Sea, the so-called 'Bermuda pamphlets' remain central to the play's historical context.[59] If one accepts that Shakespeare knew at least some of the descriptions of the wreck of the *Sea-Venture* off Bermuda in 1609, and that he invokes this wreck via Ariel's reference to the 'still-vexed Bermoothes' (1.2.229), then the symbolic force of this unusual chain of Atlantic islands provides a meaningful context for the play's larger portrayal of the early modern maritime globe. What is important about Bermuda for *The Tempest*, I argue, is not simply whether Shakespeare's language parallels Strachey's or Jordain's. Rather, early modern ideas about the ocean, within which Bermuda occupies a privileged space, underlie *The Tempest's* broader engagement with maritime culture. Numerous 16th- and early 17th-century depictions paint the Bermudas as a deeply unsettling island chain. It is both a key landmark for European sailors returning from the Caribbean and also a constant danger to navigation. These islands, isolated from the North American mainland and also from the island-chains of the Caribbean, represent a maximally oceanic space. While New Historicist scholarship has valuably explored *The Tempest* as a proto-colonial play that invokes Bermuda's connection to the Virginia Company, these islands also speak directly to the symbolic resonance of the early modern ocean.

   Bermuda's importance to the early modern maritime world flowed, first and foremost, from geography. It was among the most isolated of the Caribbean and Atlantic islands explored by European sailors after Columbus. Juan Bermudez of Spain, who sailed with Columbus on his second voyage, is usually credited with discovering the island group on 1 of the 11 or so Atlantic voyages he made between 1485 and 1519; the traditional discovery date of 1503 has stuck, although documentation is sparse.[60] The islands soon became part of a common eastward passage back to Europe from the Caribbean; ships followed the Gulf Stream around the tip of Florida and up the coast of North America before heading east with the prevailing winds. This voyage became the standard route for the Spanish *flota* and, according to D. B. Quinn, it was the route 'followed by almost all shipping coming from the Caribbean' in the 16th and 17th centuries.[61] On this route, the Bermudas served as both guide post and trap: ships were instructed to sail north past the islands before turning east, but since this part of the voyage often encountered northerly headwinds, the temptation to cut the corner and sail close to the reefs on Bermuda's northern side often proved too much. When bad weather struck, shipwrecks were common; the number of wrecks on the Bermudas is 'estimated cautiously at over thirty before 1600'.[62] Thus the island group was a useful haven for French and English privateers – French pirates may have attempted a settlement in the mid-16th century, and Richard Grenville, after dropping off Ralph Lane's colony on the Outer Banks, captured Spain's *Santa Maria de San Vicente* near Bermuda in August 1589 – and a threat to unlucky mariners. On this scaffold of geographical and navigational facts, legends of the 'isle of devils' grew.

To invoke Bermuda in early 17th–century England, then, was to name a very different New World from Virginia, Peru, or even Newfoundland. The Bermuda islands were strange, isolated, and as yet unconnected to any imperial or mercantile settlements. The 9-month stay of the crew of the *Sea-Venture* in 1609 was not the first visit to Bermuda by shipwrecked Europeans, although it may have been the longest to date.[63] To transform these islands into a colonizable space entailed a symbolic reordering of oceanic chaos. When the Isle of Devils was renamed Somers Isle, something changed in early modern English culture's understanding of the deep sea.

This oceanic context clarifies early reports about Bermuda's inhospitable nature. These texts often used Biblical and classical parallels, but their language suggests the islands were too oceanic for comfort. The cumulative effect of many parallel descriptions represents these islands and their surrounding waters as a focal point for the supernatural powers of the ocean. Walter Ralegh described the area as 'a hellish sea for thunder, lightning, and storms' (1596); Samuel Champlain wrote that 'The sea is very tempestuous about the said island, and the waves as high as mountains' (1610–11).[64] The first map of the island that has survived was made by Diego Ramiriz, whose vessel was wrecked there in 1603; it sketches an empty, claw–shaped space.[65] In contrast, Richard Norwood's map, published in 1626 but made from a 1618 survey of the island, parcels Bermuda up into a series of English settlements, thus effectively (in Smith's phrase) providing 'the image of a domesticated Bermuda'.[66] When the *Sea-Venture* and her 150 souls arrived on the 'Isle of Devils' in June 1609, the islands' unique geography and isolation within the early modern maritime world controlled their symbolic charge.

This maritime context can help reframe the two most famous descriptions of the *Sea-Venture*'s wreck – William Strachey's 'True Repertory', which circulated in manuscript before being published by Samuel Purchas in 1625, and Sylvester Jourdain's *Discovery of the Bermudas, Otherwise Called the Isle of Devils*, published in London in 1610 – in ways that emphasize the conceptual tension between Strachey's and Jourdain's projects as humanist colonizers and Bermuda's function as symbol of the untamed ocean.[67] Both Strachey and Jourdain were connected to the Virginia Company, and their reports about the *Sea-Venture* suggest that, while these islands were difficult to colonize, colonial enterprise aimed precisely to transform such places. Through humanist tropes, these men displaced Bermuda's oceanic meanings. Strachey especially used humanist topoi to engage his audience. His letter is addressed, in courtly fashion, to an 'Excellent Lady' (perhaps, according to Louis B. Wright, Sara, the wife of Sir Thomas Smith, a prominent backer of the Virginia Company); he cites Horace's *Odes* several times; and he invokes the herald of the Greek army at Troy when struggling to depict the storm.[68] 'It is impossible for me', Strachey writes, 'had I the voice of Stentor and expression of as many tongues as his throat of voices, to express the outcries and miseries' (6). Purchas' marginal comment seems apt: 'Swelling sea set forth in a swelling style' (7n). Strachey, like other humanists, uses literary style to makes his voyages and the New World itself comprehensible to his English audience. Jourdain also turned to Homer to describe the Bermudas:

> For the islands of the Bermudas … were never inhabited by any Christian or heathen people but ever esteemed and reputed a most prodigious and enchanted place, affording nothing but gusts, storms, and foul weather, which made every navigator and mariner to avoid them as Scylla and Charybdis, or as they would shun the Devil himself.[69]

These authors depict the islands as traps for classical heroism to flatter the heroic self–image of early modern explorers (and armchair explorers), and also to make the exotic locale comprehensible for English readers.

Both Strachey and Jourdain prefigure Milton in using Christian topoi to explain their deliverance. Their turn to God's power, however, is not external like Milton's invocation of Peter and Christ; rather, in their accounts the island itself acquires quasi–Christian virtue. For Strachey, the preservation of the crew reveals the hand of God in the world, and God's power to cleanse the devil's islands. 'They be called commonly the Devil's Islands', he writes,

> and are feared and avoided of all travelers alive above any other place in the world. Yet it pleased our merciful God to make even this hideous and hated place both the place of our safety and the means of our deliverance' (16).

For Strachey, as for Jourdain, the assumption that Bermuda is not inhabitable was a 'foul and general error' (16). Jourdain, while still using the phrase 'Isle of Devils' in the title of his 1610 first edition, goes farther than Strachey in advertising the healthfulness of the islands:

> Whereof my opinion sincerely of this island is that whereas it hath been and is still accounted the most dangerous, infortunate, and most forlorn place of the world, it is in truth the richest, healthfullest, and [most] pleasing land (the quantity and bigness thereof considered) and merely natural, as ever man set foot upon (109).

The second edition of Jourdain's pamphlet, published in 1613, makes the point explicit in a new title, *A Plaine Description of the Barmudas, now called Sommer Ilands*. The name refers to Sir George Somers, who guided the castaways through their order, but the islands now also recall the sun. The next logical step was colonization.

Remaking the devil's island into a colonizable earthly paradise entailed reconceiving the Atlantic rim in the early modern English imagination. This project required skipping over 800 miles of open ocean to connect Bermuda to distant Virginia. The earliest description of the colony that arrived in Bermuda in 1612 was written by the surveyor Richard Norwood, who described the islands as 'as it were the Key, [for] opening a passage, and making the way more safe to many parts of this new World, and especially to Virginia'.[70] The ideological work of reimagining the islands as paradise had been begun by Strachey and Jourdain, with their emphasis on Providential delivery facilitated by the island's natural hospitality. Richard Rich's pamphlet-length poem of 22 stanzas, *Newes from Virginia* (1610), shows how this ideological conversion connected Bermuda to Virginia. Rich's pamphlet, like Strachey's and Jourdain's, uses the title to signal its overarching interest: if the key word for Strachey's letter is 'wrack', and for Jourdain's pamphlet, 'Bermudas', for Rich's poem, it is 'Virginia'. The story of (as the title continues) 'The Lost Flock Triumphant' assimilates Thomas Gates' and George Somers' survival with their subsequent rescue of the Virginia settlement.[71] Rich's poem also stakes out the humanist claims of poetry to exceed narrative description or private letters: 'It is no idle fabulous tayle, / nor is it fayned newes: / For Truth herself is here arriu'd' (sig. A4). Like Strachey and Jourdain, Rich imputes the crew's survival to God – 'heauen was Pylotte in this storme', he writes (sig. A4v) – and his relation of their survival (which, like Jourdain's account, omits the internal political strife among the shipwreck survivors that Strachey included, and which may have prevented Strachey's account from being published before 1625) accents the formal balance between the deaths of 'Two only of their men' against two new births on the island: 'And for the losse of those two soules, / which were accounted deere: / A Sonne and Daughter then was born, / and were Baptized there' (sig. B). The final appeal of Rich's poem is for more settlers for Virginia – 'There is no feare of hunger here,' he writes, 'for

Corne much store here growes' (sig. B2) – and Bermuda's hospitality has been subsumed into the larger narrative of the colony. Rich clearly values the landed Virginia colony more than the oceanic disorder that Bermuda had represented, and careful reading of the pamphlets in maritime context can recover the conceptual labor needed to salvage Bermuda from the unknown sea.

For literary scholars and readers of *The Tempest*, this narrative, in which colonial interests and Christian triumphalism counteract the oceanic disorientation that Bermuda once represented, provides a rich backdrop for characterizing Shakespeare's understanding of the Virginia enterprise, the *Sea-Venture*'s wreck, and oceanic space. Competing depictions of the sea and the Bermuda islands in these texts encourage us to consider not simply the opening storm but also *The Tempest*'s other depictions of social order and government in a maritime context. The shifting nature of the Bermudas, from devil's islands to 'Sommer Ilands' to the newest adjunct of the Virginia settlement, shadows the play's interest in multiple forms of government, from Alonso's monarchy to Prospero's (and Antonio's) dukedom. The tension between classical and Christian interpretive frames in these texts also informs Shakespeare's play and its tension between licit and illicit magic. Finally, the sense of Bermuda as a navigational 'key' (to use Norwood's word) asks us to reconsider the apparent location of the island in Shakespeare's play, astride a different, but also crucial, sea-route between Algiers and Naples. Shakespeare clearly did not intend his island to be Bermuda, but the shifting meanings of Bermuda indicate how islands themselves were changing their meanings in Shakespeare's England. This polyvalent, mutable island-ideology connects *The Tempest* to a richer maritime historical context than conventional source study and New Historicist deep contextualization have allowed.

*Conclusion*

Fuller consideration of the maritime world can provide new resources to early modern literary scholars, including a relatively under-read but vast archive of maritime material, from first-hand accounts to propagandistic poems, and a new perspective on the land-based tropes and habits of both early modern writers and 21st-century critics. I will close this essay with some brief suggestions for what a 'blue cultural studies' – a criticism that takes seriously the place of the ocean in early modern history and culture – might look like.

Oceanic tropes, from the perils of shipwreck to the frustrations of navigation, can serve as powerful antidotes to pastoralism and other representations of landed stability. Pastoral poetry in early modern England provided a fantasy of social and natural harmony, of a perfectly transparent relation between humanity and the world. Even the veiled political critiques typical of the pastorals of Sidney and Spenser operate in a thoroughly landed world. Recognizing the sea in pastoral poems like 'Lycidas' begins to uncover the cultural implications of the transoceanic expansion of early modern culture.[72] Further work in this field would recover the tradition of piscatorial eclogues, which developed out of allusions to Virgil and then continued in the poems of Sannazaro in Italy and Phineas Fletcher and William Diaper in 17th-century England. Fishing may never have been as central as keeping sheep to early modern English poetry, but poets and writers engaged more directly with the oceanic world than we tend to remember.

A clearer sense of the ocean's disorienting impact on early modern global connectivity can also make less tidy the cultural and historical contexts of early modern literature. The fragile transoceanic networks that circulate around Bermuda provide a good example of shifting and competing discourses within the English colonial project. Strachey and Jourdain were gentlemen explorers of a fairly familiar type, and it was in their interest to emphasize

the positive possibilities of transoceanic travel, but theirs were hardly the only voices that constructed early modern English ideas of Bermuda. Norwood, who also wrote navigational instruction manuals like *The Sea-Man's Practice* (1637), speaks from the position of maritime expert, and one of the next-published pamphlets about Bermuda was written by Lewes Hughes, the colony's first preacher (*A Letter Sent into England from the Summer Ilands,* 1615). Two well-known 17th-century poems, Andrew Marvell's 'Bermudas' (1650) and Edmund Waller's 'The Battle of the Summer Islands' (1645), testify to continuing divergence regarding these islands' symbolic meanings. The Bermuda network, which in the 16th century also included Spanish castaways, French pirates, and Portuguese slavers, shows overlapping cultural spheres in conflict during the process of exploration and settlement.

Finally, a blue cultural studies must consider the physical environment as a substantial partner in the creation of cultural meaning. While ideologies of land ownership, especially around enclosure, have long been a part of the discourse of early modern literary criticism, too little attention has been paid to the ways in which prolonged exposure to the deep sea challenged early modern legal, scientific, and literary habits of thought. In this moment of ecocriticism and environmentalism, the mind-stretching vastness of the sea provides powerful food for thought. Richard Grove's provocative claim in *Green Imperialism* that modern environmentalism was born out of the encounter between European explorers and what he terms 'tropical island Edens' suggests that we need to place the oceanic margins of the known world near the center of our critical understandings of early modern culture. The sea, long treated as purely a metaphor or simply unremarkable, provides new vistas for early modern literary studies.

## Short Biography

Steve Mentz's current research explores shipwreck narratives and the culture of transoceanic exploration and travel from the 16th to the 18th centuries. His interest in the relationship between historical records and the ancient narrative tropes of romance emerges from his study of early modern English prose fiction, *Romance for Sale in Early Modern England* (Ashgate, 2006). He has explored the complicated overlap between fact and fiction in early modern texts in his edited collection of early modern criminal narratives, *Rogues and Early Modern English Culture* (Michigan, 2004). He has also authored articles for journals such as *Studies in Philology*, *Studies in English Literature*, *Renaissance Drama*, and *TEXT*, as well as several collections of essays. His work on maritime literature has received fellowship support from the National Endowment for the Humanities, the Folger Shakespeare Library, the Caird Library at the National Maritime Museum in London, and the John Carter Brown Library in Providence, RI. He teaches Shakespeare and English Renaissance literature at St. John's University in New York City.

## Notes

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[1] For a more speculative introduction to this phrase, see my forthcoming book, *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*.
[2] On early modern voyages of circumnavigation, 'the truly founding gesture of globalization', see Hulme, 'Cast Away' 190. See also Connery, 'The Oceanic Feeling'.
[3] For a visually stimulating introduction to early modern maritime history, see John Hattendorf's exhibition catalog, *The Boundless Deep*. Hattendorf has also produced numerous other studies and collections, including most recently the *Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*.

[4]  The struggle between terrestrial order and marine chaos has been a recurring trope in the West; early modern writers drew on a series of ancient Near Eastern myths in which gods of the earth (including Yahweh) created dry land by defeating gods of the sea. On the *Chaoskampf* between land and sea, see Connery, 'There was no more sea'.

[5]  On the early modern ocean as a legal space, see Muldoon, 'Who Owns the Sea?'

[6]  This conception of the sea would remain influential long after the Renaissance; Hegel's *Philosophy of History* (1837) treated the sea in exactly these terms, as 'the idea of the indefinite, the unlimited, and the infinite … the sea invites man to conquest, and to piratical plunder, but also to honest gain and to commerce' (see Connery, 'Ideologies of Land and Sea' 182).

[7]  Plato, *Laws* (4).

[8]  See *The Sea-Voyage Narrative*, esp. 18–20.

[9]  See Levinson, for a history of the surprisingly powerful impact of container shipping on the modern economy.

[10]  On the history of Western culture and beachgoing, see Corbain, *The Lure of the Sea,* and Urbain, *On the Beach*. Corbain suggests that the seaside was not 'discovered' by Europeans until the mid-18th century, but his rich reading of classical and early modern culture suggests otherwise.

[11]  As I will discuss, maritime material is appearing in various discourses, including environmental history (see Bolster, 'Opportunities in Marine Environmental History', and Grove, *Green Imperialism*), histories of globalization (see Finamore, *Maritime History as World History*), histories of science (see Rozwadowski, *Fathoming the Ocean,* Rozwadowski and van Keuren, *The Machine in Neptune's Garden*, and Deacon, *Scientists and the Sea*), and literary history (see Klein and Mackenthun, *Sea-Changes*). The social history of maritime culture also appears in works such as Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen* and *Young Men and the Sea*.

[12]  See 'Introduction: Oceans of History' 717. Further citations in the text.

[13]  Atlantic history has a vast bibliography. For a recent survey edited by two major figures in the field, see Greene and Morgan, *Atlantic History*. Among many other works, see also Andrews, *Trade, Plunder, and Settlement*; Elliot, *Empires of the Atlantic World*; Armitage and Braddock, *The British Atlantic World, 1500–1800*; and Bailyn, *Atlantic History: Concept and Contours*.

[14]  On the current status of Atlantic history, see, among others, Games, 'Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities'.

[15]  See Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic*; Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, Villains of All Nations* and *The Slave Ship*; Rediker and Lindbaugh, *The Many-Headed Hydra*.

[16]  See Cohen, 'Was there an Amerindian Atlantic?'

[17]  For further speculations about oceanic history, see Lambert, Martins, and Ogborn, 'Currents, Visions, and Voyages'.

[18]  See, for example, Peck, *Maritime Fiction*, and Rood, *The Sea! The Sea!* Traditional studies and anthologies still appear, with scholars like Bert Bender and Robert Foulke building on older anthologies and bibliographies by Frank Knight, Benjamin Labaree, Patricia Ann Carlson, Haskell Springer, and others.

[19]  Margaret Cohen has published an early stage of her work on the maritime novel as 'Traveling Genres'. See also Roach, *Cities of the Dead*, and Baucom, *Spectres of the Atlantic*.

[20]  See Klein and Mackenthun's, *Sea-Changes* and *Fictions of the Sea*. For work on medieval maritime culture, see Rose, *The Medieval Sea*. For a broad reconception of space and place across the medieval and early modern periods, see Wallace, *Premodern Places*.

[21]  See Horden and Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea*; Braudel, *The Mediterranean and the Mediterranean World in the Age of Philip II*.

[22]  For responses to Horden and Purcell's challenge, see Harris, *Rethinking the Mediterranean*; Peters, 'Quid nobis cum pelago?'; and Horden and Purcell, 'The Mediterranean and "the New Thalassology" '.

[23]  While acknowledging the contributions of New Historicist treatments of transoceanic travel, from Greenblatt's *Marvelous Possessions* to Fuller's *Voyages in Print*, I would like to distinguish the trend that I identify in this article from mainstream New Historicism. As Greenblatt's subtitle ('The Wonder of the New World') indicates, his work focuses on what happened when Europeans found their brave New World. Blue Cultural Studies is concerned with what happens on the way there, at sea.

[24]  *The Corrupting Sea*, 54.

[25]  See *The Corrupting Sea*, esp. 123–72.

[26]  For a cogent rebuttal to Braudel's notion of 'coasting', see Gillis, *Islands of the Mind*.

[27]  See Cohen, *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*.

[28]  See, for example, Wallace, *Premodern Places*.

[29]  For a recent example, the poet-theorist Édouard Glissant's reading of Caribbean history in *Poetics of Relation* emphasizes the centrality of the sea and literary culture. For further consideration of the early modern maritime, see Peter Hulme, *Colonial Encounters*.

[30]  As Rhodes and Sawday polemically put it in *The Renaissance Computer*, 'The defining moment of the European Renaissance is neither the fall of Constantinople in 1453, nor the discovery of the Americas in 1492. Rather, it was the "Gutenberg Revolution" of the mid-fifteenth century which marked the emergence of modernity in the Christian west'.

[31]  For an illustrated survey of ship types, see Landström, *The Ship*. For recent explorations of early modern cartography, see Conley, *The Self-Made Map*; Jacob, *The Sovereign Map*; and Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England*.

[32]  On Portuguese use of astrolabes to find latitude at sea in the fifteenth century, see Brotton, *Trading Territories* 54.

[33]  See Blackmore, *Manifest Perdition* 103.

[34]  See *The Sea Around Us*.

[35]  The growing field of ecocriticism has produced several critical anthologies, including Coupe's *The Green Studies Reader* and Glotfelty and Fromm's *The Ecocriticism Reader*. For a review essay, see Estok, 'A Report Card on Ecocriticism'.

[36]  See 'Opportunities in Marine Environmental History'.

[37]  On early modern globalism, see Singh's *A Companion to the Global Renaissance – 1550–1660*.

[38]  See 'Imperium Studies: Theorizing Early Modern Expansion'.

[39]  See 'The Elephant and the Whale: Empires of Land and Sea'.

[40]  For recent studies of maritime cartography, see Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England,* and Brotton, *Trading Territories*.

[41]  See *The Enchafèd Flood*, esp. 13–23.

[42]  See  Raban, ed., *The Oxford Book of the Sea*, 3–7.

[43]  See 'Hydrographies'. I provide an alternative reading of this passage in *At the Bottom of Shakespeare's Ocean*.

[44]  Quoted in Raban, *Oxford Book of the Sea* 5.

[45]  The historiographical definition of maritime culture remains surprisingly fraught. Scholarship has split around the question of whether maritime culture should be understood as distinctive and international, a model of the modern globalized labor force (as Rediker has argued), or whether maritime labor was less a separate way of life than a practice adopted by people who lived near water, who should then be considered less 'men of the sea' than 'working men who got wet' (see Vickers, Alexander, and Fingard). Land and sea should perhaps be thought of as a dialectical binary, with the current turn toward the maritime encouraging a new perspective on Western history rather than creating an entirely new academic field. Ideologies of sea power from Alfred Thayer Mahan to Hegel to Carl Schmitt have suggested that Western global domination was a maritime phenomenon, and it may not be coincidental that the collapse of European colonial empires followed air power's eclipsing of sea power (see Connery, 'Ideologies of Land and Sea'). Maritime culture may not be as distinctive and self-sufficient as Marcus Rediker at times suggests – even Rediker's pirates spent time on land – but the perspective of the sea and the mutual dependence of land and sea cultures motivates a maritime turn.

[46]  See Connery, 'There was no more sea'.

[47]  This abundance has very recently come to a drastic end, with the collapse of the Grand Banks cod fishery in the 1990s, which ended at least 500 years in which codfish were a seemingly limitless source of income (and protein) for North Atlantic peoples. For a multidisciplinary task force's study of the cod fishery, see Rosenberg et al.; for a journalist's survey, see Kurlansky, *Cod*.

[48]  Shakespeare, *Pericles* 2.1.78–80.

[49]  Ovid, *Tristia* 1.11.37–40.

[50]  See Patterson, *Pastoral and Ideology*, and Hughes's notes to 'Lycidas' in Milton, *The Complete Poems and Major Prose*.

[51]  See Lindheim, *The Virgilian Pastoral Tradition*; Connelly, 'The Aesthetics of the Collective in Vergil and Milton'; and Sansone, 'How Milton Reads'.

[52]  Although traditional scholarship has not entirely ignored this topic; see, for example, Snyder, 'Nature, History, and the Waters of Lycidas', and Shumaker, 'Flowets and Sounding Seas'.

[53]  For recent consideration of Milton's classicism, see Brown, 'Underworld Sailors in Milton's ''Lycidas'' and Virgil's ''Aeneid'' '.

[54]  See Quint, *Epic and Empire*, esp. 248–67.

[55]  On the distinction between Mediterranean cultures and those that faced the Atlantic, see Cunliffe, *Facing the Ocean*.

[56]  See Hughes, ed., 119.

[57]  See 'There was no more sea'.

[58]  On the history of interpreting this scene and the play more broadly, see Vaughan's introduction to *The Tempest*.

[59]  For an authoritative summary of this scholarship and a defense of the traditional sources, see Vaughan, 'William Strachey's ''True Reportory'' and Shakespeare'.

[60]  See Quinn, 4–5.

[61]  See Quinn, 2.

[62]  See Quinn, 3.

[63]  See Quinn, 'Bermuda in the Age of Exploration and Early Settlement' 6–7.

[64]  See Quinn, 10–11.

[65]  See Quinn, 12.

[66]  For an excellent reading of Norwood's map, see Smith, *The Cartographic Imagination in Early Modern England*.

[67] On humanism and English colonization, see Armitage and Braddick, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire*, and Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America*.
[68] See Strachey, in Wright, ed., 5, 7. Further citations in the text.
[69] See Jourdain, in Wright, ed., 108. Further citations in the text.
[70] Norwood, *Journal of Richard Norwood* lxviii.
[71] See Rich, *Newes from Virginia*. Citations in the text.
[72] For the suggestion that shipwreck serves as an anti-pastoral in Sidney's *New Arcadia*, see Mentz, 'Reason, Faith, and Shipwreck'.

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