

Read the three following excerpts about an emerging field of research in literary studies. Write an academic essay in which you summarize the positions of the three critics, elaborate on their main points, and elucidate their differences and similarities. No specialized knowledge of oceanic studies is assumed. Your main task is to analyze and synthesize the arguments presented below; you may also supply relevant examples from your own reading where appropriate.

1. Margaret Cohen, "Literary Studies on the Terraqueous Globe" (2010)

Across an era spanning from Columbus and Vasco da Gama to the twentieth century, the maritime world was a frontier of capitalism and colonial expansion. Goods, people, and information moved across the oceans of the globe, exploiting what was called "the freedom of the seas," even as nations warred on each other's ships for control of trade routes and coastal access. The immense wealth and power at stake in maritime transport led governments and companies to pour resources into research and development, making the maritime world one of modernity's ongoing frontiers of science and technology. It was also a great reservoir of books, narratives, and fantasy. Occurring in an environment that few could access yet that affected the lives of so many, sea voyages piqued the curiosity of stay-at-home audiences. As global ocean travel grew up together with the printing press, armchair sailors combed sea voyage literature, factual and fictional, for strange, surprising adventures as well as for information about world-altering developments and events recounted in what was called "news from the sea." And yet, despite the preeminence of maritime transport in making the modern world, literary scholars across the twentieth century passed over its impact with their gazes fixed on land. Nowhere was this gaze more stubborn than in my own domain, novel studies. Think of the signature twentieth-century readings of novels well established in the literary canon that treat oceangoing themes. Thus, Daniel Defoe's *The Life and Strange, Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe of York, Mariner* was read as the memoirs of a capitalist *homo economicus* or of a colonizer settling new territories; the ship's crew on the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* offered an image of factory labor; and Joseph Conrad's portrait of an inexperienced commander in "The Secret Sharer" limned a narcissist ripe for a Freudian case study. This disregard for global ocean travel even where it is a work's explicit subject matter is so spectacular that it might be called hydrophasia. The syndrome is part of a pervasive twentieth-century attitude that photographer and theorist Allan Sekula has called "forgetting the sea" (48).


2. Hester Blum, "The Prospect of Oceanic Studies" (2010)

The sea is not a metaphor. Figurative language has its place in analyses of the maritime world, certainly, but oceanic studies could be more invested in the uses, and problems, of what is literal in the face of the sea's abyss of representation. The appeal that figures of oscillation and circulation have had is easy to understand, since the sea, in William Boelhower's formulation, "leaves no traces, and has no place names, towns or dwelling places; it cannot be possessed." Boelhower's description of the Atlantic world is representative of characterizations of the ocean in recent critical work: it is "fundamentally a space of dispersion, conjunction, distribution, contingency, heterogeneity, and of intersecting and stratified lines and images—in short, a field of strategic possibilities in which the Oceanic order holds all together in a common but highly fluid space" (92–93). The ready availability—and undeniable utility—of fluidity as an oceanic figure means that the actual sea has often been rendered immaterial in transnational work, however usefully such work formulates the ethos of transnationalism and oceanic studies alike. In this essay I advocate a practice of oceanic studies that is attentive to the material conditions and praxis of the maritime world, one that draws from the epistemological structures provided by the lives and writings of those for whom the sea was simultaneously workplace, home, passage, penitentiary, and promise. This would allow for a galvanization of the erasure, elision, and fluidity at work in the metaphors of the sea that would better enable us to see and to study the *work* of oceanic literature.

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## 3. Iain Chambers, "Maritime Criticism and Theoretical Shipwrecks" (2010)

The sea becomes the countersite or heterotopia of modernity. As Cesare Casarino argues, the centrality of the sea and the ship to the making of occidental modernity propels us to set modernity on floating foundations... In the wake of Melville's and Conrad's vessels, but also in the wake of the slave ships tacking between Europe, Africa, and the Americas on Paul Gilroy's black Atlantic, "the sea narrative questions not only its own foundations but also reaches beyond itself to question the foundations of a world that for several centuries had been run in all sorts of ways from ships—in questioning itself, it questions the whole world" (12). At the horizon's edge, the maritime passages and poetics of Coleridge, Turner, Poe, Melville, Conrad, and Walcott propose men at the limits of their provincial and patriarchal provenance. If the sea is framed by European desire and rendered masculine in intent, it is also a space, as Monica Centanni argues, that has hosted Polyphemus and Circe, Medea and Calypso, and Caliban and Sycorax, who have "spoken of reasons that are inexpressible in the rationale of the *logos* that triumphs in the Occident" (47; my trans.). Cleopatra and the Orient challenge the unilateral rationale of empire. The languages that frame the world remain susceptible to appropriation by monsters, slaves, blacks, women, and migrants—by the excluded who speak of overlooked, unexpected, displaced, and unauthorized matters. Today the mythical Mediterranean is brutally vernacularized in the fraught journeys of anonymous men, women, and children migrating across its waters: Caliban returns as an illegal immigrant, and Prospero's island, midway between Naples and Tunis in the sixteenth-century drama, becomes modern-day Lampedusa.



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