

The Archipelagic Turn

Gymnasielærerdag: Engelsk

Agenda

- Me: “Introducing the Archipelagic Turn
- You: working with a contemporary poem from an archipelagic perspective
- Us: discussion – W(h)ither English?

Me



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

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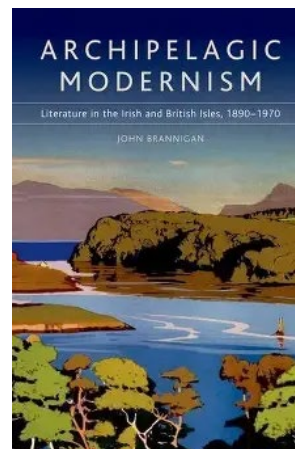
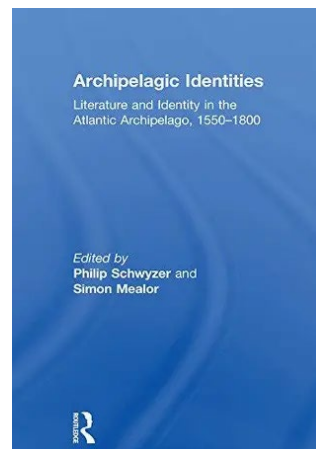
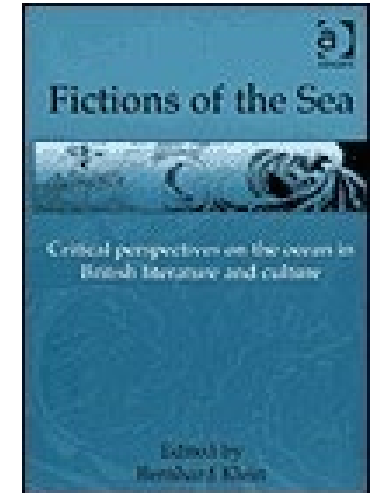
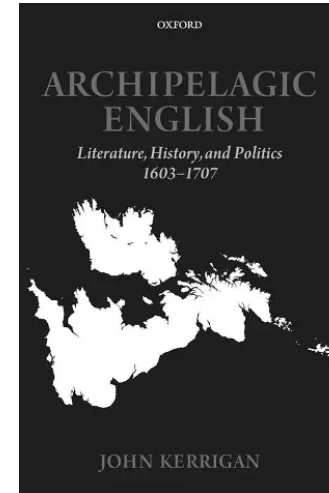
Abstract

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 *thalassa*, the sea), distinguishes these trends from non-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 "Benbow's parghies" on which Shakespeare seems to have drawn in *The Tempest*.

O what an endless worke have I in hand,
To count the sea's abundant progeny,
Whose fruitful seeds faine sowne these in land,
And also those which waite 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 ocean 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 discourse 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 non-traditional New Historicist and "Atlantic" scholarship, and suggests how these new methods can contribute to what I call a "blue cultural studies." This new maritime perspective does not view the ocean 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 decidedly) 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

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Oceanic

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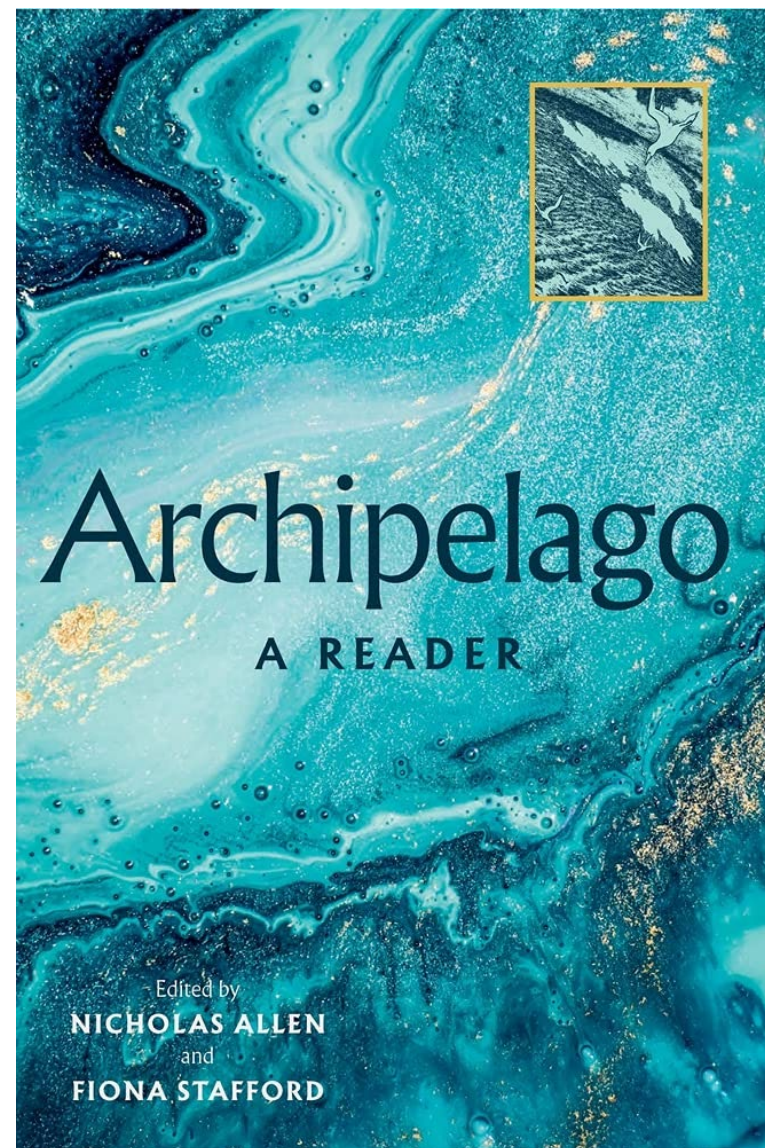
AS Kelly Bushnell highlights in her 2018 *VLC* keyword entry on "oceans," the rise of the blue humanities prompted a sea change in Victorian studies. When we attend to the "poetic history of the ocean," we widen the horizons of Victorianist ecocriticism, formalism, and historicism.¹ As we study waterborne circulations, exchanges, and contact zones, we remap our understanding of the nineteenth-century world. In place of traditional, terrestrial boundaries (e.g., the borders of the nation-state, or the infamous "red on the map" of the British Empire), we see a world connected by water—a world of human and nonhuman entanglements.

Such "blue" remapping—shifting from geography to hydrography—follows key interventions that reframe bodies of water as bridges rather than barriers. Studies of the Black and circum-Atlantic; of the Indian Ocean; of the Caribbean, Arctic, and South Seas; and of a broad blue southern hemisphere all work to surface new networks of culture, history, politics, economics, and ecology. Some studies highlight specific maritime contact zones variously humanmade (the dockside, the port, the canal, the passenger ship) and natural (the reef, the atoll, the deep, the littoral).² Other studies imagine new expanses, such as Charne Lavery's argument for the "southern Indian Ocean" as a distinct zone, one that resists the hegemony of the terrestrial Global North and of anthropocentrism.³



Archipelago

2007-2019

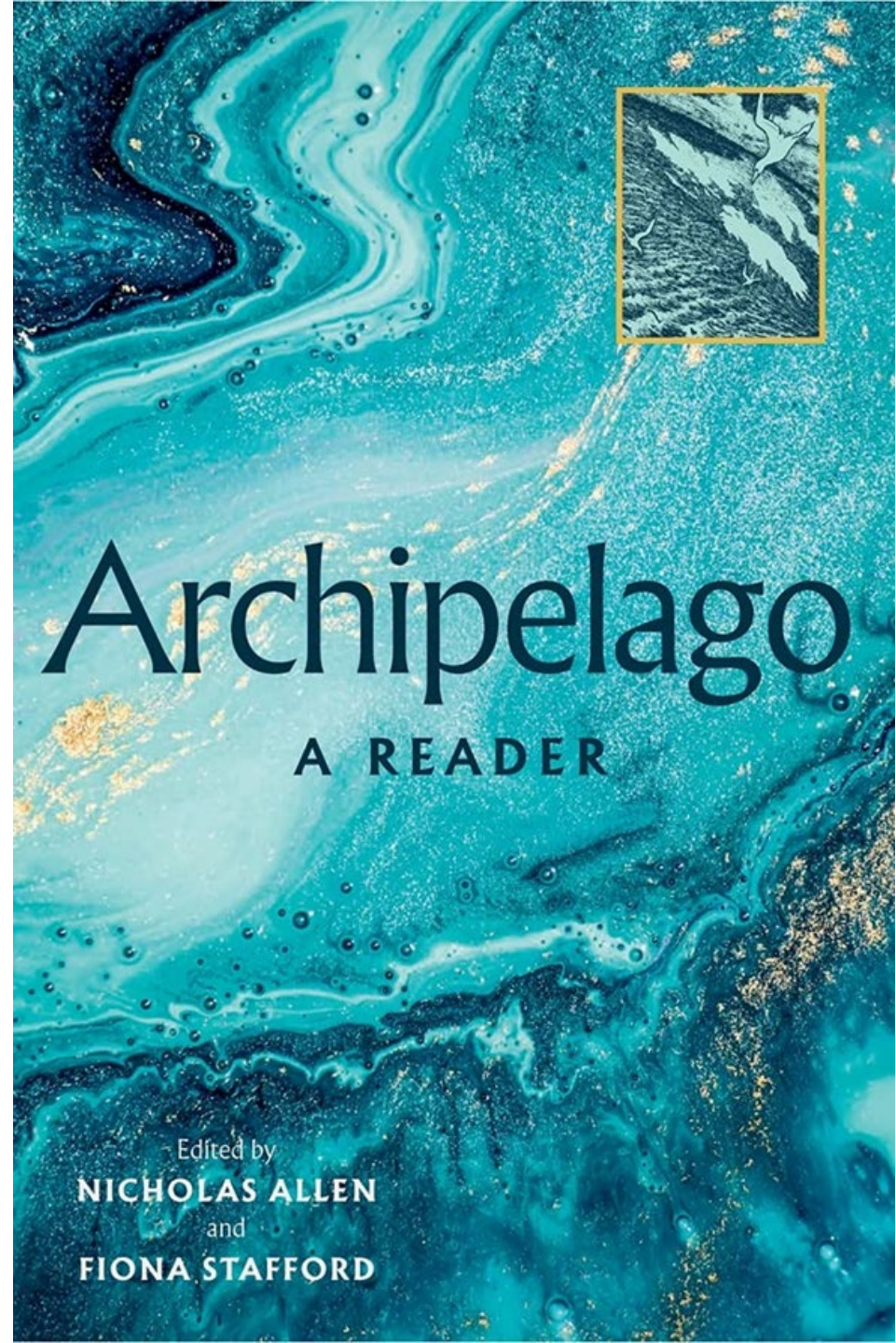


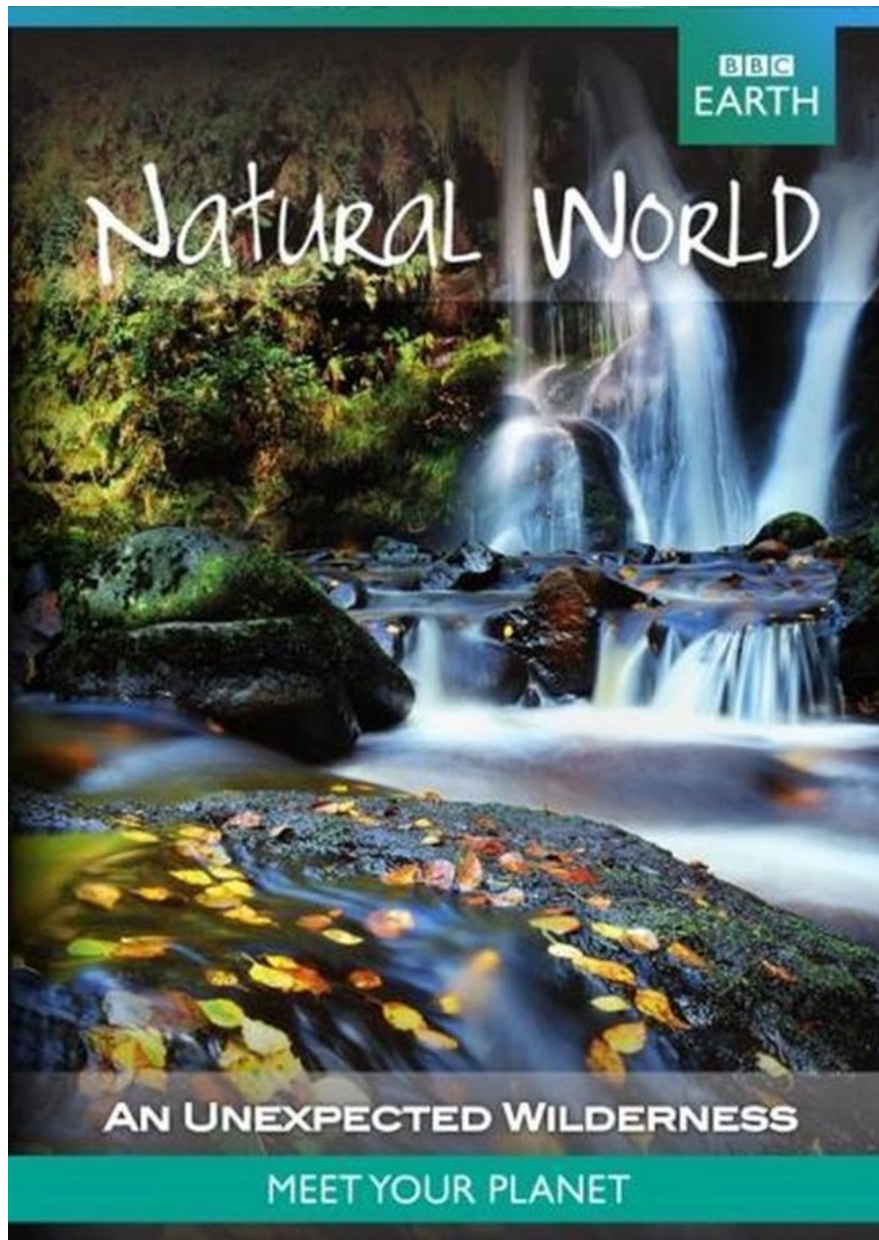
Dublin: Lilliput Press. 2021

"The Archipelagic Turn." Jens Kirk, Dept. of Culture and Learning, Aalborg University, 2025



“[Archipelago] marks a creative and intellectual turn towards the coast, the sea, and the endless declension of water as the matter, embodied and imaginary, of our shifting relations, among these islands and beyond.” (xvii)

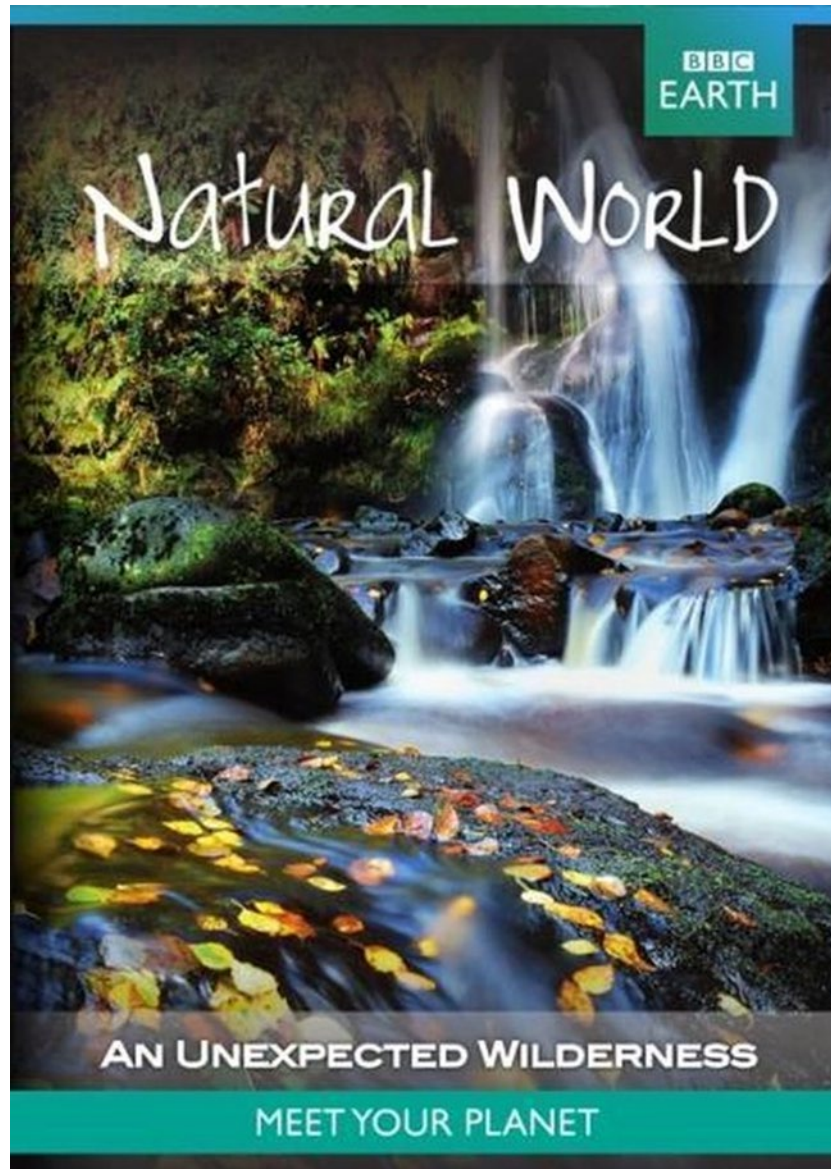






“I can understand why seals have long figure in the folklore of our coastal fringes as possessing an uncanny double nature. In-between creatures: half human and half marine.”

Robert Macfarlane, [Wild Seals in the Thames | Unexpected Wilderness | BBC Earth](#)



BBC Earth/ Robert Mancfarlane,

The Other Side of Essex: Unexpected Wilderness

[The Other Side of Essex | Unexpected Wilderness | BBC Earth](#)

The Power of Darkness

[Stunning Moonlight Time-lapse | The power of Darkness |](#)

[Unexpected Wilderness | BBC Earth](#)

Wild Seals in the Thames

[Wild Seals in the Thames | Unexpected Wilderness | BBC Earth](#)



Covehithe, East Suffolk



China Mieville, “Covehithe”: [Covehithe by China Miéville | Fiction | The Guardian](#)

Gwyneth Lewis, "An Explanation of Doily" (2016)

To Adam Z

You asked me last summer: "What is a doily?"
Sometimes, at lunch, I walk on the beach.
Today I was coatless. A storm cloud threatened,
Dark as a spaceship. Should it pour,
A sister ship down in the water
Would throw up grappling nets to the surface,
Rain rise to soak me. Behind a sandbank,
Waves touched the shore, no more than a shimmer.

Less rare than its cousin, the antimacassar,
A doily's placed between sweet thing and china.
Both survive where vicars arrive
For tea, are given thin cup and saucer
Instead of a mug. If your cake's so rich
That it's leaking syrup, you'll need a doily.
Held up, its paper's the filigree
Of snowflake, or fingers looked through in fear.



The shower holds off. My shoe's a doily.
Without it, where would I be on these shells
That crunch underfoot, like contact lenses,
As I gingerly walk, on my mermaid way
Back to my husband in his human dwelling?

Someone is pulling a blue toy trawler
Along the horizon to port, so smoothly
It looks realistic. Sea's partly doily.
Surfers ride its lace to their downfall,
After all, we're nothing but froth.
Like a carpet salesman, the indolent tide
Flops a wave over, showing samples: "Madam,
This one is durable, has a fringe." Under
Its breath the sea sighs, "Has it come
To this? Must everything always end in ... doily?"

It must. Broad afternoon. The rain-cloud barges
Have passed and here's a cumulonimbus parade
Of imperial busts, the Roman rulers
In historical order which, I think, would please you.
Their vapor curls and noble foreheads
Are lit up in lilac because they're invading
The west. Next come the philosophers and, last of all,
The poets. Pulleys draw them delicately on.
Here comes Lucretius, then Ovid, then Horace
In lines, saying relentlessly, "Doily," "Doily,"
Till stars take over and do the same.

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/90291/an-explanation-of-doily>

You

**Alice Oswald, “A Short Story of Falling”
(*Falling Awake*, 2016)**

It is the story of the falling rain
to turn into a leaf and fall again

it is the secret of a summer shower
to steal the light and hide it in a flower

and every flower a tiny tributary
that from the ground flows green and momentary

is one of water's wishes and this tale
hangs in a seed-head smaller than my thumbnail

if only I a passerby could pass
as clear as water through a plume of grass

to find the sunlight hidden at the tip
turning to seed a kind of lifting rain drip

then I might know like water how to balance
the weight of hope against the light of patience

water which is so raw so earthy-strong
and lurks in cast-iron tanks and leaks along

drawn under gravity towards my tongue
to cool and fill the pipe-work of this song

which is the story of the falling rain
that rises to the light and falls again

How does the poem constitute “a creative and intellectual turn towards the coast, the sea, and the endless declension of water as the matter, embodied and imaginary, of our shifting relations, among these islands and beyond.” (xvii) Discuss!

Us: W(h)ither English