Jack Tar’s Perilous World:

Privateers, Impressed Seafarers, Whalemen, Nautical Abolitionists & Traumatic Memory
in the American Maritime Narrative

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Memories that are written down become history, and they “are texts that have their own literary form.” This dissertation examines ordinary seafarers’ memories of horrific maritime events and observes those written recollections described in maritime narratives as tragic reminders of a brutal and perilous maritime world. Seafarers experienced tragedy and their memories of those events are a historical indicator of both their social legacies and communal endeavors. Yet these same maritime narratives describe the reality of what America’s maritime heritage looked like, from the American Revolution until the American Civil War, and the risks that awaited young men at sea.

This dissertation examines the memories of ordinary American seamen, mainly young New Englanders, all of whom experienced traumatic maritime events and each set his recollections to paper in the form of memoirs or autobiographies. It assesses seafarers’ narratives as a historical genre distinct from, yet complementary to, the literary
work of such seamen-novelists as Herman Melville. The writings of some sailors about their traumatic pasts acted as a coping mechanism to come to terms with harrowing memories. Other sailors, capitalizing on their social and cultural capital, sought to intertwine their memories and traumatic exposures within a life-story to suggest that their worthiness to be thought common American “heroes” was not simply owing to their survival, but to diligence and pursuit of greatness.

The traumatic reality of the maritime world has been shaped by literary and popular fictional culture, but the collective memories formed in fiction were motivated by reality. The memories of American sailors – notably privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists – are what inspired these fictions. These seamen are all historically connected, even if living at different times, sailing the ocean for diverse reasons, and facing varying oceanic dangers. This connection is observed through the types of memories they reflected on and how each sailors “sea eye” witnessed a dark side of the maritime world. This dissertation seeks to initiate a rereading of those nautical tales and a renewed emphasis on their disturbing memories as keys to observing that elusive, and perilous, maritime world they each sailed into.
‘I am madness maddened! That wild madness. That’s only calm to comprehend itself!’

- Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick*, Chapter 37 “Sunset”

How does one understand the terrible tragedies that sailors experienced during the years from the American Revolution until the American Civil War? In a time when America’s maritime communities were growing, the sailors depicted in this dissertation witnessed history as it happened. They took part in the building of the American empire through open rebellion against an oppressive parent nation, yet did so through service in a fledgling navy that developed under their feet. They fought on the high seas to maintain independence while American cities burned by enemy fire. They lived according to communal bonds and sailed out in accord of maritime traditions, while hunting whales and fighting against physical and emotional obstacles. Lastly, they engaged the evils of slavery on a maritime battlefield allowing for abolitionist fervor to gain traction and paving the way for the ground forces of freedom to ensure the onset of the American Civil War. With the end of the Civil War, as well as the opening up of the American
frontier, came an end to America’s “Age of Sail.” These sailors experienced terrible tragedy while witnessing the unfurling of national history, and their inscribed memories of those events are a historical indicator of both their social legacies and communal endeavors. Yet these same maritime narratives, which engage the concept of history and memory, unleash upon the reader the terrible reality of what American maritime heritage looked like and the tragic certainties that awaited young New England men that chose a life at sea.

I grew up in a small, middle-class town named Fairhaven, Massachusetts. It lies about an hour south of Boston, forty-five minutes east of Providence, and only about twenty-five minutes down highway route six from the edge of Cape Cod and the Canal that bears the same name. It is a small community. The total number of high school students when I graduated in 2000 was about four hundred, not large to say the least, but Fairhaven’s beauty and maritime presence sparks wonder and admiration in the eyes of anyone who has traveled through, or lived in this small South Coast Massachusetts town. Before 1812 Fairhaven was a part of New Bedford, Massachusetts, the major oceanic center for American fishermen and whalers. It was an area that had gained economic, political, and cultural prominence in the eighteenth century, and will be discussed more fully elsewhere in this dissertation. Fairhaven would become, on its own, an important maritime center as well, of course less well-known and much less affluent than its parent city across the Acushnet River. Still, its maritime presence was felt and the docks, shipyards, and local businesses relied on the maritime world and the young men who sailed out in search of adventure, money, and to see the world beyond the Atlantic wall.
I grew up a stone’s throw away from the Fairhaven docks, and I could see the fishing boats coming and leaving from New Bedford Harbor day and night from my home’s kitchen window. I lived only three blocks away from Fort Phoenix beach. This area was also the historic “reservation” site of a Revolutionary and Civil War fort, Fort Phoenix, which had served an important maritime and military function for Massachusetts, as well as serving as the national maritime economic sector and as a symbol of patriotism to the local community that had long looked to it for protection, first from a British enemy and then from hurricanes. Its location at the entrance of New Bedford harbor served as a barrier to both human and environmental dangers. Fort Phoenix, with the beach surrounding it, still evokes nostalgia as it did in my youth when I went there to watch the fishing boats depart and return, to observe Independence Day fireworks displays, and to picnic and play tennis and tag football games.

Located at the mouth of the Acushnet River, the fort served as the “primary defense” against British naval attacks on New Bedford Harbor during the American Revolution. It was the site of the first naval battle of the American Revolution, which took place on 14 May 1775.1 As is well-known, both in town lore and history, it was under the command of Nathaniel Pope, whose name today graces a beach in Fairhaven and “Pope Island,” where there is a bridge that connects Fairhaven to New Bedford. Off the New Bedford coast, Pope and Daniel Egery, along with twenty-five “Fairhaven minutemen” onboard the sloop Success, captured two British vessels in Buzzards Bay.2

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During the Revolutionary War Fort Phoenix would eventually be abandoned on the 5th and 6th of September 1778, only three months before Barnabas Downs and the Brig General Arnold would meet maritime disaster only thirty miles away in Plymouth, Massachusetts. The British landed four thousand infantrymen on the west side of the Acushnet River and proceeded to burn ships and shipyards, and to fight companies of local militiamen attempting to repel their march towards Fairhaven. They failed and Fairhaven, like its parent in New Bedford, although both towns were still one at this time in history, was attacked and homes burned as British soldiers marched through the town and up through Sconticut Neck. It was in the shadow of these defeats that Fort Phoenix was left undefended and thus destroyed by gleeful British soldiers who were surprised to have found the fort’s doors open and their success unobstructed. But, the story does not end there, as Fairhaven villagers defended it bravely and were able to repel further British assaults. This was done by the heroic work of Major Isreal Fearing, who, it has been written, “marched from Wareham” some fifteen miles east of the town center with additional militiamen, who in turn saved the city from further destruction.

Fort Phoenix, as a maritime beacon in the area, was again put to use as the Revolutionary War ended, a new nation was created, and greater obstacles were encountered. In 1812 Fairhaven split apart from its parent town of New Bedford, and would, as an independent town, face a new war with Britain in 1812. On 13 June 1814, with the aid of Fort Phoenix, the town successfully repelled an attack on the harbor by British forces. It was in the morning of that date that “landing boats” were launched from the British raider, the HMS Nimrod, but after having come under heavy fire from the

massive guns of Fort Phoenix and recognizing the gathering of a well-equipped militia company, the British retreated and did not land. Since that time, the fort and the reservation area have served the purpose of warning the town of impending weather problems as it sits just south of the Hurricane Barrier that closes off the harbor to rough seas and oceanic hazards and protects both sailors and town folk from those seas where many make their living.

No doubt every town’s history is important to those who grew up there and left but never forgot it. As Oliver Wendell Holmes eloquently stated, “Where we love is home. Home that our feet may leave, but not our hearts.” As Maya Angelou has written, “You can never go home again, but the truth is you can never leave home, so it’s all right.” To me, the memory of Fairhaven’s history, as well as its current image, is a source of both comfort and pride. In part the recollections that I have about the seaport community where I grew up have inspired me to write this dissertation. While Fairhaven has a history that I respect, it is its maritime position that I most admire. It is a town that Henry Hurtleston Rogers helped found. As a businessman and philanthropists, Rogers, a close friend of Samuel Clemens, or better known as Mark Twain, had made his money in Standard Oil, the Virginian Railway, and through marriage with Abbie Gifford Rogers, another Fairhaven native. Abbie was the daughter of Captain Peleg Gifford, a well-known whaler at the time. Rogers eventually donated massive amounts of his own money for improvements to the infrastructure of the community, and many of the buildings that are still important to the town bear his name one hundred years later.

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4 Quotes about home from Holmes and Angelou were located on several references sites about homesickness.

It is the town that famous marine painter and photographer William Bradford called home. James Cooke, the last surviving Pilgrim from the 1620 voyage to Plymouth, lived out his years there. It is where sea captain Paul Delano, of the prominent American Delano family whose descendants include Franklin Delano Roosevelt, settled. Prolific yacht designer William H. Hand Jr., father of the American skyscraper William Le Baron Jenney, the first Japanese person to live in America “John” Manjiro Nakahama, prominent Freemason and attorney Albert Pike, and the first man to sail around the world, alone, Captain Joshua Slocum, all called Fairhaven home. Even Christopher Reeve, who won acting fame in Superman, docked his 40-foot sloop-rigged Chandelle in Fairhaven. Like many in New England, the town has a rich heritage, strategic location, and overlooks an oceanic world that has given it historic importance.

“John” Manjiro Nakahama, who was a fourteen-year-old fisherman when he and four companions were shipwrecked and rescued by an American whaling ship in 1841, said that “Oahu could not compare to Fairhaven in opulence. The natives were extremely lovely in appearance…kind and gentle by nature…and always diligent in everything. It had become the custom of the country to be highly virtuous…”6 According to Junya Nagakuni & Junji Kitadai, who translated Nakahama’s autobiography, Captain William Whitfield of the ship John Howland admired the boy for his intellect and ingenuity and invited him to his home in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, where he was taught in English, mathematics and navigation. He was later enlisted as a member of the crew aboard a whaling ship and sailed around the earth. Later in life he joined the California Gold Rush

and earned passage back to his native home of Japan.⁷ Mark Twain wrote to his daughter Clara in July 1906 that “I never had a delightfuler holiday in my life and I did hate to leave Fairhaven.”⁸ In the end, painter Charles H. Gifford said it best when he wrote that “There is no other place on the New England coast that would give me the material for study such as sunsets, moonlights, storms, etc.”⁹

This town gave me the inspiration to follow maritime history and see where it might lead. Although I chose not to become a fisherman, or a sailor, or to enlist in the Navy, I chose to examine the lives of young men who did. I sought to examine that time when young men from New England, especially during the Age of Sail, sought to see the world through eyes that were no longer focused ashore, but rather out across the vast horizon. In the course of that exploration I gravitated towards the stories of men who had left home with the thought that they could accomplish anything and returned with traumatic and tragic memories of what they witnessed and what could have been achieved if they had not suffered a troubled fate. Their traumatic memories, their heartbreaking past, and their possible post-traumatic stress, as well as suffering, served as a unique and illuminating component of that study and cast new light on their world. They experienced terrible oceanic tragedy, wrote about what they saw on the sea, and attempted to understand their maritime past in hopes of coming to terms with “persistent” and invasive memories. In suffering from their traumatic experiences, they resemble the

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⁷ See book description for Drifting Toward the Southeast on http://www.bakerbooks.net/spinner.asp


⁹ See Thomas and Avila, A Picture Postcard History of Fairhaven.
combat veteran, possibly acting with hypervigilance, and the abused captive, but they are rarely identified as such.

This dissertation seeks to assess sailors’ traumatic memories, but at the same time to address the issues and historic consequences produced by such horrific memories. How sailors understood their past traumatic experiences to have affected them, both physically and emotionally, seeped into the narratives in which they scribbled their lasting recollections. They are what they wished to be remembered as, but in recounting their traumatic memories, they become what they wished they could forget or come to terms with. Therefore, through an exploration of their written narratives and by identifying their traumatic pasts, historians may observe with greater precision how these sailors were affected by their unique misfortunes.

I use the town of Fairhaven in this preface as a point of interest in order to explain why I have chosen the present dissertation topic. As an individual who grew up in a maritime community with a passionate legacy and became interested in maritime history, and the history of those that suffered on the sea and wrote of their experiences, I have gravitated towards an exploration of the construction of private worlds. I have been fascinated by the networks of the brain which allow, as Paul Connerton has passionately argued, for one to remember and forget. Yet when considering traumatic memories, I have found that my own memory in those moments has proved to be a consistent source of importance. Those undesirable, yet consequential, flashes in my past, moments which came as a shudder including public events like 9/11, the massacre at Columbine, Virginia Tech, as well as recent tragedies in Newtown, Connecticut and at the Boston Marathon, or private event’s like my brothers suicide attempt, have never lost their meaning and
have proven to be consequential recollections that have shaped my life. Those events, some highly public and others sadly private, found specific people overcome by tragedy and appalling horror on personal cognitive levels.

Whether you were the person in the movie theater when James Holmes opened fire, or were in one of the Twin Towers as it was struck and panic set in, or even in the library of Columbine High School watching as Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris went on their shooting rampage and killed thirteen students and one teacher, you remember these events in seemingly unaltered manifestations of cognitive recall. Such events, although public, were imprinted as personal upsetting memories for those who watched them unfold in person, and those memories will be reinforced for years to come by media coverage, anniversary remembrances, and the shocking reality of the horror that they lived through. In years to come similar events, just as horrific, will initiate persistent memories of sorts and cause the recovering sufferer to relive and recall those traumatic moments. Therefore, it is useful to consider memories for traumatic events as well as those events that found a national audience and produced post-traumatic recollections. Sailors active from the Revolutionary era until the decade before the start of Civil War, those who experienced tragedy, were often afflicted by devastating memories initiated by traumatic events and each penned a narrative trying to understand the dark maritime world they sailed into.

This love of the sea and compassion for sailors’ lives caused me to consider a different historical approach to memory and maritime social history. Even so, understanding sailors’ lives, their traumatic memories, and their literary feats alone do not make these sailors significant. They are significant because they recognized the
possibilities that lay beyond the Atlantic wall, and they dared to consider a life beyond
the New England shoreline. They lived at the mercy of the waves and have proven to be
the literary cicerone’s guide to a dark and dangerous maritime world that we rarely
understand existed. These men are important, as all victims are significant and all have
something to share about their lives, their deeds, their ambitions, and the horrible events
they experienced at sea.

Privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists lived in a
tumultuous time and observed, in the course of their vocation, the expansion of the early
Republic and the growth of American promise. They watched as crucial events unfolded
and participated in many events that have gone unnoticed in history, but nonetheless are
situated along a timeline of American history that proves that uncommon men partaking
in ordinary, yet tragic, events are the backbone of national development. Seamen
narratives prove to be a window into that dark world and their significance lies in their
elaboration of oceanic horrors suffered for God, country, and home. Distinguishing
sailors’ traumatic memories from private, yet publicly acknowledged events, and then
linking those tragedies with historical and psychological approaches to analysis can allow
for a deeper appreciation for memory, maritime history, and our collective knowledge of
the maritime world that has long been inundated with traumatic occasions.

It is therefore the goal of this dissertation to seek a greater appreciation for the
sailors’ traumatic past and their lived torment that established itself within their minds
and did not allow them to forget that which seemed to need to be forgotten. In their
narratives we find men seeking to understand their traumatic past, but not aware of the
power of those distressing memories. From their written words, we have an opportunity
to explore their memory of their maritime tragedies, and to uncover a sinister maritime world that is veiled from common historical understandings and hidden beneath the fictional stories that have collectively created a maritime imagination that is strongly pervasive in American culture. This study hopes to erase the shadow that has been cast over these sailors’ lives and sufferings and to advocate a rereading of their lives for what they say about our oceanic American past.

Epic stories like *Moby-Dick*, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, *Billy Budd*, and *The Red Rover* can be looked at not only for their literary importance but for how well they illuminate reality through fiction, yet shadow that same factual world in our collective and cultural imagination. It is through stories like *The Odyssey*, as psychologist Jonathan Shay has shown with Vietnam veterans suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, which we can find another way to examine sailors and their traumas, captivity, extended years away from home, and post-traumatic stress. It is through interdisciplinary studies that one can best understand the reality of the sailor’s experience and the tragedies of their past. Through their writing, their disturbing memories, and through those moments of appalling tragedy and horror that produce traumatic memories, historians may uncover a vision of the past that has not previously been exhaustively considered. Here sailors like privateers, impressed seamen, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists find that their narratives depict them, not as they wished to be seen, but rather as common men who experienced uncommon, but all too often, tragedies. We see them and their nautical world from a new angle. We observe that what they witnessed was traumatic. It is through those devastating memories where we see these
sailors as they were. Through their narratives we gain a greater understanding of those moments in their traumatic past that affected them and have lived on beyond their deaths.

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Chapter ONE

The Maritime Narrative and Traumatic Memory:  
_A Historiographical Appraisal_

“These are the times of dreamy quietude, when beholding the tranquil beauty and brilliancy of the ocean’s skin, one forgets the tiger heart that pants beneath it; and would not willingly remember, that this velvet paw but conceals a remorseless fang.”

- Herman Melville in _Moby-Dick_, Chapter 114 “The Gilder”

George Kemish, a fireman and engineer on the RMS _Titanic_, felt “strange” when he heard a “heavy thud and grinding, tearing sound” about which he received a telegraph signal ordering the immediate “stop” of all ship steam pressure.\(^1\) “Impact” was the message relayed below deck and Kemish was ordered to “box up all boilers and put on dampers to stop steam [from] rising.” As Kemish remembered, the trimmer, who came back from calling the “12 – 4 A.M.” watch, declared, “Blimmie, we’ve struck an iceberg.” Kemish initially believed that the trimmer was joking and after investigating for possible damage and finding nothing unusual, he, and other lower deck hands, “thought this a huge joke and had a good laugh.” Soon after word spread that water was seeping into the ship. Kemish and others hurried to see

\(^1\) Kemish argued that the impact of hitting the iceberg felt more like “a running aground or rolling over something” than a mere side-swipe.
If everything was all right. Engineers were very busy with valves. I saw one engineer [John Shepard] slip and break his leg. We placed him in a pump room and did anything we could to help the other engineers. Ship’s carpenters were constantly taking soundings. They may have known, but no one else (except Skipper Smith), that things were going to happen.²

As Kemish tried to halt the flow of water into the ship, at 12:45 A.M., on the 15th of April, Kemish received word that the “Captain has ordered all hands to Boat Stations” to launch the lifeboats. This message came between the flooding of boiler room number 6 and the implosion of boiler room number 5, which was so catastrophic that Kemish would likely have noticed it. After the captain’s orders were relayed to the crew, Kemish watched as the “ship was as steady as if she had been in dry-dock, going down very steadily forward. But even at that time it was hardly noticeable.”³ The knowledge of impending doom on Kemish’s psyche caused him great trouble and moved him to work to get as many women and children as possible off the liner and into the lifeboats. But many “women and children had to be forcibly put into the boats. They felt much more safe on the decks of the big liner than in the small boats” which were lowered from about “90 feet above the water-line. Therefore the boats that got away first did not take half the number of people they could have [held], and then later, when we realized things were really serious, the boats getting away were very much overloaded.”⁴ As Kemish realized at this point, time was “getting away” and the situation became desperate. As he observed


that the band had stopped playing, he took particular notice of “novelist William T. Stead,” who he wrote was “calmly reading in the first class Smoke Room and it looked as if he intended stopping” and remaining where he was no matter what happened next.

On one boat Kemish observed that lifeboat “number 9 or number 11,” but probably number 15, “was being lowered; but about five or six feet from the water-line, it was on a very uneven keel.” He noticed that one end of the boat’s “falls had caught up, somehow.” Judging from the commotion on the boat, Kemish imagined that they were “trying to cut the entangled falls,” which, he later noticed, they were successful at doing even though “they were shouting and screaming that there were no members of the crew aboard.” Still they managed to free it and themselves. As Kemish helped to get the last of the lifeboats away, and continued to throw anything and everything overboard, he suddenly took an opportunity, or as he described it, a “flying leap” and jumped over the side of the liner, with the intent to “grab the dangling boat falls,” probably from the empty davits of boats 9 and 11, or 15, “and slither down them to the water. But I missed the ropes. (I reckon a parachute would have been handy from that drop.)” Kemish, in freezing cold water, swam until he was safely onboard a lifeboat, and to his dying day never knew which boat he was on. As Kemish concluded in his 1955 letter, reflecting back on the destruction of the RMS Titanic,

It was extremely cold now and terrible for the women and kids. The few boats that were in view, then, tried to keep together. We were rowing aimlessly; our hands froze on the oars and we lost sight of the other boats. Until then it had been


fairly bright (the moon). But mercifully clouds covered the (light in the sky) and it became very dark. Mercifully dark.  

As Kemish hauntingly remembered that fateful night, “when the Titanic took her final plunge there was a noise I shall never forget. Shouting – screaming and explosions. A hundred thousand fans at a cup final could not make more noise.” As they continued to drift, off in the distance as the sun rose, Kemish wrote that he “could just see the Berg.” In his opinion the iceberg that had sparked this distressing experience had drifted on to the skyline with the “help of the bump we gave it.” Before he fell asleep from the severe cold, Kemish remembered hearing Paddy McGough give a “great shout – ‘Let us pray to God, for there is a ship on the horizon and tis making for us.’”

Many did pray and many did cry, according to Kemish, but they were picked up by the S.S. Carpathia at about 7 A.M. on the 15th of April. Even on board their rescue vessel, many of the Titanic survivors died from exposure and frostbite, after having been too long in the water. One of the officers on board the Carpathia asked Kemish to visit the ship’s mortuary, because four people had died and the officer believed, perhaps, that one was a crew member whom Kemish could identify. Kemish eventually baulked at the request, arguing that “it might have been one of my mates. I had had enough.”

The trauma of what took place had begun to set in and how to cope with such horrific scenes, so much death, and so much pain was too much to handle in a short period of time.

Kemish was never able to get the screams and sights of that April night out of his head

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until his death in 1966. At 11:40 pm on 14 April 1912 the RMS Titanic struck an iceberg and the disaster that ensued caused the deaths of 1,514 people in one of the deadliest peacetime maritime disasters in history.\textsuperscript{10} It is a story that has been told and retold by survivors, historians, and cultural enthusiasts. The Titanic charted a course with destiny that proved that the maritime world is unpredictable, dangerous, and can produce an unforgiving traumatic experience practically instantaneously.

Although George Kemish was undeniably stricken with a lingering traumatic memory of his survival on the Titanic, he is not alone in this world of maritime trauma. This dissertation uses the story of the Titanic solely to open our minds to the idea of maritime trauma. It examines the recollections and remembrances of sailors, those for whom George Kemish may serve as a 20\textsuperscript{th} century representation. But this study also elaborates on the world of maritime suffering from the American Revolution until the years just before the American Civil War. This time frame is selected because the United States’ maritime legacy was created, built upon, and declined during these eras of national importance. With the American Revolution the United States found the importance of naval might and ushered in its republic on the backs of not only farmers but sailors as well. With the dawn of the new republic, young men took to the sea in search of something more and found it, but it was not always the result they had envisioned. In the decades that followed fishermen, whalers, and traders – all served as economic, political, and cultural components of the nation’s developing image. The decade before the American Civil War serves as a fitting end to this study because it is then that America’s maritime heritage declined in the wake of a great national crisis and the advancement in industrialization and modern technology. Between these bookend

\textsuperscript{10} See Barratt, \textit{Lost Voices from the Titanic} and Wilson, \textit{Shadow of the Titanic}.
eras lies a dark maritime world that is little understood, but clearly defined and elaborated upon by common New England sailors through their distressing memories transcribed through language and literary exploits. Boston Privateers, New Bedford whalemen, impressed New England sailors, and Cape Cod nautical abolitionists – all serve as maritime examples for this historical study. Their memories provide the core evidence for this study and, in that sense, their tragic experiences serve to address crucial queries about their writings, how they coped with destructive memories, and what they sensed was their role in a larger cultural and social picture.

The Unknown Traumatic Maritime World

Historian Daniel Vickers wrote that “the ocean is a hostile environment, and the decision to live and work upon it strikes most of us as something that ought to be explained.”11 Even so, today when you close your eyes and think about the ocean, you might be immediately overcome with either scenes of childhood trips to the beach, images of cruise or fishing vessels leaving port, or just the wonderment and beauty of a sunset where the sky meets the water. Rarely does the imagination bring one to the tragedy of the seas, but nonetheless tragedy is abundant, it is real, and it is not typically part of the imaginative construction of the maritime world. The ocean’s beauty is inspiring and captivating, but that exquisiteness can also be tricky for in a moment’s notice the sun may be blocked by storm clouds, the rain falls, the seas swell, and the ocean, which had been picturesque, turns into a mighty monster and unleashes a world that is observed atop the mast, but rarely talked about. This transformation is clearly represented in sailors’ narratives and the changes in weather, the coming of battle, and

the aftermath of both, indicate a reality that unravels the imagination of a singularly perfect oceanic world. We tend to think of the ocean as endless, expansive, and, as how our sailors viewed it, a place where anything can happen. They were right, and they knew that the ocean could bring about destruction, but they set sail anyway, partly as a means of adventure and equally to strengthen the bond between them and their nautical community.

These sailors must have been aware of the tragedies that had occurred on the ocean before them, and their writings served as warnings to those who followed in their place. Yet they refused to tell their contemporaries or other young sailors seeking a new life to refrain from following the vocation that birthright had afforded them. They knew that no matter what terrible events they spoke of, others would always chart a course toward oceanic exploration. They wrote to inform, to warn, but always to remember their maritime past, oceanic tragedies, and those seafarers whom they set sail with but who did not live through the same devastating events that they witnessed. These sailor narratives serve as information packets on a maritime realm that was dangerous, scary, and tragically existent. These young men witnessed a world that many on land could not fathom actually existed, but they had come face-to-face with that reality and attempted to make sense out of it through their written words, but also their traumatic recollections of that experience. They had returned from that nautical tradition injured, most times physically, but frequently emotionally even if such conditions could not be clearly recognized from their written works. The importance of their words, their lives, and their tragedies is that they elaborate on an oceanic existence that was both beautiful and deadly. Young men set sail from their maritime communities and witnessed events they
were aware could happen, but that nonetheless brutalized them in both physical and mental ways.

Jonathan Shay argues that trauma is not an “ailment,” but rather an injury.12 Veterans of all American wars, including sailors of the American Revolution, can be considered “war wounded, carrying the burdens of sacrifice for the rest of [society] as surely as the amputees, the burned, the blind, and the paralyzed that carry them.”13 As this dissertation argues, sailors like Barnstable, Massachusetts native Barnabas Downs were both physically and mentally traumatized by events and sought a community of healing to deal with their memories. The eventual publication of their thoughts served many purposes, not least an effort to make sense of the past and come to terms with the death and sufferings they witnessed. As we will see in chapters two and six, like the Vietnam Wall for American Vietnam veterans, a small monument at Burial Hill in Plymouth, Massachusetts, served as a yearly meeting place and to help stimulate “recovery,” as well as a memorial, for those sailors who survived, but were psychologically injured during the wreck of the brig General Arnold.14 In this regard, such a moment in Plymouth, or even New Bedford, Salem, Boston, Massachusetts, or Wiscasset, Maine, served as an “impulse” to preserve the memory of sailors who had sailed the ocean and came face-to-face with death, many losing that battle and others bringing the emotional fight back home. Kirk Savage writes that


13 Shay, *Odysseus of America*, 4-5.

rhetoric used to justify erecting monuments offered various answers, occasionally advancing the argument that people are forgetful and need their social memory bolstered by powerful mnemonic aids: sometimes arguing instead that memory is safe in the present but monuments are needed to transmit it across generations; yet frequently invoking a startling counterargument – that the memory of heroism is undying and will outlast even monuments, which are therefore built simply as proof of memory’s reality and strength.  

Society in the nineteenth century constructed memory in physical monuments and these maritime monuments served to “anchor collective remembering…and legitimated the very notion of a common memory, and by extension the notion of the people who possessed and rallied around such a memory.”

Oceanic memorials and monuments that line the New England waterfront districts, both at the time they were built and today, serve to both legitimize the nautical profession and to assure maritime communities that the memory of those men who did not return to land would not have their deeds erased from communal consciousness. Bronze, stone, and marble figures with Greek quotes referencing both the beauty of life and the sorrow of death serve to remind residents of the reality of the oceanic vocation. One did not go to sea without accepting his possible fate. The sailors in this study all accepted the fact that they might not have returned home, but they did. Yet their return home was riddled with both traumatic memories that fueled their writings and the eventual construction of forms of memorials.

Eight years had passed before Barnabas Downs wrote the story of his shipwreck, but the recollection of that event remained consequential and harrowing, while also having continuity, because he continued conversing about it in “anniversary” stages. His writing indicates an attempt to seek understanding through creating a narrative, as well as

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an exercise in the therapeutic art of recall in search of closure, which, as we will see, 
psychologist Judith Herman argues is common. By addressing his distressing past and 
by remembering it through his writing, Downs, like other seafarers, was attempting to 
make sense of it and somehow move forward by acknowledging his destructive pain. 
Downs ability to recall the event might also have acted as a “resuscitative function of 
memory,” which is a form of memory that brings the dead back to life and this process 
takes many, often “unrecognized forms.” Downs may have been going through 
“intractable guilt, rage, or grief,” which served the purpose of keeping faith with the 
dead. It is possible that Downs felt guilt about what had occurred. It is evident that 
Captain James Magee, Downs’ commanding officer on the General Arnold, suffered 
from “survivor’s guilt” and his need to maintain close connections with the survivors of 
the wreck falls in line with the “four ‘existential functions of guilt’: to deny helplessness; 
to keep the dead alive by making them ever present in thought; to sustain loyalty to the 
dead; and to affirm that the world is still just a place where someone…feels guilt at what 
was done.”

The trauma that these men experienced resonated well after the tragedy occurred 
and falls in line with understandings of trauma and recovery. It allows for them to be 
included in that scholarship for the first time. Like Homer’s Odysseus, Civil War combat 
warriors, soldiers of the Vietnam War, and combatants of all other American wars, these 
New England sailors of the “Age of Sail” were traumatized by uncommon events and

17 Judith Herman, Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political 

18 Shay, Odysseus of America, 78-81.

19 Shay, Odysseus of America, 80.

20 Shay, Odysseus of America, 80.
lived with a possible variant of “post-traumatic stress.” Hitherto no study has included them, and this examination seeks to remedy that omission while at the same time illuminating the dark reality of the oceanic profession and early American nautical past.

As Margaret S. Creighton and Lisa Norling have argued,

> the estrangement of seafarers and maritime experience from the mainstream of American historiography may be rooted in the late nineteenth century, when Frederick Jackson Turner, speaking at the 1893 World’s Fair in Chicago, noted the importance of the terrestrial frontier to the course of American history and the American character.21

As Turner asserted, referenced by Creighton and Norling and as will be explained later,

> the dramatic decline of the American maritime industries as both intellectual and financial capital shifted away from the sea. Even though the particulars of his theories were widely criticized….For generation after generation, students of American history emphasized westward expansion and internal economic and demographic growth as the most critical forces in American development.22

As Creighton and Norling concluded, “American society in large part dismissed the degree to which an oceanic frontier linked America to other landward polities, societies, and economic systems around the world.”23

> It seems, at least with this study, that the memory of American seafarers, while not a perfect carbon copy replica of a disturbing experience, allows for historians to unearth an unacknowledged sailing reality of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. In the “The Heroic Age of Sail, 1775-1815,” as historian Robert Albion called it, “a man had no respect for the sea who, glancing back at the familiar shore as his vessel cleared the land, did not wonder for at least an instant whether his voyage would bring


22 Creighton & Norling Iron Men, Wooden Women, xi.

23 Creighton & Norling Iron Men, Wooden Women, xi.
him safely back to his home port.” As both these sailor narratives reflect, and maritime history scholar Albion argues, “A mariner’s life was the most dangerous calling a man could choose during the age of sail. Many of Salem’s more than four hundred widows in 1783 would have testified to that.” As will be seen in many of these nautical narratives, sunken ledges, sandy shoals, and hidden reefs along scenic coasts in the Atlantic and Pacific could drive hundreds of vessels to destruction. T.S. Eliot wrote, in “Dry Salvages,” that

And the ragged rock in the restless waters,
  Waves wash over it, fogs conceal it;
On a halcyon day it is merely a monument,
  In navigable weather it is always a seamark
To lay a course by; but in the somber season
  Or the sudden fury, is what it always was.

As Albion concluded, mariners did not stand alone in “his never-ending battle against the hazards of the sea.” Through their narratives and stressful recollections they “dedicated themselves to making seamen’s lives as safe as possible,” but they never lost sight of the dangerous waves and determined enemies who greeted them after they set sail from harbors riddled along the New England coast.

Historians are devoted to the study of facts, yet historical narratives, like those created by our seafarers, are void of absolute certainty and filled with endless possibilities of meaning regarding their memories, writing ambitions, and historical merit. Yet we investigate these narratives for both their potential and their possible flaws. Although the

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25 Albion, New England the Sea, 87.

26 T.S. Eliot poem found in Albion, New England the Sea, 87.

27 Albion, New England the Sea, 87.
memories of these authors are not perfect, they represent an understood reality of the sailor himself. They elaborate on how he understood both his past and his present to function and how he interacted with a maritime world that has been illuminated through his gaze. The late scholar Howard Zinn once wrote that

I was reminded of the character in Dickens’ *Hard Times*, the pedant Gradgrind, who admonished a younger teacher: “Teach nothing but facts, facts, facts….” But there is no such thing as pure fact, innocent of interpretation. Behind every fact presented to the world – by a teacher, a writer, anyone – is a judgment. The judgment that has been made is that this fact is important, and that other facts, omitted, are not important.28

We, as historians, rely on facts, but must examine those social histories that are riddled with unknown possibilities, because if we examine close enough, dig deep enough, and consider methods outside outdated historical modes, then we may understand these historical subjects for both their lived pasts and literary legacies. Historian Richard D. Brown in *The Hanging of Ephraim Wheeler* argued that

The intensive study of a single episode…enables us to explore large questions of policy and principle at the level of actual people and specific experience. This approach…allows us to understand the entire episode in light of the longer histories of the participants and their community and in relation to the surrounding events that shaped their outlook and behavior.29

Through the advocacy of social history fused with memory studies and trauma theories, historians can consider these sailors from multiple angles and investigate their writings for likely motivations.

One thing that must be considered is whether these maritime recollections of an author can be corrupted, or influenced, by the political environment in which he wrote.


For privateer Joshua Davis, and even impressed seafarers James Durand, Joshua Penny, and Joseph Bates, this is highly possible. Davis’ memory was not perfect, yet his sufferings were severe enough to encode consequential traumatic memories. Thus, Davis, like Downs and others, had the ability to evoke, understand, and acknowledge his event. Still, Davis wrote thirty years after the war. Davis will be examined in light of his position of temporal “bias,” because he never lost sight of his exposure to the terrible events that assisted him in considering his past in current political terms and elaborating on a dark oceanic world that was both predicable and erratic. He did not write directly after the event, but did not wait as long as Andrew Sherburne, another privateer who will be examined. Portions of Davis’ memory were corrupted or the focus shifted, if even subconsciously, and experiences enhanced or buried in his political environment or social circumstances. Nonetheless, the trauma that he wrote about served as a vibrant recollection. It can, this study argues, be uncovered from his overarching political narrative through an exploration of the cultural and social environment in which he wrote. That memory is heartbreakingly strong, if rusted by a semblance of facts and details that have been included from a sense of political theater or cultural performance.

**Memory and History**

Clifford Geertz wrote,

> There is an Indian Story – at least I heard it as an Indian story – about an Englishman who, having been told that the world rested on a platform which rested on the back of an elephant which rested in turn on the back of a turtle, asked…what did the turtle rest on? Another turtle. And that Turtle? “Ah, Sahib, after that it is turtles all the way down.”

Historian Myra Glenn argues that Geertz’ anecdote is used to illustrate an important point, which is that “past events and the stories constructed about them are so complex that it is ultimately impossible to get to the bottom of their multiple meanings.” As Glenn argues, there will always be more turtles to discover as “one engages in the processes of analysis and interpretation. Yet if definitive interpretations elude historians that does not absolve them from trying to make sense of the past as best they can by subjecting extant texts to analysis.” This dissertation is a study of memory, social history, and the importance of traumatic maritime memories to specific people whose lives were seared by personal painful events. In order to engage these types of memories, this study examines a multitude of autobiographies, memoirs, and “brief” narratives that were written by American sailors at specific times and for specific reasons in the years after they experienced severe trauma. Although Glenn has enhanced an already rich body of work in her exploration of “how mariner authors remembered, interpreted, their years at sea; how the lens of memory shaped their life stories,” this work examines specific sailors who all survived catastrophes at sea and used that trauma in the creation of their own life-story. This study seeks to enhance the analysis of these sailors through interdisciplinary methods and expand upon that rich source of maritime literature that is already available. Glenn was correct in arguing that

It is often a frustrating and daunting task to study self-narratives. One must determine how factually accurate these accounts were. The student of autobiographical words must also analyze the multiple concerns that shaped how a narrator/subject recounted his past. But investigation of such texts ultimately

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32 Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 175.

33 Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 6-7.
offers rich dividends when it illuminates the values of the authors who produced them and the world in which they lived.34

Scholars starting with Samuel Eliot Morison to Paul Gilje, Margaret Creighton, Marcus Rediker, and Daniel Vickers, to name a few, have produced a wide body of scholarship about the maritime world and common American sailors. Expanding on their writings, this dissertation offers a fresh interpretation devoted to maritime trauma, which has never been the focus of a definitive study.35 The maritime world was more than just the scene of adventure, prizes, and whales; it was equally a place of horror, death, and personal pain that haunted sailors well after they returned home from sea. Megan T. Shockley goes even further expanding on theories proposed by Lisa Norling and Margaret Creighton. She presents a look at how a Cape Cod captain’s widow developed, crafted, and perfected her own “self-identity” through her connection to the maritime world and the death of her captain husband.36 The life of Hannah Rebecca Burgess ran parallel with the age of sail and the rise and fall of the maritime community as the center of American life. Hannah Burgess used the death of her husband to craft an image of herself not only as a gentile woman, whose devotion to the memory of her dead husband

34 Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 177.


prevented her from remarrying, but also because she had, after his death, taken command of his vessel and saved it from certain ruin. She wrote based on memories that were shaped well after the heroic event in question occurred and she wrote with the intent to be remembered in a specific “maritime” way. Her outlook was guarded in an “old” maritime tradition and as she grew older towns like Sandwich, Massachusetts, were broken up and their enterprises disbanded as maritime traditions faded in favor of industrialization and westward expansion. Her memories were a reminder of a “nostalgic” past that could only be reached by focusing on her and her peers’ reading her diary.

This dissertation adds to the rich maritime literature and goes one step further by not only presenting the maritime world as sailors observed it, but by digging deep into the sailor’s cognitive realm to piece together the shared traumas they wrote about. This study argues that because of their traumatic experiences and the formation of disturbing, often painful memories, these sailors presented a much clearer written depiction of oceanic dangers and the dark side of the maritime world than those who just wrote a conventional life-story of their time at sea.

Historian Bernard Bailyn has said of memory’s value in historical interpretation:

“Its relation to the past is an embrace…ultimately emotional, not intellectual.”

As David Blight has argued, the primary concern, when it comes to “individual memories (actual remembered experiences) in letters, memoirs, speeches, debates, and autobiography,” is with the deceptive “problem of collective memory – the ways in which groups, peoples, or nations construct versions of the past and employ them for self-understanding and to win power in an ever-changing present.”

In Blight’s concluding words to his chapter in *Slavery and Public History*, “Memory is sometimes that human burden we can neither live comfortably with nor without.” The memories of historical subjects are an imperative part to how historians study the past. Even as scholars begin to understand the nature of traumatic memories or depict overwhelming experiences over conventional lived events, one must understand that memory’s role in these studies can tell us a tremendous amount about the past of historical subjects. Yet as Alfred Young, Julie Roy Jeffrey, Sarah Purcell, and especially David Blight have taught historians, memories must not be taken as conclusive fact and their representations must be broken down, dissected, and reinterpreted.

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*Shoemaker and the Tea Party*, advanced the field of historical memory by “leaps and bounds,” conveyed the important subtleties of memory’s growth, and decline. As Young wrote,

> Historians frown on memories…an eyewitness is better than a secondhand report, and an account taken down at the time better than one recalled years later…a memoir written late in life is flawed, and a memoir ‘as told to’ someone else, or strained through another voice, is doubly flawed.

One must be wary of what has been written, but not unwilling to read what sailors wrote with a hopeful intent. Even though Young’s research into the life of George Robert Twelves Hewes began as a journey into the accuracy of Hewes’ memory, it quickly turned, not only to his experiences and “what he had done and thought during the Revolution but [to] the way he remembered them.” In the moments in which Hewes spoke, which he was “convinced” he had experienced, not a false memory, “lay a clue to the meaning” of, in this case, the American Revolution. To Hewes, how he remembered the war was important because of what he understood the meaning of the Revolution to be. Therefore, for Alfred Young, Hewes’ “recalled memory” became the subject of his sweeping study. This historical exploration attempts to target the evoked reminiscence as well and focus on those memories that have allowed for the sailor to reconstruct his horrific past in written language.

Using the “new science of personal memory,” historians like Young have argued that the rehearsal of memory leads to its consolidation, and most important, emotion.
enhances memory, lending an ‘extraordinary power and persistence to many emotional or traumatic experiences.’”

Discussing the implications of the “new understandings of memory for historians,” David Thelen has argued that the “first [implication] is that memory, private and individual, as much as collective and cultural, is constructed, not reproduced. The second is that this construction is not made in isolation but in conversations with others that occur in the context of community, broader politics, and social dynamics.”

If this is the case, as Young argues it is, and if “memory, personal and public, is constructed, and if historical context is crucial in understanding what impinged on the process of constructing memory, what do we have to explore in the context of public ‘discovery’ and ‘recovery’ of Hewes in the 1830s?”

What Young discovered is a concept that will be addressed: the need to understand the historical context of sailor writings and underlining motivations of their narrative production.

In Sealed with Blood, Sarah Purcell has given the issue of collective memory and forms of remembrances a position of importance, while displaying the need to focus

44 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, xiii. See also, Daniel Schacter and Elaine Scarrey eds., Memory, Brain, and Belief (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), Chapters 1, 2, and 3.


46 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, xiv-xv.
attention on common men like privateer Joshua Davis. Davis’ literary work showed, as Hester Blum does for others with *Before the Masthead: Maritime Imagination and Antebellum America Sea Narratives*, sailors were literate and were both “producers and consumers of literature.”

47 Historian Vickers argued that

> Sea narratives constitute a vivid literary genre that extends back several centuries; court records have describe troubles afloat in close and compelling detail for even longer; and the ships logs that describe the workaday world of the sailor have no real parallel in any other line of early modern employment.

48 Men like Davis found a literary outlet to share their story, and at the same time found recognition for their service to their nation. In her chapter titled, “John Blatchford’s New America: Sailors, Print Culture, and Post-Colonial Identity,” in Paul Gilje’s edited work, *Pirates, Jack Tar, and Memory*, Purcell argues that sailors’ narratives were an attempt to shape a unique American identity. She contends that “John Blatchford committed his life to the page, provided his own take on the captivity narrative, and left the American public to imagine for themselves what they might become in the future.”

49 Many sailors like Blatchford used written narratives to set themselves “up as a model of perseverance” and depicted themselves as “humble” sailors who did not “assign one” specific meaning to their maritime experience, which in turn allowed for the reading public to imagine their own maritime version. 50 He attracted people through a “cracking good story” and served as a common man-turned-revolutionary-hero through his own written account and, in this case, resembles several seafarers discussed in the coming pages of this study. Still as

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Vickers argued, “the task of tracing mariners’ lives ashore…before and after their adventures,” as well as their sufferings, “on the deep, is much more difficult.”\textsuperscript{51} Those sailors who traversed the deep were the “heroes of their story” but on land they were simply “faces in the crowd” and, as Vickers argued, “Tracing their stories into port involves daunting problems of evidence.”\textsuperscript{52} Vickers concluded that

\begin{quote}
we study sailors as sailors precisely because that is what they did for a living. Historians can no sooner ignore the identity that the sea attached to seamen than they can deny that which the soil lent to farmers, the forest to loggers, or the waterfront to shipwrights.\textsuperscript{53}
\end{quote}

We focus on seafaring life, as well as sailors’ narratives, because, as we will observe throughout the coming pages, it “provides so much excellent script” and their oceanic lives proved exciting, dramatic, and traumatically authentic.

The significance of traumatic maritime memory derives from its ability to illustrate a dark maritime past and consider these horrific tales as markers that trace the “heart beat” of a socially, politically, and economically developing nation. How societies, then and now, use such horrific and historically relevant memories is important. Although this dissertation examines personal memories of sailors and addresses their traumatic memories from a social and culturally historical standpoint, it is important to acknowledge how those memories were utilized by writers, politicians, historians, and the general reader to shape multiple national identities. It is one thing to understand why each sailor wrote and the pain he struggled with, but it is quite another to see how his pain was co-opted by his society, as well as future societies, and how a sailors’ memory and

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{51} Vickers & Walsh, \textit{Young Men and the Sea}, 2-3.
\textsuperscript{52} Vickers & Walsh, \textit{Young Men and the Sea}, 3.
\textsuperscript{53} Vickers & Walsh, \textit{Young Men and the Sea}, 3.
\end{flushright}
memories’ were utilized for specific political, national, and economic goals. This is
ground that David Blight has paved. Blight’s work showed how the memory of the Civil
War was utilized, twisted, and changed for the nationalistic purpose of achieving reunion.
This powerful conclusion has allowed us to see how societies can change memories, even
of events like the Civil War, for their own undeclared purposes and may forget or
decenter groups in the new overarching memory of the great event. Purcell writes:

By commemorating the Revolutionary War Americans created a national
mythology for themselves. They transformed bloodshed, division, and violence of
war into beautiful symbols of unity and national cohesion…although many
nationalistic commemorations appeared on the surface to offer a completely
consensual idea of what the American community should be, in reality, nationalism and memory were both subjects of constant conflict and change. There was no single, correct memory of the war that defined what the nation was…to stress unity, Americans continually struggled to create a national identity
favorable to themselves and their interests, while simultaneously using memory to
maintain the appearance of patriotic impartiality.54

As one can imagine, society’s use of memories of war posed major problems, as
agreements on how to use such memories could never be concluded. Our sailors’
narratives fell prey to these opposing political, religious, and social forces, all seeking to
use their memories to serve their own greater nationalistic purpose. This study seeks to
look at these narratives not as partisan voices in a nationalistic game, but rather as the
recollections of the authors who penned the tales and the horrors that they sought to make
sense out of, whatever their reasons. It seeks to assess whatever horrors these sailors were
trying to understand, convey, and consider as their authors understood them.

In this case, this study continues to add to the growing field of social memory by
engaging these maritime authors’ written narratives by seeking to address the personal,
not always national, issues that prompted them to write. As will be shown, some authors

54 Purcell, Sealed with Blood, 3.
chose to use their maritime experiences for political purposes while others sought eventually to understand what they had lived through by carefully writing about it. Historian Myra Glenn argues that “Ultimately autobiographies and memories are cultural constructs that illuminate not only the particular life of the author/protagonist but also the society in which they were produced.”55 Autobiographies and other forms of life-writing, are an important genre of historical writing for they serve to depict the reality perceived by the author. As Paul John Eakin observes, these sailors, as autobiographers, are “not free to invent as they please.”56 Eakin tries to “reconcile history and autobiography” by referring to Hayden White’s “conflation of history and fiction,” and examines David McCooey who drew from theories proposed by David Carr, a philosopher in the “phenomenologist tradition” who has argued that “narrative structure is an inherent feature of all human experience, and not, as White would have it, an artificial pattern imposed on raw historical data.”57 McCooey has emphasized the ethical accountability that is intrinsic to the basic understanding that life-writing and that autobiography “involves telling the stories of others along with those of the author.”58

55 Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 9.


57 McCooey, Artful Histories, 10. See also, Popkin, History, Historians, & Autobiography, 32.

Still, according to Eakin, “we tend to think of autobiography as something created after the fact, at one remove from the experience that is its subject over and finished.”\(^5^9\) Yet that is not the case. The sailors considered here lived their lives autobiographically. When they decided to write down the disastrous events they had lived through, they were still continuously reliving those moments out autobiographically. Each sailor worked, suffered, and lived autobiographically and his recollections serve to address their lived concerns and experiences. Although Hayden White took the position that all forms of narrative are likewise fictional, Jeremy Popkin observes that White also argued that “to call a narrative fictional does not necessarily imply that it is incapable of conveying truth.”\(^6^0\) Rather, our sailors combined truth, as well as some embellishment, depending on the individual and circumstances, to the narrative form. They captured their traumatic memory, not in raw data, but instead through a depiction of what they had seen and the thoughts they continued to suffer from. Their memories allowed them to convey a “historical truth” with many pieces of narrative fiction reflecting the sailor’s autobiographical intent.

This study elaborates further these autobiographical considerations, but through personal harrowing memories and does not argue that our sailors’ memories of past events are wrong or misplaced. Instead, addressed is how they used their traumatic memories to make sense of their “present” life and how they moved forward into the future. Psychologist Daniel Schacter has been a pioneer in arguing that memories, even

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\(^6^0\) White, “Historical Text as Literary Artifact,” 42, 60, 61. See also, Popkin *History, Historians, & Autobiography*, 34.
though not snapshots of the past, but rather complex reconstructions, are not fabrications or fictions. Myra Glenn argues that if their stories were based on fact, many sailors shaped their narratives to expose various abuses they had suffered, to gain the sympathy of the public, and of course earn to badly needed revenue. No doubt there were times when they padded their life stories, exaggerating or minimizing certain experiences. Like most autobiographies and memoirs, sailors’ narratives straddle the boundary between fact and fiction. Sailors wrote of their nautical experiences “both from within and from outside” their societies, writes Vincent Caretta, speaking of events as they “experienced them at the time and as [they] reinterpreted them from the perspective of the time in which [they] recalled them.”

This dissertation examines a number of maritime narratives birthed in tragedy as they include particular types of painful memories, not broad overviews of past experiences. It explores the remembered trauma of specific events, captured in these narratives, to show how each event helps to illuminate a maritime world that is not chiefly concerned with trade, contact, and the “performance” of war, but rather is tragic, brutal, and shadowy. Under the guise of the “new” social history, maritime narratives have, in recent years, started to become the focus of greater historical debate and inquiry. Although several texts have been written recently to explore some facets of 19th century autobiographies and memoirs, they fail to exploit insights drawn from interdisciplinary areas. Those historical inquiries either seek to discuss how the subjects of these works looked towards issues such as questions of masculinity, or the growth of nationalism, or

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62 Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 9-10.

simply to tell the story of their lives; and they tend to allow the narrator a “pass” on how he remembered and reinterpreted the events in question. Exploring these neglected sailor narratives, this study uses both cognitive and historical methodology to examine the memories of those individuals and what their horrific stories tell us about their lives.

A couple of the sailors’ narratives have been assessed by authors engaged in seeing them as conduits to life on the ocean. Paul Gilje explored the intimate lives of all types of sailors during the Age of Revolution and a few sailors – Joshua Penny, James Durand, and Joshua Davis – make an appearance. Even so, they are viewed not through an exploration of history and memory, but rather through a historical examination of the maritime world in which they lived and served. A fascinating social historical work, Gilje, in *Liberty on the Waterfront*, has pioneered waterfront culture in revolutionary America and has illuminated stories of common men and women both along the waterfront ports and on ships during that time. He crafted a picture of the maritime world for the average American sailor. This study adds to the work that scholars like Gilje, Glenn, and Norling have done to reconstruct the social historical outlook on the American sailor.

Each individual experiencing one or more distressing events formed disturbing memories, but not all used those recollections as the focal point of their narratives. Still, several inquiries into each maritime author’s intent, the power of crucial incidents on his memory, and the parallel timing of the narrative it inspired will be examined. The narratives, which appeared in the period between the American Revolution and 1852, deal specifically with the maritime trade. Each account is important for specific reasons,

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64 See Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story* and Creighton and Norling, *Iron Men Wooden Women*. 
but even though each was written in response to a traumatic event, they all got caught up into the politics of the time during which their authors chose to write.

For example, Joshua Davis published his narrative only months before the start of the War of 1812 about his impressments by the British while serving as an American privateer during the American Revolution. He wrote almost thirty years removed from the trauma in question, and the years seem only to have built up his anger toward the British. Even so, at the same time Davis buried his harrowing experience beneath patriotic “propaganda.” It is evident that his writings were intended to garner further support for a second war with Britain, but at the same time parts of his traumatic experience, if taken alone, demonstrate the invasive power of memory and the existence of a brutal maritime realm. Although he was not lying, the part of his story relying on ordinary autobiographical memory is misleading. Davis was not the only one who had such motives and utilized his own history to support his present and future well-being. People like Davis used their memories to create a story that generated patriotic cries for action. Even so, these tales maintain their value because of their action as a symbol of a changing time and how they reveal a side of the maritime world that is both dark and deadly, yet politically and literary can be useful to author and reader.

This study utilizes narratives from privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists who wrote about a life-altering nautical moment, or moments, in their lives. They all are tragic incidents, some of them overtly horrifying, others simply disheartening. Each story fills a void, one that has been created psychologically by the memories of the event, in the consciousness of the author and this is true of Downs’ narrative as well. Interestingly, most narratives written by ordinary American
Revolutionary war veterans were published after 1815. Yet Downs’ narrative was published in 1786, almost thirty years before those of his contemporaries. In great part, the memory of the event must have been haunting. Downs unique timing of his publication, having been written so much earlier than others, will also be explored. In the end, it is clear that the longer one went without writing his narrative, the more the memory took on a meaning beyond the trauma that drove it. But still the sailors’ tragedies illustrate oceanic realities that must not go unnoticed.

But the question still remains: Did these individuals willfully distort their own memories to serve, in some cases, a political purpose or were their memories distorted by time, loss, and a populace who perceived these sailors as a symbol of what society believed them able to attest to? Many of these men did not knowingly distort the truth, but their ordinary memories became what they wanted them to be in response to a society that demanded their experience as a measure of national pride and national honor. Daniel Schacter has argued that “bias” is a “sin of memory” that must be acknowledged and can play a significant part in effecting the memory of studied historical subjects. According to Canadian social psychologist Michael Ross, “people do not have clear memories of exactly what they believed or felt in the past, and instead infer past beliefs, attitudes, and feelings from their current states.”

Schacter concurs with Ross and argues that “unless there is good reason to believe that your views on capital punishment have changed, you are likely to assess your present opinion and assume you felt the same way five years ago.” Joshua Davis, James Durand, and several others could have easily have been affected by this political and economic “bias” when they wrote about their past trauma.

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65 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 140.

66 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 140, 152-153.
As Schacter has concluded, there are various forms of bias deeply embedded in human cognition and it is “perhaps the best” to “appreciate that current knowledge, beliefs, and feelings, can influence our recollections of the past, and shape our impressions of people and objects in the present. By…recognizing the possible sources of our convictions about past and present, we can reduce the distortions that arise when memory functions as a pawn in the service of its masters.”

Historians must remember that the narrative “told” has sometimes been reconfigured with a “desire for coherence and continuity” that produces a blind eye to reality; but like peeling an onion, below the layers of political discourse lie the trauma that subsumed them and forced them to put pen to paper. As Hayden White has written,

The value attached to narrativity in the representation of real events arises out of a desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary. The notion that sequences of real events possess the formal attributes of the stories we tell about imaginary events could only have its origins in wishes, daydreams, and reveries.

Still, Barnabas Downs, who is the quintessential sailor afflicted by an unyielding maritime trauma, remains a stranger to historians and their historical inquires.

Barnabas Downs, Horace Holden, and Daniel Collins had bolder narratives than many of their contemporaries and their distressing memories are clearly represented throughout their brief narratives, but may not have gained the popularity of later contemporaries. While they prospered in presenting a fascinating maritime drama fueled by their own oceanic catastrophes, they failed to incorporate a comprehensive political message intent on imbuing thoughts of war, patriotism, and economic achievement into

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67 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 160.

68 Sturken, Tangled Memories, 8.

the American consciousness. Downs, Holden, and Collins, whose narratives are brief, spoke to their momentary maritime career and those instants that proved traumatic and life-changing. To start, Down’s narrative of suffering will pave the way to investigating other sailor narratives in their specific periods and what they tell us about their dangerous nautical world.

The narrative of the privateer, the memoir of the impressed and imprisoned sailor, the account of the whaleman, and the report of the seafaring abolitionist— all will broaden the scope of this work. Through each memories and history are explored, their world illuminated in a new way, and their ascent from common sailor to an important historical witness assured. Jack Tar’s memories are important because their unending cognitive trauma was passed on through their words and has heightened our own collective awareness of their lives and travails. The recollections that remain allow us to form inferences and pose various questions regarding these sailors’ ultimate literary intentions, the world they sailed into, and lastly the world they returned to when they survived the horrors witnessed upon the waves.

Although historian Marita Sturken was concerned with cultural collective memory, a concept that will be discussed in a latter part of this dissertation, this study visibly focuses more on personal traumatic memory. Although how maritime memories impact society today is important, this historical study focuses, initially, on how memories functioned in the past as the sailors’ instrument in examining the trauma of their own past and unforeseen agony of their future. These sailors sought to move beyond their own cognitive fears. These sailors’ tales anticipate Daniel Schacter, who observed in “persistence” a memory, which “involves remembering those things you wish you could
forget” and that does not hinder the human mind, but instead serves to protect it through continued remembrance.\textsuperscript{70} Schacter argues that to the extent that “persistence” originated “as a response to life-threatening situations that posed a direct threat to survival, animals and people who were able to remember those experiences persistently would surely be favored by natural selection.”\textsuperscript{71} This type of memory, according to Schacter, is adaptive and developed over generations and although “this ability seems so basic” we would expect many specifics to have neural machinery dedicated to “preserving the memory of life-threatening experiences for long periods of time.”\textsuperscript{72} Schacter has concluded that memories appearing as villains, intrusive and considered the antagonist to the self, what he identifies as the seven sins of memory, are “integral part of the mind’s heritage because they are so closely connected to features of memory which make it work well.”\textsuperscript{73} In Schacter’s professional theory, and following in line with modern psychology and theories on post-traumatic stress and devastating memories, the sins of memory are not nuisances to avoid, but rather they “illuminate how memory draws on the past to inform the present, preserve elements of present experience for future references, and allow us to revisit the past at will.”\textsuperscript{74} Although he argues that memory’s vices are also its virtues, the

\textsuperscript{70} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 162.


\textsuperscript{72} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 201.

\textsuperscript{73} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 202.

\textsuperscript{74} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 202.
seamen who are depicted through the rest of these pages had neither the understanding nor ability to consider this psychological conclusion. They found some solace through writing and considered their recollections a detriment that they wanted put to rest.

Although a dissociative memory is alleged to block out a past that is too painful to remember and “persistence” is a natural way the body protects itself through a constant remembering of past trauma, our sailors refused to ignore the trauma of their past. Often times, they recovered significant parts of their memories that they considered a representation, as well as a consequential component, of their lived past. Even if they had attempted to substitute appealing memories for those “too painful or disturbing to retrieve,” for men like Joshua Davis, even Daniel Drayton and Ebenezer Fox, and especially Barnabus Downs, forgetting was not an emotional or psychological option. They sought not to split or repress, but to acknowledge these tragic pasts and through the retrieval of their upsetting memories, they opened a literary door to their suffering, their world, and their believed truth. Suppression of these emotions proved futile and dangerous and for some, these memories were recovered through circumstances outside their control. Yet for others, the winds of war and waves that beheld tragedy gave them the strength and desire to turn trauma, as Pierre Bourdieu would argue, into political, social, and cultural capital. Yet no matter how much political and economic capital was achieved, sailors continued to suffer from upsetting recollections of a lived past.

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75 Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 201 and Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 3-5.

76 Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 137.

**Post-Traumatic Stress and Oceanic Suffering**

Considering maritime history in light of distressing memories and possible traumatic stress, this examination observes in the written letters, correspondence, and narratives of sailors who experienced horrific events at sea, possible examples of post-traumatic stress. Jonathan Shay, who is both a classics scholar and clinical psychiatrist who has treated Vietnam combat veterans, believes that “Achilles, as described in The Iliad, would almost certainly be diagnosed as having PTSD today.”

As Penny Coleman has argued, “Shay parallels the behaviors and symptoms of the Greek hero in Homer’s 2,700-year-old story with those of American veterans of the war in Vietnam, and finds them to be strikingly similar.” Coleman concludes that the susceptibility of Achilles’ heel is a symbol for his vulnerability.

As Shay concludes, Achilles’ grief and rage at the death of his friend Patroclus and his sense of betrayal at the hands of his commander, Agamemnon, are such that he suffers a breakdown and has to be restrained so he cannot harm himself. He then directs his pain outward, committing atrocities against the living and the dead until the gods and even the ghost of Patroclus are appalled and intervene.

Through his parallel between classic Greek literature to Vietnam veterans, Shay opens a door to exploring further connections between past combat trauma and traumatic stress. Shay, Coleman, and Herman, as well as Paul Springer and Edward Rick, have done important work in bringing the reality of post-traumatic stress disorder out of obscurity and suspicion.

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80 Coleman, *Flashback*, 22.

Eric Dean, Dennis Brandt, and Penny Coleman have brought the scholarship of trauma and war to an entirely new level. In *Pathway to Hell: The Tragedy of the American Civil War*, Dennis Brandt writes about the tragic fate of a Union soldier, Angelo M. Crapsey, who was seemingly at every major battle of the Civil War, but who, having experienced significant emotional and psychological trauma, descended into madness and took his own life to escape his fears. Crapsey is an ominously fascinating subject because of how his writings reflect his descent down the “pathway to hell.” As Brandt observes, viewed through his letters and pension records, his life permits historians to see another side of war, a side that was otherwise unknown in the nineteenth century. As Richard Wheeler believes, “The records of the Civil War are copious with stories of veterans who were typical of their kind. Rare indeed – perhaps even non-existent until now – are detailed accounts of soldiers who survived the war’s horrors physically but not mentally.” Though Eric Dean, in *Shook Over Hell*, has explored post-traumatic stress common to soldiers who fought in the Civil War and in

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Vietnam, Brandt examines the implications for the study of emotional trauma in individual historical figures. In this study, seamen, not soldiers, are the focus in exploring those young men who survived horrific events, but came back to New England physically and mentally wounded.

Daniel Drayton, a nautical abolitionist who will be discussed in the fifth chapter of this study, committed suicide in 1852, only four years after experiencing severe trauma at the hands of an angry southern mob, as well as the fury of an ocean that seemingly sought to disrupt any venture he attempted. Drayton, like Brandt’s Crapsey, tragically descended from normal life to a life unraveled. Through the stories of “average” men like them, the image of the world they lived in takes shape, and the trauma they experienced and writings they left behind provide another view of what they saw and heard. Studies like these, which link history to trauma studies, allow historians to see a different past than might have been observed since that time. Penny Coleman, whose recent work Flashback, attempted to take Dean’s scholarship even further, argues that

George Washington’s Continental Army, which became the U.S. Army, was plagued with mental health disorders that are recognizably similar to those seen today. Labels of “melancholia” and “insanity” were loosely applied to the most extreme cases, the psychoses, the paralyses, or to those who suffered from invasive flashbacks.

Coleman, whose husband committed suicide after his return home from the Vietnam War, took this issue personally and crafted a historical interpretation of post-traumatic

86 Coleman, Flashback, 21-26.
stress that argued that in every American military engagement examples of traumatic stress can be found.\textsuperscript{87}

Judith Herman, whose work on trauma includes the study of post-traumatic stress, writes that

as predicted, the study of psychological trauma has remained highly controversial. Many clinicians, researchers and political advocates who work with traumatized people have come under fierce attack. In spite of this onslaught, however, thus far the field has vigorously resisted being “disappeared.” On the contrary…the fundamental question of the existence of PTSD is no longer in dispute.\textsuperscript{88}

As Herman argues it has become clear that “as [Pierre] Janet observed one hundred years ago,” dissociation lies at the heart of the traumatic stress disorders. Studies that have involved survivors of disasters, terrorism, and combat have demonstrated that people who enter a dissociative state at the time of the horrific event are the most likely to develop long-lasting PTSD.\textsuperscript{89} As Penny Coleman wrote, Pierre Janet was

convinced that traumatic symptoms were a direct response to a devastating experience that had overwhelmed the psyche. The experience was too frightening, too horrible, too unacceptable for the mind to absorb. He theorized that, in the face of such an extreme assault, the personality split into conscious and subconscious aspects….It was the demons buried in the subconscious mind that Janet held responsible for traumatic symptoms.\textsuperscript{90}

Dissociation has been described as a symptom experienced by some victims of trauma that appears to have a “high specificity and a low sensitivity,” which means that

\textsuperscript{87} Coleman, \textit{Flashback}, 24-26.

\textsuperscript{88} Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 238 and J. D. Kinzie and R. R. Goetz, “A Century of Controversy Surrounding Posttraumatic Stress-Spectrum Syndromes: The Impact of DSM-III and DSM-IV.” \textit{Journal of Traumatic Stress} 9 (1996): 159-180. As of May 2013 DSM-V is the fifth version of the American Psychiatric Association’s diagnostic manual for criteria for PTSD and was following a two-year period of field testing.

\textsuperscript{89} Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 238-240.

\textsuperscript{90} Coleman, \textit{Flashback}, 27.
dissociation is common among those who are traumatized.\textsuperscript{91} Even so, there are many victims who have suffered from significant trauma who do not show dissociative symptoms.\textsuperscript{92}

In a 2012 article, D. B. Stern supports the hypothesis that recent trauma may affect an “individual’s assessment of the more distant past, changing the experience of the past and resulting in dissociative states.”\textsuperscript{93} Judith Herman argues that dissociation is a term derived “entirely from clinical observation” and even as the “central importance of dissociation in traumatic stress disorders has continued to accumulate, it has also become apparent that dissociation offers a window into consciousness, memory, and the links between body and mind.”\textsuperscript{94} The sailors depicted throughout these pages may have suffered from dissociative states though the historian cannot know for certain, but may make only informed conclusions based on the material left by the maritime subjects and their own conclusions about past events.

Nelson Cowan argues that

Dissociative responses are believed to arise as a coping mechanism for trauma. Pretending to be somewhere else during an inescapable traumatic event would be an example of a dissociative reaction….when dissociation occurs, a separate memory can be formed for the traumatic event, that is, a memory that is not linked to normal consciousness….Although dissociative tendencies do appear to


\textsuperscript{93} D. B. Stern, “Witnessing across time: accessing the present from the past and the past from the present,” \textit{The Psychoanalytic Quarterly} 81:1 (January 2012): 53–81.

\textsuperscript{94} Herman, \textit{Trauma and Recovery}, 240.
be linked…at present, there are no adequate tests of dissociation as a mechanism for memory loss.  

The sailors depicted in this study do not seamlessly exemplify this theory or understanding. Their memories, while not perfect representations of their lived pasts, are corroborated by diaries, newspapers, and other eye-witness accounts created both during and after the tragedies took place. Even though they would suffer from visions considered flashbacks, or as they referred to them, waking and sleeping nightmares, these seafarers do not appear, at least in the sources unearthed, to show traits of dissociation. But the possibility of such consequences cannot and should not be ignored. As Daniel Schacter has argued, “patients with PTSD reported more frequent intrusive memories and flashbacks than did depressed patients….For some people, the force of a traumatic event is so compelling that they become ‘stuck’ in the past.” Victims of trauma “who remain focused on the past for years after a traumatic event,” he concludes “exhibit higher levels of psychological distress than those who focus on the present and future.”

Maritime narratives contain vital information about specific circumstances surrounding past stressful events. These memories were consequential and, as Cowan argues, “extreme stress can have a positive effect on memory by helping to create durable…representations of stressful events.” Sailors suffered during catastrophic maritime events and those sufferings were discussed in local taverns, onboard other ships, and lastly in their written memoirs. While some of the memories from those events may

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96 Schacter, _Seven Sins of Memory_, 174-175.  
97 Schacter, _Seven Sins of Memory_, 175.  
98 Cowen, _The Development Of Memory In Childhood_, 311-312.
have been repressed or dissociated, they were inevitably transported to paper and reflected a representation of a reality that their authors considered important and significant. Their past oceanic traumas were consequential and changed their sea and landed lives, but historians must understand the limits and weaknesses of their memories.

Even though the post-traumatic recollection of these sailors is difficult to diagnose, when possible at all, it must be acknowledged that as they were traumatized, they formed diverse memories that stored that information differently. Even as these sailors were inundated with recollections that remained detailed in the days, months, and years after a harrowing event, parts of these traumatic memories may have acted in a dissociative manner. When that process broke down, the cordoned-off memories swiftly intruded into the consciousness. They then attempted to make sense of those memories by putting them into words. They wrote about those memories, including persistent memories, invasive flashbacks, and significantly crippling memories, creating a fascinating read that they considered consistent with their catastrophic past. They framed their narratives to both contain and incorporate these memories, because their past traumas affected them in diverse and complicated ways, which can only be understood by a rereading of their written narratives. In the end, their written accounts are generally all historians have of what these sailors’ remembered, felt, and believed. As Jonathan Shay has argued, there are three stages of reclamation, or rehabilitation: “Stage One, establishment of safety, sobriety, and self-care; Stage Two, trauma-centered work of constructing a personal narrative and of grieving; Stage Three, reconnecting with people, communities, ideals, and ambitions.”

Even though this dissertation only charts a sailor’s

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possible recovery process through the first and second stage, it is clear that sailors suffered and sought to make sense of those haunting recollections.

Even though traumatic memories must not be considered an unmediated reality because they are memories given language, and therefore can never be a perfect replication of that oceanic past, they do represent a detailed and presumably honest representation of the past that these sailors lived through.¹⁰⁰ These sailors, many of whom spoke of the nightmares and persistent recollections, believed that what they wrote was a sound representation not only of their past, but of those memories that tormented them. Historians must understand that to consider parts of their narratives traumatic is not to endorse them as reality, but to acknowledge the “machine” of memory at work and at play. It is important for historical explanations of war and suffering to be examined through diverse historical and psychological lenses, but also not to lose sight of the historical significance of the sailors’ overall lives and tragedies. To do so opens the door to an array of historical possibilities and scholarly approaches that synthesize a rare world of trauma, history, and the experience of the vast ocean.

Herman has argued that traumatized people feel and act in a manner that represents the disconnectedness of their nervous system from their present and that “many systems of post-traumatic stress disorder fall into three main categories:…‘hyperarousal,’ ‘intrusion,’ and ‘constriction.’”¹⁰¹ Hyperarousal, according to Herman, “reflects the persistent expectation of danger; intrusion reflects the indelible imprint of the traumatic moment; constriction reflects the numbing response of

¹⁰⁰ See Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain*.

¹⁰¹ Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 35.
surrender.”102 Many, if not all, of the sailors studied in this work show signs of all of these symptoms of “post-traumatic stress,” and it is through their own words that these symptoms will be explored. In their narratives they wrote about nightmares, the fear of the “return of danger,” and battles fought with enemies who seemingly had no face. Yet this dissertation pays especially close attention to the intrusive and persistent reminiscences that plagued them and how they coped with those dangerous thoughts. “Unlike ordinary memories,” Herman has argued, “traumatic memories are not encoded…in verbal, linear narrative that is assimilated into an ongoing life story.” Nautical memories, as is evident in our traumatized sailors, are frozen and “congealed in stories” told over and over again “with the same words and gestures, in stereotyped phrases….Traumatic memories lack verbal narrative and context; rather, they are encoded in the form of vivid sensations and images.”103

The coming chapters seek to build upon the work of Dean, Brandt, Shay, Herman, and Coleman on trauma in historical context, and integrate the results within the scope of maritime narratives. The sailors each, in their own way, experienced the type of trauma that Crapsey experienced. Some sailors resemble the Odysseys’ Odysseus, who Shay concluded served as the fictional representation of the traumatized soldier. They chose to write about those troubles for their own reasons and on their own terms. Even in a literary sense, as Margaret Cohen wrote in The Novel and the Sea, Odysseus acted as the forebear of the American sailor in popular fiction and survived the pitfalls of the maritime world through “his consummate practical resourcefulness, calling on his ability to assess

102 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 35.
103 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 37-39.
situations and manipulate the psychology of men, of monsters, and of the gods.”

As Cohen argued, the descendants of Odysseus, in a maritime consideration of literature and suffering, are left with an “enduring, international form of modern fiction,” which inspired not only a historical reading of maritime tragedy but acted as the “ancestor” of James Fennimore Cooper’s John Paul Jones in The Pilot and the “dashing pirate” of The Red Rover. According to Cohen, Odysseus can be seen as the forebear to the “agile harpooners on Herman Melville’s Pequod” in Moby-Dick, and “the hardworking captains and seamen of novels written at the turn of the twentieth century by Joseph Conrad,” and “Robert Louis Stevenson, Jules Verne…and Patrick O’Brian, among many others.”

These works of fiction, starting with Homer’s The Odyssey, deal with “constructed” maritime trauma, which overshadows the histories of those seamen who lived through disturbing events that these fictions rely on – a reality our collective imagination has marginalized.

When considering trauma and historical research, Judith Herman’s 1992 influential Trauma and Recovery: The Aftermath of Violence – from Domestic Abuse to Political Terror must be considered. Herman’s work has since defined the field of trauma studies and has consistently been hailed as “groundbreaking.” Changing the way one thinks about and treats “traumatic events and trauma victims,” Herman’s theories and methods can be consulted when dealing with American sailors and other historical figures who have experienced severe traumatic events. According to Herman’s theory, the trauma of the past for the captive, abused sailor, and political martyr, can never be buried


106 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 1-6 & 33-51.
under the avalanche of shattered dreams. The victim’s mind refuses to let go of that past pain even as victims of atrocity, like many of the sailors in this dissertation, attempted to forget, but discovered that remembering was the only way to put their traumatic memories to rest. Healing is born through remembering, as Herman theorized, for victims of trauma and those sailors plagued by disturbing memories that not only made them remember, but forced them to put pen to paper. As Herman’s work fills a clinical need to understand suffering and recovery, it is perfectly situated to help in dealing with our sailors’ recollections. Herman’s chapters on “Forgotten History,” “Terror,” “Captivity,” and “Disconnection” all provide a psychological frame of reference within which to engage and extricate maritime memories from maritime narratives. Herman makes trauma relatable to both historians and common lay readers and by doing so has allowed for researchers to gain a greater understanding of historical agents who have been devastated by circumstances well beyond their control.

This dissertation endorses and elaborates on many of Herman’s theories and employs them to interpret them within the maritime world where trauma was common and suffering not unusual. As Glenn, Blum, Vickers, Rediker, Shockley, Gilje, and other scholars have strengthened maritime history and the study of nautical memory in terms of their discourses on manhood and other themes. While addressing some of these same concerns, this study does so through the lens of traumatic memory. It reconstructs uncommon events that rarely, if ever, are addressed in the annals of popular American maritime history. These sailors’ traumatic memories, even though they wrote for varying purposes, play a prominent role in all their writings. Even if those events are sometimes shaded, glossed over, or hidden from view in an attempt to craft another vision of what
the author wanted to be remembered for, the trauma they were burdened by refused to be ignored and continuously identifies itself. As Herman argues,

The ordinary response to atrocities is to banish them from consciousness….Atrocities, however, refuse to be buried. Equally as powerful as the desire to deny atrocities is the conviction that denial does not work. Folk wisdom is filled with ghosts who refuse to rest in their graves until their stories are told….Remembering and telling the truth about terrible events are prerequisites both for the restoration of the social order and for the healing of individual victims.\(^\text{107}\)

Herman’s theories are important for the examination of the written characterization of these sailor memories and what they tell us about their difficult experiences, their post-traumatic understandings, and the perilous world they observed. Through this linkage of cognitive trauma studies and maritime historical interpretation, these sailor recollections can add an intriguing and unique dimension to the scholarship of the maritime world.

**Historical Significance of Maritime Trauma and Culture**

It is important to study the traumatic memories of young sailors in that their recollections are windows into the world of seafarers, as well as key to understanding personal and cultural memory. Through their remembrances, one observes their dark world, their tragic fate, and gains a greater insight into how they lived in a world that utilized their memories but forgot their names. Their life-stories are almost totally lost in “the master narrative” of the American Revolution, War of 1812, the era of Whaling and then industrialized economic growth, and lastly in the era leading up to the American Civil War.\(^\text{108}\) Sailors were far from being speechless or inactive in the history of early American maritime history. In this respect, Ira Berlin has observed that “under the

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\(^{107}\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 1.

pressure of unprecedented events, ordinary men and women can become extraordinarily perceptive and articulate.”

These “unprecedented events,” which found an oceanic stage and an audience in print, “required” fishermen to put away their everyday gear and fly patriotic colors, which in turn “created” maritime legacies. Even episodes that occurred in the service of economic endeavors like whaling and fishing had voyages burdened by shipwreck, mutiny, or murder and caused seamen to dig deep within themselves to both survive and move forward. Privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists wrote about consequential, as well as traumatic, events that changed them and left them with detailed memories that they eventually gave language.

As Daniel Vickers has argued, through maritime narratives we learn about their world, their passions, and their dreams. Young men, many just teenagers, observed accounts of adventure on the Atlantic and, living in seaport societies, they sought to follow in the footsteps of community leaders and family members. But through their narratives we can also understand how they coped with disturbing experiences and reminiscences that would not go away. Through their narratives historians can appreciate the fears that these sailors were overcome by and understand how “seamen worried that their labor would be forgotten in the invisibility of their passing” and how they “could best remember their fallen shipmates.” As one sailor wrote, “the benefit of their exertions is daily felt in the security given to commerce, and the lives of their fellow

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110 Young, *Liberty Tree*, 3.


112 Blum, *View from the Masthead*, 159.
men; but nothing remains to mark the scene of their suffering and their triumph, but the few frail, perishing memorialis, which the hand of friendship has erected.” \(^{113}\)

In recent years the examination of journals, diaries and recollections of soldiers who fought during American wars has been used to study possible post-traumatic stress in historical subjects. The same kinds of sources can be used to address sailors. They journeyed home changed men and wrote about what they had gone through. Their recollections share the struggles of the aftermath by addressing the reality of their suffering. They teach us about shipboard life and the hazards of seafaring, but they also elucidate how maritime memory was shaped from those same hazards. Their memories must be examined directly and critically taking into account the issues of forgetting and memory distortion. It matters, even if for other reasons, whether or not one remembers correctly, but as Marita Sturken has argued, memory is “notoriously unverifiable” and the original remembered experiences are irretrievable, which results in a world where we only know the past through “memory remains…objects, texts,” and stories. \(^{114}\) Sailors’ memories, those objects, and, lastly, their writings reflect a maritime world that is thrown off balance by devastating imperfections and exposes the hidden turmoil behind the mask of collective maritime imagination.

Even though sailors’ subsequent memories must not be taken as “absolute truth” their narratives reflect a past truth that the sailors’ themselves believed in and therefore gains a historical significance that must not be overlooked. Sailors were exposed to painful events and these overwhelming events were depicted in their narratives for multiple reasons. This study investigates those reasons, while elaborating on the

\(^{113}\) “The Sailor’s Grave,” *Sheet Anchor*, 4 October 1845, 145.

possibility of their distortion from post-traumatic stress. It cannot be argued that any of these sailors suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder, because to do so they would have had to exhibit “all” signs and symptoms. Many of these criteria are impossible to apply, but these sailors exhibited, in their narratives, letters, and other primary materials, evidence of some of these benchmarks and therefore might have suffered from what we today recognize as post-traumatic stress disorder. By examining sailors’ narratives with modern “eyes,” historians open a door to exploring sailors’ narratives from new and interesting angles. They challenge the limits that older histories have placed on social history and memory studies. By writing about their past horrors and previous exploits, during national events, these sailors exhibited a mark of “agency” and therefore their lives must be reopened to examine how they contributed, in their own way, “to the making of history.”

What must also be also considered is the connection each of these maritime authors had with the others. They were all teenagers; all saw the sea with wonderment, and each choose the ocean as his vocation. Historian Marcus Rediker observed a young seafaring class or “proletariat” who sought economic fortune in the open ocean, and Daniel Vickers saw young men from Salem who lived in a maritime world and observed the sea as a natural consequence of their seaport lives. Eric Jay Dolin explored the complex, and complete, history of American whaling and discussed young men who

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116 Vickers & Walsh. Young Men and the Sea, 5-7. See also, Rediker, Villains of All Nations; Rediker, Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea, and Linbaugh and Rediker, The Many Headed Hydra.
braved the whale and sought riches beyond imagination.\textsuperscript{117} W. Jeffrey Bolster provided for an African American perspective of the “Age of Sail” and discussed men like Paul Cuffe, and other black seaman who used the maritime world as their escape from both slavery and a shore life with little promise and seemingly no semblance of equality, benefits that could be found on whalers and privateers and in places like New Bedford, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{118} Lisa Norling and to a larger extent Margaret Creighton discussed the trials and tribulations of “whaling” women both at home and those who chose to join their husbands for long voyages at sea.\textsuperscript{119} Ernest Dodge explored the adventures of young New England sailors who sailed in search of great wealth in the “South Seas,” as whalemen, sealers, and sandalwood traders, and came home with both money and artifacts that transformed the New England region economically, architecturally, and politically, as can be seen today.\textsuperscript{120} Acting to expand on this important scholarship, this dissertation considers young men from port cities and New England towns with long traditions of seafaring looking out beyond the broken Atlantic Wall. These sailors


\textsuperscript{119} Norling, \textit{Captain Ahab had a Wife}, 1-14, 149-150, & 220-250.

observed the sea in relation to both economic success and oceanic adventure, but in the end they all experienced trauma. These oceanic events, filled with rich traumatic memories, will lead to vital questions that must be considered.

The first question is: What is learned by studying these diverse autobiographies/memoirs? Historical research gains strength from the incorporation of social history and through the use of techniques borrowed from cognitive science historians have significantly illuminated memory and history. In Liberty Tree, Alfred Young explained that the importance of social history lies in its reflection of history as “theater,” which for a “Pacific historical perspective” is very reminiscent of Greg Dening’s theory of history as performance. If the old way of “doing” history was to fill the stage with famous actors and it was they who had all the lines and scenes, the social history way of conducting historical research and writing now meant adding, to that stage, common men and women who paved the way for those great figures to accomplish what they did. The famous figures are not absent from the stage, but rather positioned to the side. Now anyone can fill their old position and have as many lines warranted. Without such players as the common sailor, shoemaker, tavern owner, or female consumer and boycotter, the known figures could never have achieved their fame and success. History must be looked at as a theater with actors and actresses playing significant roles, even if in insignificant scenes, because their importance comes from

their lived actions, written understandings, and, in the end, the brilliance of their uncorrupted ambition and courage to do what it was thought no average American could do. From the writings of these individuals who, at one time lacked a voice in history, historians can gain new perspectives on typical lives, and in this case, the process by which maritime memories are developed, personally and collectively, following a tormenting seafaring experience. As Young writes,

If the names of the players in this vastly expanded cast of characters send readers to the libraries, it is a sign of the times that readers are likely to find a good many of them written up in the new multivolume collections of biography which are changing the “who’s who” of American history. Historians have added so many characters in so many subplots that how the play should end is subject to differing interpretations: the play seems to cry out for multiple endings at different times because lots of these historians are not confined by...dates.122

In a small coastal town baring the name Fairhaven, Massachusetts, Herman Melville, on 3 January 1841 set sail towards the Pacific on the whaler Acushnet. This vessel, this journey, and this man changed the course of maritime history in the American imagination. During an eighteen-month cruise Melville experienced the life of a sailor and came face-to-face with ship culture, in more ways than one. His experience would influence his writing of *Moby-Dick; or, the Whale* and his decision to desert his ship in the Marquesas Islands and act as a beachcomber among the Typee natives, who many had believed to be cannibals, inspired his writings of *Typee, Omoo*, as well as *White-Jacket*, and hatred of ship culture encouraged his posthumously published *Billy Budd*.123

Melville, Richard Dana Jr., James Fennimore Cooper, and even Edgar Allen Poe, brought the maritime world into American homes through literary masterpieces and the utilization

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122 Young, *Liberty Tree*, 16.

of the sailors vocabulary. In “A Descent into the Maelström” Edgar Allen Poe, who will be discussed in chapter six, dives into the heart of the shipwreck tale and, like Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s 1798 The Rime of the Ancient Mariner, is narrated by an “excited old man retelling his story of shipwreck and survival.”\(^{124}\) Poe’s tale is one of “perception” and highlights the narrator’s thoughts and feelings, which must be considered when thinking of the memories of actual sailors who were found using reasoning skills to survive, but stricken with fearful memories of that tragic past.\(^{125}\) Poe wrote in “A Descent into the Maelström” that

Never shall I forget the sensations of awe, horror, and admiration with which I gazed about me. The boat appeared to be hanging, as if by magic, midway down, upon the interior surface of a funnel vast in circumference, prodigious in depth, and whose perfectly smooth sides might have been mistaken for ebony, but for the bewildering rapidity with which they spun around, and for the gleaming and ghastly radiance they shot forth, as the rays of the full moon, from that circular rift amid the clouds which I have already described, streamed in a flood of golden glory along the black walls, and far away down into the inmost recesses of the abyss.\(^{126}\)

Like Poe’s The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket, “MS. Found in a Bottle,” and “The Oblong Box,” “A Descent into the Maelström” is a sea tale that must be considered when one investigates those actual sailors who wrote about the tragedies that would inspire these fiction writers. While the past is ungraspable to the historian, sailors’ memories provide a greater understanding of the past that seamen considered consistent with their past tragedy. By examining literary agents like Melville and Poe, who explored

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the sea disaster story, historians gain greater understanding of the power of those recalls and how fiction can transform those tragic events into powerful literary devices.

Hester Blum, who has discussed “sailor’s literary culture and the epistemology of maritime narratives,” argues that sailors’ own writings have been ignored as a contribution to the American literary sphere. Instead their “sea eye,” which is a term that “derives from maritime narratives themselves,” is written over by literary masters who used these men’s own recollections for their inspiration and crafted their “imaginary tales.” Although sailor narratives, as Blum argues, “have been frequently invoked as primary evidence by maritime, labor, social, and political historians, nonfictional sailor writings have not to this point received any sustained analysis as literature.” Blum successfully remedied this literary and historical puzzle and showed how literary important sailor narratives were as literature. This study extends Blum’s overarching ambition of illuminating their literary importance, but it does so by showing how they reflected suffering and how that trauma is collectively considered by literary greats like Melville and Poe to construct a network of literary maritime drama that outshines sailor participation in maritime literary culture.


128 Blum, The View from the Masthead, 12.

129 Blum, The View from the Masthead, 12.
Although these works created “imaginary images” of the maritime world, especially engagements in the Pacific, of which more was told of the author or artist than the places and peoples themselves, they opened people’s eyes to sailor experiences and sailor desires.\textsuperscript{130} These works, especially Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, had the power to transcend the maritime world and build an imaginary, complex, and extensive understanding about what that world could and should have looked like based on what he wrote. When one thinks about Ishmael, Captain Ahab, and the whaleship *Pequod*, we do not consider the reality, or real ships and crews; we create our own images evoked by his words. Well after Melville’s death and the demise of the “Age of Sail,” his work created a collective image regarding the maritime world. Readers fail to consider the real Cape Cod captains or the real tragedies that betook many sailors, instead favoring the fictional demise of a revenge-driven captain and hapless crew brought to their deaths through the destruction of reason. As this study will discuss, the collective image of the maritime world has been shaped essentially by the fictional masterpieces of literary greats.

Yet sailors, as Hester Blum argues, were literate adventurers who crafted their own stories that would act as precursors to the American maritime literary era. Sailors’ own writings inspired the fictions of famous literary greats and their “factual stories” found larger public appeal through fictional stories. These assertions will be illustrated in later chapters. We will assess the collective memory of maritime history and how

fictional works of maritime tragedy have influenced our understanding of that dark oceanic world that American seamen sailed over and the factual horrors they witnessed and returned with. Fiction does not counter fact, nor does fiction destroy fact, but eventually the growing reading public forgot about the commons sailors who had suffered and instead remembered those fictional characters that sat before the mast and imagined an oceanic world that offered them endless possibilities. This reading public would have stopped reading maritime tales by the dawn of the Civil War anyway, but they not only stopped looking beyond the Atlantic Wall, instead focusing on the growing industrialized nation, they seemingly forgot their own nautical heritage. There is a reason that by 1851, and the publication of Melville’s masterpiece *Moby-Dick*, society turned its back on the famous writer. It was an era when whaling and maritime adventuring were no longer a primary focus of the American public reading attention. Instead American attentiveness was shifting West with the Gold Rush and the conquest of the Great Plains. Not only did America’s attention shift, but so did its partiality toward lengthy works, “dealing with the brutal technology of the whaling industry.” As will be discussed in chapter six, Melville considered *Moby-Dick* to be his “magnum opus,” but he was saddened and disconcerted by its commercial failure, which began his slide toward literary obscurity.

In line with arguments proposed by David Blight, as well as Margot Minardi, Benjamin Cloyd, and Joanne Melish, this study argues that the memory of maritime events was used by writers, politicians, and cultural enthusiasts in an attempt to craft their

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own vision of the maritime world. Although based on real events, and while their
depictions of the maritime world are as real as can be considered, these works of fiction
serve to obscure and inadvertently make “mute” the real stories that had inspired them in
the first place. This will be evident through a comparison between Melville’s *Moby-Dick*
and the story of the whaleship *Essex*. Most Americans know of Melville’s masterpiece,
but have no knowledge of the story that inspired it. Nathaniel Philbrick’s work, *In the
Heart of the Sea*, has done wonders in breaking down this historical failure, but
Philbrick’s study focuses purely on how the trauma of the *Essex* disaster is lost through
the trauma of the *Pequod*’s ruin and psychotic behavior of Captain Ahab. In the end,
this confirms that it is important to continue reading Melville’s *Moby-Dick*, because it is
also through reading fiction where we can rediscover fact.

As Hester Blum argues, and Marcus Rediker, Ira Dye, and many others have
advocated, “Many sailors recognized that their term of maritime service could be an
opportunity for knowledge and learning,” and they went on to become learned
individuals who wrote stories of their experiences to showcase their abilities and partake
in the “non-fictional” literary world. Their narratives, memoirs, and autobiographies
must be considered part of a larger literary trend that focused attention for some time on
the shipwreck, captivity, and overall maritime tale. How these narratives fit into this

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135 Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 26-27.
literary world is important both to the study of these works’ motives for their traumatized authors’ penning their chilling tales and what these works contribute to our understanding of that perilous oceanic world.

These men were linked through the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans and their journey was meant to discover who they were. The uncharted world beyond the Atlantic wall, one that has been broken down through an Atlantic history approach championed by Bernard Bailyn, David Armitage, and several others, can unveil their culture and how they observed the world. They each chose the sea, based mainly on their youthful love of adventure, New England traditional expectations, economic dreams, the honor of maritime life, and their calling to see what lay beyond the horizon. Some understood the Calvinist ethics and perceived their own ambitions as “God’s” will and their eventual trauma as part of “God’s” plan. When these New Englanders returned, the seas had left a discernible impact on them and they struggled to understand its meaning. They wrote about those autobiographical memories that continued to disturb their dreams and impacted their view on life. They had chosen the ocean, but the ocean now continued to

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haunt them. These sailors shared their outlook on the world and the results that political actions had on those who defended the flag and sought maritime wonder.

**Outline of Chapters**

The privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists, who are discussed in this dissertation all met with disaster and experienced a tragic episode that would shape the rest of their lives. They all set sail on the ocean with a youthful imagination, which, while promising to convey the beauty of the world, provided endless and a difficult life of maritime labor. Some lived a life defined by their trauma, others lived trying to reshape their lives into another autobiographical tale, and still others found that the memory, the drama of that maritime event was more than they could bear. The traumatic memory remained vibrant, readdressed with each anniversary, and embedded in the brains for those sailors addressed in the pages of this dissertation.

In chapter two, Barnabas Downs, Joshua Davis, and Andrew Sherburne take center stage, through their written recollections, to present the world of the traumatized revolutionary privateer. Through shipwrecks, impressment, and maritime savagery, these men observed horrible events and those moments of pain are, in different ways, an important part of their maritime narratives. Even as they were inundated with overwhelming memories and possibly suffered from post-traumatic pain, eventually they chose to use those memories in diverse ways and their writings reflect the cognitive battles waged over the meaning of their memories. This chapter identifies the impetus for their writing and it sheds light on the instances that formed harrowing memories.

Chapter three assesses the writings of a second group of sailors who were traumatized – impressed sailors of the War of 1812. Joseph Bates, James Durand, James
M’Lean, and Joshua Penny serve as impressed and imprisoned narrators. Focusing on literature, history, and psychology, the captivity narrative plays a significant role in how each man considered his seizure and detention, but their narratives served to inspire public anger toward a British enemy that refused to recognize and respect American maritime rights. These sailors wrote in an effort to inform a national public and tell them what was to be feared beyond the Atlantic Wall as Britain incarcerated and beat young American seamen. Each man experienced dreadful memories that fueled his narrative’s construction. Although many of these sailors inflated parts of their narratives in an effort to gain public attention through political propaganda, their traumatic memories served to remain a consistent source of agony.

Even as chapters two and three included sailors who had experienced trauma while in service to their country, chapter four elaborates on the suffering whaleman. Whalemen Horace Holden, William Lay, and William Torrey, as well as fisherman James Jewitt – all recalled their numerous shipwrecks, mutinies, and oceanic murder. Their disastrous maritime experiences served to inspire the maritime world depicted by Herman Melville, and his eventual success is an unrecognized testament to their tragic lives. They sought, through their narratives, to remember the fallen, to understand senseless tragedy, and possibly quiet the terrible images that infiltrated their minds. Their memories of oceanic trauma were, even in their own judgment, thought about regularly and they suffered from the persistence of that past and the uncertainty of their future.

Chapter five serves to conclude our investigation of groups of sailors with a look at nautical abolitionists. Jonathan Walker, Daniel Drayton, and Austin Bease began their lives as coastal maritime traders and in the course of those lives found a greater calling;
the abolition of slavery. Each sailor, and captain, observed unthinkable tragedy and brutality in the course of that endeavor and each man was affected diversely by his disturbing memories. They sailed on the nautical seaway of abolitionism and they watched as slaves were brutalized. At the same time these sailors were pushed to the limit. Although all three nautical abolitionists used their trauma to speak out against slavery, only two were able to use their inability to forget to remind the country of the promise of freedom. One nautical abolitionist was so haunted by his appalling maritime past, which he could not forget, that he possibly found peace only in death.

Any look at historical events and the personal memory of historical subjects must consider the collective memory of society then and today. Chapter six explores both the personal memory of sailor Daniel Collins, while at the same time identifying the collective growth of societies understanding of the maritime world. Novels, movies, and a seemingly imagined maritime world are discussed. Literary masterpieces like *Moby-Dick*, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, and movies like *Master and Commander* address and replace the perilous maritime world of Barnabas Downs, Horace Holden, and Daniel Collins. Chapter six expands on our cultural and collective imagination of their dark maritime world. This chapter, like the study as a whole, attempts to put these traumatized sailors into the foreground and to reconstruct the memories they suffered from, both during and after the disastrous events took place. Their words showcase their suffering and their painful past, starting with Barnabas Downs, whose remarkable memories scholars have previously neglected in historical writing.

Chapter TWO

Distressed Revolutionary Privateers and Oceanic Trauma:
Barnabas Downs, Joshua Davis, & Andrew Sherburne

“As the short northern day merged into night, we found ourselves almost broad upon the wintry ocean, whose freezing spray cased us in ice, as in polished armor.”

- Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick*, Chapter 36 “Merry Christmas”

On the morning of 27 December 1778 Barnabas Downs from Barnstable, Massachusetts, and an American privateer on the brig *General Arnold*, awoke to find that sixty of his shipmates had died during the evening snow storm off the coast of Plymouth, Massachusetts, after their vessel had become encased in ice and wrecked where it anchored. He struggled to remain conscious, fearing that if he fell asleep he might never wake up. As the storm began to abate, off in the distance the sun appeared and on board the brig *General Arnold*, Downs hoped for an end to the horror. As the snow stopped and the sun rose, the cold grew more severe. In the distance, Downs could see Plymouth and “a number of people coming along the shore” for their relief.¹ James Magee, Captain of

¹ Barnabas Downs. *A brief and remarkable narrative of the life and extreme sufferings of Barnabas Downs, Jun. Who was among the number of those who escaped death on board the privateer brig Arnold, James Magee, commander, which was cast away near Plymouth-Harbour, in a most terrible snow-storm, December 26, 1778, when more than sixty persons were frozen to death. --Containing also a particular account of said shipwreck.* (Boston: E. Russell, for the author, 1786.), 11-12.
the brig, tied a handkerchief to a stick and waved it wildly in an effort to be seen by those on land.

Barnabas Downs watched as townspeople pushed off two boats and made a “hard trial to come to us, but the harbor was so full of ice they could not reach us.” Three men, “passengers not crew members,” climbed into the long boat, which had been pinned below the portside gangplank of the ship, and set out for shore. The three men, Abel Willis of Martha’s Vineyard, David Durham of Falmouth, and an Irish sailor named John Robinson, struggled across fifty feet of open water and fought against the sheets of ice, which led them to a small schooner out of Duxbury. The schooner was carrying several men and one woman, all of whom had taken to the ship in an attempt to reach the brig General Arnold in a failed rescue effort. They too became embedded in the ice about a half mile away from the General Arnold, immobilized but safe. When the long boat with the three brig passengers made it safely to the schooner with local townspeople, the crew of the General Arnold stood and cheered, using the last of any energy they had left. But Downs and the other members of the General Arnold crew watched as the townspeople retreated to the shore, giving him, and possibly them, “an inexpressible shock.”² As the three men and the yawl failed to return to the brig, morale on board the General Arnold became ominous and the sailors had little to support their hunger and thirst. There was nothing to keep them warm and “the Heavens was our only covering!”³ On the “Lords’ day” Downs struggled to remain awake, but at two o’clock fell into a deep sleep, or as

² Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 11-12.
³ Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 12.
Downs called it, “the sleep of death.” As he lay asleep and the cold abused those on board, the prospect of survival shrunk as the bodies of fallen sailors continued to rise.

**Traumatic Memory and the Sailors’ Path to Tragedy**

Barnabas Downs suffered through a traumatic episode that lasted for three days and he recalled it for years thereafter with the help of those devastating memories. What does the memory of such an episode tell us about the world Barnabas Downs and other sailors lived in? What do his memories say about his sufferings and what do his recollections indicate about the power of memory to preserve traumatic experiences? It is important that these narratives be interpreted and their literary and historical importance assessed. In the end their emotional trauma and drama seem remote from the historian, but the historian must peel away the built up “material” to find the traumatic reality, as these sailors understood it, in their writing. Although many memoirs contain accurate elements, many were also shaped by unacknowledged social, political, and economic motives. Their capacity to understand their past experiences and ability to relate those memories in autobiographical writings give historians the ability to discern common features from uncommon events.

As maritime historian Daniel Vickers has argued, through maritime narratives the historian learns about the sailors’ world, their passions, and their dreams. But it is also through their narratives that historians can understand how they coped with traumatic experiences and memories that did not go away. Narratives written by sailors who suffered from a tragic event provide a new perspective not only on maritime history, or the history of the early republic, but a new viewpoint on the daily experiences of common men who observed a world of wonderment beyond the Atlantic seaboard. They chose to
sail the ocean in search of something that life ashore evidently could not offer them, and in doing so fell prey to a world outside their control. Sailors experienced terrible moments that often left them with significant emotional, as well as physical, impairment that inspired a collective imagination of the sea, and eventually forced them to relive their maritime trauma in written narratives.

The history of memory has become an important field of historical inquiry. As historian David Blight, whose work on the memory of the Civil War in Race and Reunion serves as an essential text for scholars, has argued, “Memory is one of the most powerful elements in our human constitution….Memory can control us, overwhelm us, poisons us. Or it can save us from utter confusion and despair. As individuals, we cannot live without it, but it is part of the agony of the human condition to live with it as well.”4 Psychologist Daniel Schacter has argued that memory is a “fragile power” that is unstable and changing; but even so, the historian must consider the reality the stricken sailor believed his memory to represent.

Linking traumatic memory understandings with the study of sailors’ experiences allows the historian to evoke an intriguing picture of the American maritime past. As Cathy Caruth has written, “it is not the experience itself that produced traumatic effect, but rather the remembrance of it.”5 Even as historians David Blight, Alfred Young, and Myra Glenn engage memory as a collective creation, this dissertation views personal traumatic memories as depictions of the sailor’s reality, while recognizing that their distressing memories were often distorted by a collective audience for political and social


purposes. The memories that men like privateer Barnabas Downs put to paper are terrifying recollections. They are horrible remembrances that their victims would sooner have wished to forget than constantly to recall. Yet they may not have forgotten them, because in the end the biology of their cognitive structures sought to protect them from future harm by making them constantly summon up a painful past with persistent and intrusive memories.\(^6\)

In what could be considered a terrible irony, these sailors were destined to remember these horrific days over and over again so that, in their minds, they could survive the next traumatic round.\(^7\) Their memories elaborate on a maritime world that is both dark and uncertain. It is place where death is constant, danger immense, and suffering a common prescription for those who lived through their nautical occupations. For the privateer their path to tragedy was charted through circumstances outside of their control, whether that was the nation’s urge for independence or their birthright, as young men from maritime communities, to follow the ocean as a means of both self-discovery and social acceptance. They did what many of their seafaring brethren did both before and after them, but these particular men came face-to-face with brutal events that must have been difficult to describe. Yet for varying reasons they eventually wrote their stories and assigned meaning to that chaotic past in hopes of defining their future in terms they could control.

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In this chapter, average New England American privateers who left home in search of adventure take center stage as they recount shipwrecks, impressments, and combat, which imprinted moments of tragedy on their memory. Barnabas Downs, Joshua Davis, and Andrew Sherburne went through one or more traumatic events and were later oppressed by shocking, negative, and stressful memories reinforced by the devastation of their ensuing ordeals. These tragic maritime moments provide historians with a new look at early maritime history. To understand why these sailors were in harm’s way, it is important to recognize the world they sailed into and the trauma that awaited them beyond the New England coast.

The American Revolution was fought in many places, yet few examine the fight along the New England coast and fewer research the traumatic memories of those who served in the combat that was precursor to the American navy. Most of the important action of the Revolution took place on land, except for the French victory in the Battle of the Capes that cut Lord Cornwallis off at Yorktown. Although John Paul Jones has received ample comment for the famous battle between the Bon Homme Richard and the Serapis, for the most part historians focus on the land campaigns and assume that most American males served either in the Continental Army or the local militia. It is vital to

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realize that an estimated 2,000 to 3,000 privateers on fifty-seven vessels served in the
Continental navy. As Samuel Eliot Morison argued, “The maritime history of
Massachusetts during the War of Independence would make a book in itself….We must
pass by the marine Lexington in Machias Bay, the state navy fitted out in 1775, the
British attacks on Gloucester, Portland, and New Bedford.” In terms of privateering,
Morison asserted that success in

this legalized piracy was probably the greatest contribution of seaboard
Massachusetts to the common cause. Six hundred and twenty-six letters of
marque were issued to Massachusetts vessels by the Continental Congress, and
some thousand more by the General Court. Privateers were…of very greatest
service in preying on the enemy’s commerce, intercepting his communications
with America, carrying terror and destruction into the very chops of the Channel,
and supplying the patriot army with munitions, stores and clothing at Johnny
Bull’s expense.

From a financial and community perspective, privateering employed the fishermen and
“all those who depended on shipping, taught daring seamanship, and strengthened our
maritime aptitude and tradition.” Before the war, “a huge proportion of Massachusetts


12 Morison, Maritime History of Massachusetts, 29.

13 Morison, Maritime History of Massachusetts, 29.

14 Morison, Maritime History of Massachusetts, 29.
men had participated in fishing, shipbuilding, or ocean trade.”15 In coastal towns like New Bedford and Salem, “one in six owned or part-owned a trade vessel and the number of fishing and whaling boats exceeded one thousand, employing thousands of men.”16 Following the advice of those around him, George Washington sought to capitalize on this maritime “influence” by seeking to have “the colony’s Provincial Congress…outfit its own navy to counter British ‘piracies.’”17 This was a logical move since Massachusetts captains, “armed with neither the legal authority nor heavy weapons, had been converting their fishing and cargo boats to bare-bones warships for several months,” until given the legal authority on 20 June 1775.18 In Marblehead, Massachusetts, Washington sought to inaugurate his vision of a legalized armed American navy. He proposed having these vessels elude “the British patrols and intercepting some of the richly laden and weakly armed transports and supply ships that kept the redcoats” functioning in the city of Boston.19 Historian James Volo argued that

Washington’s agents commissioned eights small, fast, and lightly armed vessels to sail from Marblehead, Beverly, and other nearby ports. Each vessel sailed under a white ensign bearing a green pine tree with the words ‘An Appeal to Heaven’ inscribed below it….As a group, Washington’s ‘Marblehead’ captains captured fifty-five prizes. A number of these captures were important in that they changed the course of the early rebellion.20

19 Volo, *Blue Water Patriots*, 151-152.
20 Volo, *Blue Water Patriots*, 151-152.
Those privateers, young men inspired by these early successes and whose devastating
moments produced terrible memories and who transcribed those sufferings, are the
subject of this chapter.

Young men, like Barnabas Downs, were told of the great and lucrative advantages
of joining privateering vessels during the American Revolution. Recruiters worked all
positions to “combine patriotism and other appeals.” One poster early in the war
addressed to the “JOLLY TARS who are fighting for the RIGHTS and LIBERTIES of
AMERICA” urged sailors to “make your Fortunes now, my Lads, before it’s too late,
Defend, defend, I say defend an Independent State.” Recruiters often held parades and
marched carrying flags that discussed the “cause of liberty.” Many appealed to
apprentices who were looking for a reason to rid themselves of their master’s oppression
and join in a most “glorious cause.” They sang songs with lyrics such as,

All you that have bad masters
And cannot get your due’
Come, come, my brave boys,
And join our ship’s crew.

Young sailors like Roxbury, Massachusetts, native Ebenezer Fox were recruited through
their desire for adventure, their desire to be a part of the revolution, and lastly their desire
to be rich. As historians Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh explained, the “outbreak of war
in 1775 brought New England’s maritime economy to a shuddering halt.” As he

21 Gilje, Liberty on the Waterfront, 111. See also, William Bell Clark, ed., Naval Documents of the

22 Clark, ed., Naval Documents, 3:47.

23 Ebenezer Fox, The Adventures of Ebenezer Fox in the Revolutionary War Illustrated By Elegant
Engravings from Original Designs. (Boston, 1838), 57-58.

24 Vickers & Walsh, Young Men and the Sea, 164.
recognized, the port of Boston had already been shut down by 1776, Nantucket’s whaling industry shrank dramatically, and Salem seaport “saw its commerce collapse,” which forced ship owners and mariners to begin immediately converting their vessels into privateers. With money to be made, men like Barnabas Downs joined men from Salem, Marblehead, Roxbury, Boston, and many other ports in New England on vessels like the *Dolphin, Hannah, Franklin, Warren, Revolution, Julius Caesar*, and of course the *General Arnold*. As Vickers and Walsh detailed this fleet, by wars end, the combined flotilla from Salem and Beverly, Massachusetts, which numbered 80-100 vessels, carried 2,500 guns, was “crewed by more than 3,000 men,” and who collectively claimed to have “captured something like 350 prizes.”

As privateer Caleb Foot, a native of Salem, Massachusetts, wrote, after spending years in Mill Prison in England and still later serving on the *South Carolina*, “nothing is more destructive to the mind than to be cruising these seas, beating from a lee shore….We endanger our lives, expose our health, and are very desirous of sailing for the continent.” On New Year’s Day in 1782 he prayed for deliverance from this slavery and declared that his service on the *South Carolina* was the “worst of hells.” Caleb Foot wrote numerous letters from prison, with many discussing his physical conditions, “personal lamentations to his wife,” and always including, for those back home, a “list of

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Salem natives who wished to be remembered to their relations.”29 Foot had experienced severe trauma during his service on the *South Carolina*, as well as from his imprisonments at both Mill and Forton Prison, and in the years following his employment suffered from the memory of those moments that had left traumatic memories. Still, Foot looked back at his seafaring days as having been worse than his prison days and, when transported from warship to shore-based prison, wrote that entering Forton Prison “was like coming out of Hell and going into Paradise.”30

Celeb Foot hated the path he chose in fighting the British and he was not alone. William Widger, a native of Marblehead, Massachusetts, and another sailor captured and transported to Mill Prison, “filled his diary with the names and birthplaces of recent arrivals” and “even copied a roster of Marblehead boys at Forton Prison.”31 At one point Widger, as historian Paul Gilje discovered, “recorded a dream that transported him back to the waterfront of his beloved Marblehead.”32 These common sailors sailed out in search of both money and glory, a story that is not unknown, but their narratives reflect the dark reality that was the American Revolution at sea and through their written reflections historians gain access to that dark side of early American maritime history.

Barnabas Downs, who witnessed extreme horror on board the brig *General Arnold*, was both similar to and different from many individuals who chose to serve on the ocean during the American Revolution. But, most importantly, he was one of the first


“common” American Revolutionary War veterans to write of his experiences during the war. Writing his tale was imperative to him for commemorating the time in which he lived and recording how he wished to be remembered. Downs’ narrative served many purposes, not the least of which was to find some semblance of understanding of such a harrowing event and to help quell the possible traumatic stress, assisted by lingering memories that he, at that time, could not have understood he suffered from.

**Barnabas Downs’ Icy Abyss**

As Greg Dening wrote poetically, “There are lives caught like dried flowers between the pages of a book.”\(^{33}\) This dissertation seeks to resurrect from obscurity sailors like Barnabas Downs as common men of choice and chance, not just for how they are depicted in historical contexts. Dening argued that

> There is in history no resurrection…only cultivated meaning, although our common prejudice is otherwise. History, by that prejudice, is not an artificial curiosity at all. History, by common sense, is the past itself. It is not independent of our knowing, as wild as reality, controlled and ordered like life, perhaps, but not by us.\(^{34}\)

Here we seek to address traumatized sailors for both who they were and for the memories they sought to address through literary efforts. Barnabas Downs was a sailor, privateer, and common young New England resident that lived, suffered, became a writer, and then died as the nation continued to grow. While his tragedies, life, and eventual natural death seem to have no significant historical importance on the face of common historical understanding, his greatest debt to the course of human endeavors is that he lived. We seek to understand his world through his common experiences, uncommon tragedies, and

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seemingly ordinary existence. The sailors depicted in his study all made history “in the ways History is always made,” as Dening puts it, “by the selective transformations of events and experiences into public cultural forms and narratives.”

Barnabas Downs, Jr. was born in Barnstable, Massachusetts, on 2 October 1757 to, “Credible parents, whom I served as an obedient Son, I hope, until the commencement of the late war called me from my home.” Barnabas Downs served in three campaigns during the war, which, as he recalled, “led me to exchange the occupation of husbandman to which I was bred for the more dangerous employment of a soldier,” but “know not that my behavior was censored by my officers.” Downs then returned home and “to the farming business” and, making only a modest living, he concluded that his fortune was best secured at sea. It was not uncommon for lucrative opportunities in times of war to draw men into service. One privateering sloop, Comet, during the Revolution had its share of prize money distributed as follows: “the captain received five shares, the first lieutenant three shares, the second lieutenant, gunner, boatswain, and steward two shares each, the armorer one and one half shares, seventeen crew members one share each, and two boys one half share each.” One wartime prize, a captured ship, could bring in £30,000. It became widely known that men expected, and many times achieved, quick

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35 Dening, The Death of William Gooch, 19.
36 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 6.
37 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 6.
38 Gilje, Liberty on the Waterfront, 22.
40 “Return of the Crew of the Privateer Sloop Comet,” 29 March 1780. For more statistics see Maclay, A History of American Privateers; Patton, Patriot Pirates; Coggins, Ships and Seamen of the American
rewards through privateering. During peacetime maritime life, quick financial success was not always achieved through routine maritime work. In times of peace, making money through maritime trades, like whaling, was considerably slow and difficult. Whaling, which offered one of the best ways to accumulate wealth, could require a successful voyage as long as three years. Although rewards could add up to a small fortune for those willing to brave the deadly whale, they were not acquired nearly as fast as in privateering.

As a result, Barnabas Downs recognized early on that a “financial quick fix” could easily be achieved as a privateer. Downs began his privateering carrier on board the privateering schooner Bunker-Hill, captained by Isaac Cabb. As Downs recalled, the anticipation of a lucrative first voyage was short-lived, and quickly he experienced an initial “shock” that started a long road towards further stressful events. He commented,

We had not been out more than six days before we were taken by the brig Hope, one Brown, Commander, and carried into Halifax. We were committed to jail and kept very short: Then I was taken with the small-pox, thro’ which GOD safely carried me when destitute of necessaries of life, and under great pressure of mind.

Downs survived small-pox, but was sent back to jail. After receiving a small allowance of salt, which he believed was “next to poison for a sick person,” Downs was taken with a violent fever, which returned him to the hospital. He described his situation as “gloomy” and

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41 Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 323.

42 Norling, Captain Ahab Had a Wife, 123-127 and Dolin, Leviathan, 39-40, 47. See also, Alexander Starbuck, History of the American Whale Fishery (Boston: Castle, 1991).

43 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 5-6.
no person who hath not experienced it can image how gloomy and distressing it is to be under such circumstances…. To be far distant from our dearest Friends; to be among persons who are not only without any concern for us, or interest in our fate, but who are our professed enemies, and not governed even by the common principles of humanity, is a case truly melancholy.  

As Downs remained overcome by bleeding in his nose and a violent fever, he had come “to the gates of the grave.” As he later commented, the stories of quick riches he was told of were not in his forecast. This difficult start was a sign of things to come. Though at that instant, Downs could not have imagined the road ahead, today historians can see a path riddled with complications and destruction, yet historians, as Greg Dening had argued, cannot change their subject’s direction or fate. Examining the death of William Gooch, Dening strongly argued that it is “fraudulent” for historians to read into events better than Gooch. Like all historians, Dening had the power of hindsight and his subject’s story remained as an “after-meditation” that must be understood through its inevitability as things happened in a “particular way at a particular time.”

Barnabas Downs remained in a British prison at Halifax until he had recovered from his fever and was completely rid of all bodily problems removing him, as he recalled, from “the very borders of eternity.” Like four hundred of his countrymen, he was eventually released and returned home. For Downs it was a pleasant experience and one that “any one may imagine more easily than I can describe!” For Barnabas Downs, time at home with family and friends was short-lived. As Downs explained, because the first attempt went so poorly, he “could not resist the inclination I had to try once more

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44 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 6.

45 Dening, The Death of William Gooch, 146.
what Providence would do for me.” The possibility of wealth and excitement was far too good for him to pass up.

When Downs arrived in Boston, he joined the crew of the brig *General Arnold.* Downs recalled that when he boarded the *General Arnold,* he experienced an unusual emotion. “I well remember,” Downs wrote, “I felt an unusual dejection when I entered on this undertaking; and tho’ I pretend not to say that this foreboded the misfortunes I was to meet with in this fatal vessel, yet I have often reflected upon it since with a degree of admiration.” Downs looked back at this event knowing the catastrophic conclusion the fateful voyage, but demanded that he did not forebear the misfortune. Of course this might easily have been a hindsight use of memory by Downs. As he wrote his narrative, Downs knew the end result and might have thrown in this scene of dramatic premonition to add a hint of religious predestination. It might have been his intention for the audience to see that what occurred to Downs was beyond his control. Therefore, he was destined to endure this journey through hell. So, this feeling of impending danger might have been a form of cognitive “bias.” Although he might have had feelings of impending doom, it is probable that Downs unknowingly used this scene to elicit a greater response from his audience or to show that he could not have changed his fate, thus allowing him to accept his present reality and not live in the shadow of “what might have been.” Either way, this moment was used by Downs to consider the event within a larger perspective in terms of life, death, and religious awakening. That focus did not serve to assuage his lingering


memory, but it did show what Downs was trying to achieve, which was to understand how this tragedy could have occurred and if he could have avoided it.

Downs went on to relate that the apprehension he had apparently had was so strong that he tried to abandon the General Arnold as it docked in Boston Harbor preparing to set sail. Downs and “some other hands” attempted to flee using the ships long boat, but the wind “suddenly rising,” they were in danger of capsizing and drowning, so they abandoned the idea. The long boat they were on was suddenly hit by a severe gust of wind and “the boat was run aground on Governor’s-Island, and we were obliged to stay there twenty-four hours before” they could return to the General Arnold. Downs later felt that this instance was a part of the overall plan of “Providence,” which is a significant theme in many disaster narratives. His life had been spared that danger, so he might live through another peril and “testify to [God’s] loving kindness and mercy.”

On Thursday, 24 December 1778, Captain James Magee, an Irish-born American in command of the brig General Arnold, sailed from Boston ready to take on the British navy. As Downs recalled, the vessel had been at sea for only a few hours when suddenly the wind picked up, the snow began to fall harder and faster, and soon they were in the midst of a Nor’ East blizzard. Another ship that had sailed alongside the General Arnold was the Revenge commanded by Captain John Barrows. Barrows decided that he would take the storm on and sail through it off the coast of Cape Cod. Captain James Magee felt that the General Arnold did not have the capability to weather the storm on the open

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48 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 7.


50 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 7-8.
ocean. He decided instead to endure the storm in Plymouth Harbor behind Gurnet Point.\textsuperscript{51} As the \textit{General Arnold} anchored in Plymouth and the wind began to die, a severe cold quickly rolled in and became intense “beyond description.”\textsuperscript{52}

After two days of waiting, on Saturday the 26\textsuperscript{th} of December, the brig’s anchor began to loosen and would not hold. Suddenly, Downs recalled that during this event the vessel began to drift deep into the long harbor. As huge waves crashed over the bow, which quickly formed a coat of ice, nothing seemed to stop the ship from dragging its anchor. At around six o’clock in the morning, “from the violent motion of the sea, the brig struck the bottom as tho’ it would drive her keel in.” Downs remembered that “as there was not depth of water enough to work the vessel in the place where we lay, and we saw a heavy storm coming on, our commander thought it best to cut our cables and let her drive, which was immediately done.”\textsuperscript{53} Downs recalled that the “storm increased very fast so that we were obliged to cut away the main mast, and we drifted upon a hard flat to the Westward of Beach Point.”\textsuperscript{54} Early Saturday, as Down’s remembered, he feverishly began throwing wood overboard and, with the help of other crewmembers, attempted to transport “the sixteen main deck guns” into the hold, but the ship, he recalled, “began to leak very badly.”\textsuperscript{55}

\textsuperscript{51} James Thatcher, \textit{History of Plymouth, From its First Settlement in 1620, to the Present Time: History of the Aborigines of New England, and Their Wars with the English, \&c.} (Boston: Marsh, Capen, and Lyon, 1835), 210-211.

\textsuperscript{52} Downs, \textit{A brief and remarkable narrative}, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{53} Downs, \textit{A brief and remarkable narrative}, 8-9.

\textsuperscript{54} Downs, \textit{A brief and remarkable narrative}, 9.

\textsuperscript{55} Downs, \textit{A brief and remarkable narrative}, 9.
With every motion of the sea the *General Arnold* struck the bottom, giving many sailors, including Downs, the feeling that she was going to split in half and sink. As the crew tried to siphon the water out of the hull with two pumps, “but could not gain upon the water,” the storm continued to inflict havoc and increased to a most “prodigious degree.” The snow was so strong that a sailor on the main deck could see only a few feet in front of him, and still the cold grew harsher. On Saturday the crew neither drank nor ate, instead working hard to save the ship. As Downs concluded, when an individual is burdened with the prospect of death, he loses his appetite and does only what is needed to survive, even if it means missing a meal or drink.\(^{56}\)

Until this point Barnabas Downs had believed that the *General Arnold* and its crew would escape the storm, but as he wrote remembering that day, with an intense memory to guide him, “just before night we looked into the hold and saw the casks floating about; this drove us to despair.”\(^{57}\) Seeing that the water had overtaken the hull of the vessel, Downs and the rest of the crew “forsook the pumps without a ray of hope.” Down’s recalled that he was shocked to watch as men, who had been ever the example of rugged maritime image, dropped to their knees and prayed that “divine Providence” would immediately intercede on their behalf. Himself shocked by the harrowing event that had been unleashed, Downs recalled that

I went into the cabin and sat upon one of the gun carriages. I had not been there long before I saw chests floating about and perceived that the tide was flowing on us very fast. By the direction of the Captain all left the cabin and come upon the quarter-deck. It is not possible to describe my sensations at this time.\(^{58}\)

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Within a few hours, the scene on board proved shocking. Some of the men had been killed under the snow, others perished from the extreme cold, and a few were washed off the deck and drowned.59 “Death appeared inevitable,” and Downs “waited every moment for its approach!” As the terrible moments passed, Downs felt as if he was being drawn closer and closer to the gateway of death. Even years later, he recalled that “when I recollect my feelings, it is difficult to steady my pen and indeed I had ground enough for my apprehensions, for we had not been long upon the quarter-deck before the water upon the main deck was even with it.”60

Although the remaining crew of the General Arnold had found temporary safety on the quarter-deck, the water came in upon the crew ankle-deep and the ship continued to be pelted by the storm, forcing it to roll until “it lay sunk, the tide was flowing fast and the sea broke heavily over us.” The crew then decided to use the remaining sails, which had been removed from the “windward quarter” as blankets to protect them from the cold. As Downs recalled, “there were so many under it that we should have stifled for want of breath, if we had not cut places to let in the air.” As the crew tried to remain warm, huddled under the sails of the General Arnold, the tide refused to abate. Soon nothing was heard on board the vessel except “screeches, groan, and deep lamentations for themselves and their families, and earnest cries to GOD for mercy and relief!”61


60 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 10.

With the snow continuing to fall, many of the men on the quarter-deck, unable to
move, were suffocated where they lay. Downs recalled the moment, during this episode
when he was

thrown down and trampled upon as if the breath would be crowded out of my
body. I soon discovered my feet and trampled upon others in my turn, for my
immediate regard which each man had to his own life prevented him from
attending to the distresses of his neighbor. Struggling in this manner, trying to
clear ourselves who fell down, we pulled off some of our shoes and the wet and
cold soon froze our feet.62

As Saturday grew darker, the officers abandoned any ideas of disciplining the sailors. At
one point some of the crew members had taken hold of some of the casks of wine and
drank from them for liquid warmth. Many of the crew had become severely intoxicated
before Captain Magee realized what had taken place. He tried to order them to put the
brandy into their shoes, “As the alcohol had a lower freezing point than the water which
was soaking them.”63 The difficulty of the sea and the strain on the sailors took its toll.

Downs remembered that soon nature could sustain the men no more and they
began to die at a rapid pace. Captain John Russell of Barnstable, a tall, powerful officer,
whom Downs knew was the first person to die, “but many others soon followed.”

“Fatigue and distress,” Downs commented, “added to the extreme cold and despair of
relief put a period to the lives of many others.”64 Russell had been using his tremendous
endurance to keep his men alive, calling on them for patience, when suddenly he fell on
the deck and “rose no more.”65 On Saturday night, those capable of standing were

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62 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 10.

63 The use of the rum in this manner is said to have saved the lives of several of the men.

64 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, 10-11.

65 Snow, Storms and Shipwrecks of New England, 46.
ordered to do so and huddled in a circle facing each other with their breath keeping each other from the “Silent Death.” As the night wore on, the tide subsided, but the wind grew stronger and colder. As the ship became encased in ice, many men fell overboard into the snow around them only to die of suffocation. All through Saturday night the people of Plymouth could hear the screams and cries from those suffering on board, but had no power to help them. On Sunday, 27 December, as Barnabas Downs fought a battle against the elements, the sun rose to reveal the horrifying sight of the dead and dying onboard the brig General Arnold.

In terms of his narrative, Barnabas Downs wrote of no great enemy and no grand champion. Rather, Downs wrote to understand and find acknowledgement. His rehearsal of his past pain, both through talking about it, reading about it in local papers, and continuously holding yearly events with other survivors to commemorate it, fit perfectly with the creation and stabilization of an enduring memory, created by several horrific events during one long traumatic episode. Although his description of the shipwreck was straightforward, and can be corroborated by Magee’s and Barnstable historian Thatcher’s accounts of the wreck, his motive for writing does have an air of religious determination, as well as financial hope, and the tale served to give language to the images in his head. He tried to find an outlet that could help him cope with an unknown future. Downs used his memory to find comfort in understanding. As Downs wrote in the Preface of his narrative,

66 It should be noted that when a person is exposed to “intense cold” there is always a “propensity to sleep, but the moment it is indulged it becomes the sleep of death.”

67 An advertisement for his “brief narrative” was placed in the Norwich Packet on February 18, 1796. It was advertised for the price of “4 d1/2” and was said to provide an example of “surviving” and “a particular account of” shipwreck. This account was discussed by local papers as well as through an account given by Captain James Magee shortly after the incident.
To the reader into whose hands this narrative may fall, especially my seafaring brethren: Friends – When any remarkable circumstances take place in a man’s life, he feels commonly a disposition to communicate them to the world. If they have been deliverances from great and signal dangers, he will make this communication from a principle of Gratitude to the Being who hath protected and preserved him…By these motives, the subject of the following pages hopes he is influenced in publishing them to the world, which is all the apology that may be expected from the public’s distressed friend.68

Through Downs’ twelve short typed pages of narrative one can survey those moments of personal trauma that Downs experienced. His narrative allows historians to reflect upon a side of both the American Revolution and dark maritime world previously dominated by the overarching exceptionalist history commonly referred to in books and oral discussions. We can observe those horrific experiences, their reflection on stressful memories, and those other recollections that can be considered historical “bias” or part of the overall flow of the conventional historical narrative. To understand their narratives and reasoning behind their stories, historians must consider both their traumatic experiences and the realities they believed their past represented.

The Impressment of Joshua Davis

Like Barnabas Downs, whose experience on the brig General Arnold became linked with maritime disaster, Joshua Davis wrote a narrative describing his experience as an American privateer. His narrative stated that he was an American citizen who had been involved in seven engagements; once wounded, five times put in irons, he was only able to obtain his liberty by desertion during the American Revolution. Davis’ narrative described the discipline, practices, and treatment of impressed seamen in the British Navy. As Davis claimed, his narrative contained “information that never was before presented to the American people,” and with that declaration Davis sought to capitalize

68 Downs, A brief and remarkable narrative, Preface.
on several shocking memories that had been shaped by degradation, yet were used to promote freedom and vengeance.\textsuperscript{69}

Joshua Davis began his privateering career on 14 June 1779 at the age of eighteen out of the port of Boston, Massachusetts, on the ship Jason. Davis did not return home to Boston’s Long Wharf until 30 December 1787, some eight years, six months, and seventeen days after he had departed.\textsuperscript{70} The trials and tribulations, resembling those of the classic literary hero Odysseus from Homer’s the Odyssey, that awaited Davis for over eight years were recounted throughout his narrative. He spoke of his journeys and adventures, his imprisonment and impressments. The tone of his work was not one of dread and unhappiness, but rather constructive, to inform his audience of his ability to overcome adversity and describe for them the horrendous tactics of the “British enemy.”

Davis attempted to take a severe personal pain, which had peppered his memory with vivid depictions of the past, and use them to inspire a nation to fight for those sailors who may have found themselves “sentenced” to the same fate as he was. Davis did not want sailors to be brutalized, degraded, and humiliated for “British” amusement and power and did not want sailors to suffer from the same type of post-traumatic stress of those experiences that would never fade. Therefore, Davis wrote a uniquely crafted narrative positioning him as the focal point and picturing privateering as an experience that made him a patriotic yet an emotionally broken human being. Davis suffered from severe traumatic recollections and possibly hoped a narrative, which dwelled on vengeance, could alleviate these cognitive troubles. By alluding to his trauma and using that cape to

\textsuperscript{69} Joshua Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, an American Citizen Who Was Pressed and Served on Board Six Ships of the British Navy, (Boston: 1811), title page.

\textsuperscript{70} Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 3.
cloak what was truly burning within his psyche, Davis “showed his hand,” but the reader, so engaged with his prose on calling for war, may have failed to recognize Davis’ cognitive turmoil.

During his privateering career, Joshua Davis served on several American, as well as British vessels and sailed all over the globe. He followed orders, helped capture prizes, and observed, firsthand, how naval combat began and concluded. During the course of these conflicts, Davis observed tragedy and trauma. Today his words serve as an interesting and unique “eye,” which historians can call upon when considering maritime history and the American Revolution at sea. Davis’ career aboard the *Jason*, a vessel of twenty guns, under the command of Commodore John Manly, and with Lieutenant Thayer as second mate, began with great hardship. As they left Boston on 25 June 1779, they quickly encountered two unknown vessels in the distance. Although at first it was believed that these two ships were “our privateers with a prize. Lieut. Thayer went forward with the glass, and after looking for some time, said one of them appeared to be a frigate and the other a brig. On running nearer them we supposed them to be enemies.”

Captain Manly was then advised to “heave the ship in stays,” which was done to see if the unknown enemy vessels would follow. Once completed, the enemy vessel “hove in stays, and gave us chase.” After watching this maneuver, Captain Manly ordered the ship to flee towards Portsmouth, NH, but the enemy vessel, as the *Jason* was then within a “half league of the *Isle of Shoals,*” and in gun-shot of the enemy brig. Davis recalled that in a sudden and surprising moment of cognitive clarity, a small squall came from the west, very fast, and, as he remembered, Captain Manly ordered

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71 Davis, *A Narrative of Joshua Davis*, 3.
every man to stand by, to take in sail. When the squall struck us, it hove us all aback—when we clued down. In ten seconds the wind shifted to our starboard beam, and shivered our sails. In a few seconds more the wind shifted on the starboard quarter, and stuck us with such force that hove us on our beam ends, and carried away our three masts and bowsprit. She immediately righted and the squall went over. The vessels that were in chase of us saw our trouble – hove about – and went off with the squall; and we saw no more of them. They had survived their first encounter with an enemy vessel and, unlike several of the sailors who will be examined in this dissertation; they had survived a major squall that came close to wrecking their vessel.

Although they had survived the squall, and maritime chase, the vessel was in bad shape and needed to be fixed. During this occasion, Davis recounted an interesting example of ship discipline, as well as ship brutality by an American captain. As Matthew Raffety has written, “Captains and mates on American merchant vessels have always had an authority problem.” Ship discipline, especially the brutality of the lash, always makes its appearance in popular nautical literature, especially Melville stories like *Billy Budd*, *Benito Cereno*, and *White Jacket*. Richard Henry Dana Jr., was not only the author of the memoir *Two Years before the Mast*, he was also a prominent Boston lawyer. Dana went on to concentrate on maritime law and fought to stop floggings and the brutalities he had observed during his short seafaring career. In October of 1839 Dana wrote an article that took a local judge to task for “letting off a ship’s captain and mate with a slap

72 Davis, *A Narrative of Joshua Davis*, 3-4.

on the wrist for murdering the ship’s cook.”

The captain had beaten him to death for “not laying hold” of a piece of equipment.

In the end, Dana was angered by the judge’s sentence of ninety days in jail for the captain and thirty days in jail for the mate. Dana knew that sailors themselves hated floggings and he sought to act as their political and judicial advocate. Even so Dana admitted that flogging was regarded as a sign of “bad usage, and a bad ship…. The lash’s primary value was not in its actual use (though many captains wore out their leather on the backs of men), but rather as a fearsome last resort that remained always in the back of men’s minds.” As Raffety concluded, “Even captains who barked, or feared the effect a flogging would have on morale, relied to some measure on the security that the idea of the lash provided.” Even so, the events that Davis witnessed and eventually wrote about in an effort to inform and enlighten, in regards to ship-based discipline, proved to be traumatizing to common sailors and events that acted as consequential moments and politically promising in literary circles.

While Captain Manly was on shore seeing that the masts were transported safely onboard, Patrick Cruckschanks, the boatswain, and John Graves, captain of the forecastle, “went forward and set down on the stump of the bowsprit, and said that they would not step the masts in such a wild rode stead, to endanger their lives, but if the ship was taken into the harbor, they would do it with pleasure.” When Captain Manly returned and was

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told why the crew was not at work and that they wished to get into the harbor first, the

Captain, as Davis recalled,

answered, “I’ll harbor them,” and stepped up to the sentry at the cabin door, took
his cutlass out of his hand, and ran forward, and said, “boatswain, why do you not
go to work?” He began to tell him the impropriety of getting the masts in where
the ship was, when Capt. MANLY struck him with the cutlass on the check, with
such force that his teeth were to be seen from the upper part of his jaw to the
lower part of his chin.78

The captain went to speak with John Graves who, when asked the same question and was
about to answer, was struck with the cutlass on the head, which cut him so badly that he
was transported to the ship hospital. When it was all over Captain Manly, with severe
threats, ordered everyone to work and in the space of thirty-six hours, everything the
captain wanted done, was completed. As the drama of this event continued, Davis argued
that the threat of physical pain allowed for the masts to be “stepped…placed on end.” The
sailors fear of punishment inspired them to “lower the yards athwart and the top gallant
masts on end,” concluding their task by bending the sails, running the rigging rove, and
putting the boats on beams.79

After meeting up with the privateer Hazard, out of Boston, Captain Manly
ordered the Jason to Penobscot, and within a few days the ship was off of Sandy Hook,
but at about three o’clock of the next day the “sailing master went to the fore-top-mast-
head, to look out for a sail,” and once gazed out upon the ocean and declared, “a sail on
the weather bow.” After a few moments the Jason pulled anchor and made sail for them.
In two hours the Jason was within “two gun-shot of them” and Captain Manly ordered
every man to quarters. Davis recalled that

78 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 5.
79 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 5.
the enemy hove upon the wind, with his larboard tacks on board – run up his courses, hoisted his colours, and gave us a broad side. Our Captain ordered the sailing master to get the best bower anchor out….The Captain ordered held hard a-port, which brought us a long side. The anchor caught their fore rigging. Our Captain then said, “fire away, my boys.” We gave them a broadside, which tore her off side very much, and killed and wounded some of them. The rest ran below, except their Captain, who stood on the deck like a man amazed.\textsuperscript{80}

Victory belonged to the \textit{Jason}. The crew of the \textit{Jason} boarded the vessel, removed all its crewmen and placed them into irons. Once all sailors, and other material deemed worthy of prize status, were taken on board the \textit{Jason} Captain Manly ordered that his vessel be disentangled from their prize and chase another enemy privateer that had sailed into the area. As Davis remembered, the only man injured during these two engagements was their sailing master, who was wounded in the head and would soon die in the ship’s hospital. Although Davis was pleased with the outcome of this trip, the death of the sailing master had proved that oceanic combat could bring dire consequences. Even as they hauled their two prizes back to port, the frigate \textit{Hazard} of eighteen guns from Liverpool and the brig \textit{Adventurer} of eighteen guns from Glasgow, Davis had no idea that these two victories would be his last, at least in an American uniform.

Davis’ accounts of naval combat are fascinating pieces of political propaganda, or at least would become such as the War of 1812 approached. He wrote in a manner that provided drama and glory to the American cause of freedom during the American Revolution, yet these recollections were reliant on moments of surprise, trepidation, and disgust, more than moments of glory or positivity. He argued that sailors played a significant part in wreaking havoc on British shipping and played an important role in helping the American colonists win their Independence. His narrative, therefore, serves

\textsuperscript{80} Davis, \textit{A Narrative of Joshua Davis}, 6.
the purpose of shedding light on the bravery and courage of common American sailors during the Revolutionary War, but it also sought to uncover the horrors inflicted upon those same sailors by both the British Navy and the ferocity of the ocean. Davis recounted, through a clear and near flawless description, how he was first captured and pressed into the service of the British navy. Davis remembered another terrible event when, on 30 September 1779, the “man at the maintop masthead cried out, ‘a sail on our starboard beam.’”

Although the weather proved too calm to give chase, Davis’s recalled that “she took the wind first, and came after us….She came up under our larboard quarter about eleven that night. On hailing her, we found her to be the Surprise Frigate….They ordered us to ‘heave too, or they would fire into us.’ We replied, ‘fire away, and be d—d, we have got as many guns as you.’”81 Shortly after that declaration, the Surprise swung around and came to the Jason and gave them a broadside “which cut away some of our running rigging, and drove some of our men from the tops. We gave them a broadside, which silenced two of her bow guns. The next we gave her, cut away her maintop sail, and drove her maintop-men out of it.”82 Both sides continued to fire upon one another until one o’clock that morning. In the end, the Jason’s “studding sails and booms…sails, rigging, yards, & c. were so cut away that they were useless. Lanterns were hung at the ship’s side, between guns, on nails; but they soon fell on deck, at the shaking of the guns; which made it so dark that the men could not see to load the guns.” Ultimately the British sailors of the Surprise successfully stormed upon the Jason by breaking open the “fore

81 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 11.
82 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 11-12.
hatches” and running below deck. The Jason was taken as an English prize and soon after, catching word of an American plot to retake the ship, the first Lieutenant, Mr. Lane, of the Surprise ordered the entire Jason crew to be placed in irons and searched and pillaged of anything of value.

In the aftermath of this overwhelming defeat, that Joshua Davis was ordered to board the frigate Surprise and to “continue” his privateer service, but now with the British navy. Davis objected, telling them that he was “a prisoner of war, and would not go.” First Lieutenant Lane looked at him, Davis remembered, and “called me a d—d Yankee rascal, and if I said a word more, he would tie me up to the gangway and give me a dozen lashes.” Even so, Davis found an opportunity to hide among his shipmates, who had been ordered to prison, and followed them onboard the prison ship, where he was put in irons with his compatriots. But Davis’ escape from impressment was short lived as First Lieutenant Lane noticed Davis going onboard the prison ship and took him by the collar and said, “you d—d rascal, how come you are here? Away on board of the boat, this minute.” Davis was brought back to the frigate and began his first shift as an impressed American privateer put into British service.

As Davis was transported to the Portland, a frigate of fifty guns, under the command of Admiral Edwards, Commodore Manly of the Jason was ordered to the Portland to receive a communication from the Admiral. As soon as Manly came on board the Portland he was met by Admiral Edwards who asked him, “Are you not the same John Manly that commanded a privateer from Boston, called the Columbia?” Manly, who had been captured previously and escaped, answered “Yes.” The admiral looked at

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83 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 13.
Manly, knowing how he had brought devastation to the British navy previously and had attained release from prison through bribery, said, “You are no gentleman, Sir; go on board the ship that took you, and there you shall be confined until you arrive in England, where you shall be kept during the war.” According to Davis, Manly was eventually transported to Mill Prison where he stayed until 1789, “when an exchange of prisoners took place, and he was sent to France.” Soon after he returned to his home in Boston he volunteered for naval service and took command of a continental frigate, which sailed for the West Indies.

As an impressed sailor, Davis wrote of the many engagements he was involved in and the brutal punishments he was forced to endure when he refused to obey his commanders. On one such occasion Davis recalled, “While our ship,” the Portland, “was lying in Plymouth Sound, an order was sent on board from Admiral Digby, commander in Plymouth Dock, to slip our cables, and out to sea.” They immediately obeyed their orders, Davis recounted, fearing punishment if they did not, and ran westward, continuing on this path for the rest of the night. The next morning, Davis recalled, they “saw a sail to the leeward of us. We bore down, in order to speak to her. It being hazy weather, and a gale coming on we thought it best to hove too, in order to take in sail which we had scarcely finished, when another sail was seen to leeward of the first, and (a brig).” Fearing that they might be outnumbered, Davis recollected that several crewmembers ran

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84 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 14-15.
85 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 15.
86 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 15.
87 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 15.
down under the brigs quarter, and hailed her. They informed us that she was the
Hope, kings tender; from Falmouth bound for Portsmouth, England…We left her
and gave chase to the other sail, a ship, which we overhauled very fast. In the
course of two hours we came up with them, and ordered them to strike their
colours, which they refused to do. We gave them a broadside, and they returned
it—We gave them one more, which made them haul their colours down.88

David contested that the Portland ran to leeward of the anonymous vessel, “in order to
secure our half port, and bring our ship to the wind; it blowing very hard, we could not
beat up for her.” Then a few minutes later, the Portland’s crew observed as the unmarked
vessel came bearing down upon them, “under the press of sail.” When the Portland’s
captain witnessed what was taking place, he ordered “the ship put away…but all to no
purpose; the prize came upon us very fast, and seemed determined to sink us, by running
aft of our stern, which we perceived when they got within pistol shot.”89 The Captain
of the Portland hailed the attacking ship and ordered it to “bear away” or he warned his
vessel would “fire broadside and sink them.”

In a moment of intense emotional fear, Joshua Davis experienced what he called a
terrible “shock.” Although Davis had lived through many naval engagements like the one
previously described, and he would live through many more, all were described in detail
in his maritime narrative and diary. On this occasion, he wrote about the shock he had
been overcome with and that, during this episode, “fell on the ship’s deck.” In a moment
of surprise, the enemy vessel refused to listen to the Portland’s warning and
came down on our starboard quarter with such force as to tear away our quarter
badges with the fluke on his small bow anchor….The prize immediately hove
too…We hoisted our cutter, which sunk in a few minutes…finally we got the long

88 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 16.
89 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 16.
boat out, and dropped her down safe; a number of seamen and marines got on board of her out of the gun-room windows. 90

The next day a great wind came to their back and the Portland headed towards Cherwell with its prize. After staying in Spithead for several days, the Portland, with Davis still an impressed member, and in the company of the Indiaman of forty-four guns, the frigate Emerald of thirty-six guns, the ship Huzza of twenty guns, the ship Squirrel of twenty guns, the schooner Wasp of twelve guns, and the cutter Wolfe of twelve guns – all departed and sailed toward “Concall Bay on the French coast” to disrupt and damage French and American shipping and naval abilities. 91 Although Davis’ time as an impressed sailor was long and trying, it is important to understand why Davis, after these tragedies he experienced sought to publish a detailed account of his sufferings.

Joshua Davis discussed his reasons for publishing his work in 1811. Davis recalled that when he arrived home in 1787, he went into business with the hope of making up for lost time and for many years continued in that business, but with no luck. 92 Like all privateers, Davis was not entitled to a military pension. After his failed attempts at business, he understood that in a time when impressments were such a powerful political issue, he could make money by writing of his experience as a prisoner of war. Clearly, a financial “payoff” was a primary reason Davis chose to write his narrative. Yet its greatest success was undoubtedly its vividness and human story. Published in 1811, his narrative was perfectly timed and filled with adventure as well as brutality. Davis’ narrative described his detention experience, allowing for his literary piece to be

90 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 16-17.
91 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 17.
92 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 71.
considered a captivity narrative, so that his audience might understand the pain inflicted on those who served on privateering vessels and were imprisoned against their will. Davis stated he wanted to “give the reader a more brief account of the different proceedings in the British navy for the information of my friends and fellow citizens,” so that Americans could understand just how dangerous maritime life, especially as a privateer, was. Those narratives written by soldiers, sailors, and even common folk captured by diverse enemies that spoke to their confinement and the brutalities that suffered all wrote with the intent to inform and elucidate a continuing problem that needed to be combated. Captivity narratives served both to inform a national public and for the victim to cope with the horrendous events they experienced.93 Davis stated that he offered a description of the British proceedings for “those of his countrymen, who should be forced on board any ships of his Britannic majesty.”94 Through memories arising during one long traumatic ordeal, Davis considered these lasting recollections in an attempt to enhance his name in the accounts of maritime narratives, which had gained notoriety in American literature.

Even though these sailors’ memories cannot be considered absolute truth, they must be considered important in the sense that they provide a deeper understanding of these sailor’s past traumas and why they chose to put memory to paper. These memories


94 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 62.
were persistent, and although not a perfect representation of that past must be examined as a detailed representation of what those sailors considered to be true and what historians must consider an honest, even though not perfect, illustration of that perilous world. As Daniel Schacter has argued, “persistence,” a sin of memory that he has investigated, is strongly linked with “our emotional lives” and therefore to understand the concept of long-lasting troubling memories, one must understand the “relationship between emotion and memory.”

He agrees with cognitive theorists and physiologists who have studied traumatic memories, discussing that “emotionally charged incidents are better remembered than non-emotional events” and that the “emotional boost begins at the moment that memory is born, when attention and elaboration strongly influence whether an experience will be subsequently remembered or forgotten.”

With Barnabas Downs, whose experience has only begun to be historically unraveled, his dramatic memories served to illustrate both the importance of memory, the significance of traumatic exposures, and how the American maritime world conveyed an uncertain, as well as unreliable promise of future endeavors. Although the prize may be sought, the flag strung up in defense of country, and the cannons sounding the “performance” of battle, the reality of such actions is many times deadly and all too real both for those that witnessed the horror and those who went home with those visions in their minds. Yet these are the men who lived and could speak about such experiences. This is so, even as they acknowledged that many friends, countrymen, and their own

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95 Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 163.
96 Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 163.
“youth” and innocence died on those ships that fell prey to a determined enemy, whether that was the British or a brutal New England storm.

As was the case with Downs, many of Joshua Davis’s unsettling traumatic experiences, which are disclosed below, clear examples of disturbing memories and evidence of possible “traumatic stress,” served as cautionary “survival guides,” and whose current emotional state and activities were “guided” away from similar sources of trouble. This conceivably fits with Schacter’s and Judith Herman’s argument about persistent memories that in Schacter’s words, “preserve the intense fear and anxiety that prevailed during the original experience.” Even so, Schacter observed “persistent” memories, or traumatic memories, as healthy and natural functions. For all its “disruptive power, persistence” serves to confront events that are hard to ignore, but must not be forgotten, because even though considered an “inconvenience or annoyance,” they instead are a survival mechanism and a “symptom of some of the greatest strengths of the human mind.” The mind serves to protect its body through the consistent remembering of distressing experiences that are encapsulated in the traumatic memory. Psychologists Judith Herman and Jonathan Shay both consider these same ideas and have advanced the study of trauma, recovery, and memory to important unprecedented levels. As Shay has written, “it is important that the trauma survivor must be permitted and empowered to voice his or her experience; the listener(s) must be permitted to listen, believe, and remember; the listener(s) must be allowed to repeat what they have heard to others.”

For Joshua Davis his pain serves as a historical marker and window into the world he

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97 Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 181 and Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 37-42.

98 Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 183.

99 Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 244. See also, Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 29.
understood existed. It is the historian’s job to observe what sailors’ recollections imply and traumatic experiences present in historical contexts.

Through his narrative Davis hoped to keep those who followed in his place safe from the severe punishment of British captors, as well as to enlighten his countrymen about the cruelty of the British navy. In the conclusion of his narrative, by far the most important and informative part of his work, Davis included an “appendix,” which he argued served as his “step by step” instruction piece to warn his brethren of their impending doom if they sail the sea during war. Davis asserted:

My advice to you is, to avoid drinking….If you get intoxicated, and fight with one of your own class, you are put in irons one night, and the next day…the boatswain’s mate gives you a dozen lashes. If you strike an admiral, a commodore, captain, or lieutenant, you are tried by court martial, and sentenced to be hung up at the yard arm, or be flogged through the fleet. You have the right to speak in your behalf, and [choose] whether you will be hung or flogged. On the morning of your execution, a yellow flag is hoisted at the fore-top-mast-head, as a signal, and a bow gun is fired, to inform the fleet, who lower their [colors] at half-mast.\textsuperscript{100}

As Davis explained, if the “accused” selected to be hung instead of “flogged through the fleet,” a day of execution was appointed and the master-at-arms knocked off the prisoners’ irons, and brought them to the quarter deck, “and from thence to the forecastle,” where they would stand until the captain of the forecastle went “on the end of the fore yard, and \textit{reves} a rope through the block prepared for the purpose.”\textsuperscript{101} Davis, who recounted these punishments watched as both impressed American and British sailors were subjected to these abuses during his decade-long imprisonment. He remembered those tragic events as if they had occurred just days before. “The chaplain then comes up

\textsuperscript{100} Davis, \textit{A Narrative of Joshua Davis}, 64.

\textsuperscript{101} Davis, \textit{A Narrative of Joshua Davis}, 65-66.
to the forecastle,” as Davis remembered, “and makes a short prayer—after which the master at arms turns to you, and says, ‘You are to be hung by the neck under the yard, until you are dead, dead, dead; and may the Lord have mercy on your soul.’”¹⁰² With this the “prisoner” was hung for an hour and given a watery grave or a land grave if the ship was anchored near land.

Davis described how some “poor” sailors were forced to “run the gauntlet.” As Davis explained, “you are brought upon deck and the boatswain pipes all hands, and orders his yeomen to bring up a quantity of tarred rope yarn” which every man was ordered to hold tight and stand five feet apart from one another.¹⁰³ The accused was then told to strip and stand between the ranks. Davis continued,

Master at arms walks before you, with a sword under his arms, then point towards you, to prevent your running forward—two corporals walk behind, with swords in their hands, to keep you from running back. The boatswain starts you by a stroke on the back with the cat-o’-nine-tails.¹⁰⁴

As Davis horrifically remembered this routine, an individual must run on deck three times and each time he completed one circle he was thrashed with the cat-o’-nine-tails. Davis warned that “It is in vain for you to cry, scream, jump, roll, for you must grin and bear it, as none will pity you. Finally you look like a piece of raw beef from your neck to the waist of your trousers. Once it was over salt was rubbed on your back and you were sent back to work.”¹⁰⁵ On one occasion on 28 December 1784, Davis recalled how he, as well as ship and crew, were laying in Plymouth sound, with a number of other

¹⁰² Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 65.
¹⁰³ Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 67-68.
¹⁰⁴ Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 68.
¹⁰⁵ Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 68.
ships, when “a man belonging to the Queen, of 98 guns, struck his first lieutenant, on the nose with his fist, which occasioned two black eyes.” This man, as Davis remembered, was tried by court martial and “sentenced to receive 800 lashes.” Although Davis was unable to watch the actual flogging take place, he did observe the terrible aftermath of the punishment. He wrote that he was shocked to see as “the blanket was taken off his shoulders by our master at arms” that “his head hung back. Our captain ordered the doctor to feel his pulse, and found that the man was dead.”

Joshua Davis illustrated the agony inflicted on American sailors, yet at the same time unknowingly gave historians a unique portrait of those memories that occurred during a distressing ordeal and elaborated on a dark maritime world that he did not even truly understand. Through this first-hand experience, Davis’ personal identity was transformed. Thus his memories not only informed “future behaviors and decisions, they contributed strongly” to maintaining that identity and joining, collectively, with others to “achieve important interpersonal goals.” On the last page of his narrative, Davis wrote directly to those wondering about the fate of their “fathers, husbands, brothers, uncles, cousins, or sweethearts” as they live their lives on the ocean, “which is now ruled by the ships of his Britannic Majesty.” Davis wrote to those who found themselves on those “hellish floating torments,” and most times these men wrote for help, but assistance was

106 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 68.

107 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 68-69.


109 Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 68.
blocked by the oppression of their captors.\textsuperscript{110} He wrote to inform Americans that the ocean was unsafe for American shipping and that the concern about impressments and free navigation of the seas was a call to arms to protect sailors’ rights. Through this “rehearsal” of his traumatic and emotionally charged events, Davis built a collective, personal, as well as communal identity with other sailors who followed his path and found tragedy on the open ocean.

Though shaded in patriotism, propaganda, and a call for war, Davis described a dangerous world that he could not control, but strangely was within his cognitive power to tell of, as well as remember. Davis sought vengeance and closure from a disastrous maritime past that infected his mind. Yet at the same time Davis unknowingly built an identity around a definable and retentive memory. The atrocities he wanted revenged were painful recollections that others had experienced and therefore he helped to establish a community, which was enhanced by the literary construction of his traumatic memory. The very moment that Davis wrote of his war experience, his bravery and his pain, even if he had sought to shade the trauma of his past through patriotic prose, he actually brightened those hidden components with a great intensity and ignited a fuse that seemingly refused to dissipate.

Men like Davis, even Barnabas Downs and Andrew Sherburne – really all the maritime men discussed in this dissertation – sought to position sailors as “figures of national, sympathetic importance in a time when mariners were typed as profane or degenerate, on the margins of ‘civil’ society.”\textsuperscript{111} They all invoked a sense of a

\begin{footnotes}
\item[110] Davis, A Narrative of Joshua Davis, 69.
\item[111] Blum, The View from the Masthead, 68.
\end{footnotes}
“brotherhood of literate sailors” and their subsequent narratives suggest that sailors had “more power and autonomy over their own circulation in the Atlantic world than their potential for seizure might have otherwise indicated.”\textsuperscript{112} This sense of security was noteworthy for American sailors. Through their written words, they enhanced their image as “literate,” shaped the collective impression of sailors, and introduced a reading public to the world of maritime tragedy.

In a time when impressments were a major issue, Davis’ account added fuel to the fire of discontent. Yet the narrative itself served as a reminder of why America fought to become an independent nation. Yet the “trauma” he wrote about was pushed into the background in the typical “glowing” American narrative of sacrifice during the war. In its “wake” the forgotten emotional world that sailors suffered in was left beyond the reader’s imagination. Like veterans of the Civil War, Vietnam, and other American wars, soldiers and sailors came home and continued to suffer. Yet that common story, especially for sailors in the Early National Period of American history, is avoided for an all-too-similar nationalistic tale. Davis elaborated on an already volatile situation in the United States and his story served as political propaganda for it. Although his motives for writing are clearly financial and educational, he possessed a stirring story of maritime drama and brutality that might sell, but only temporarily. His success was short-lived. In writing about this hazardous world, Davis roused a call for vengeance and in the process validated the memories that troubled him.

\textsuperscript{112} Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 68.
The Political Ambition of Andrew Sherburne

At the same time Downs and Davis each joined the American struggle as privateers, Andrew Sherburne, another New Englander, looked to reap the benefits of prizes and glory. Like Downs and Davis, Sherburne wrote about his experience, but in contrast to Downs, Sherburne wrote of his time with glowing admiration for his nautical service and used that “lionizing” prose to hide the true content of his writing. He differed from Barnabas Downs in how he perceived the vocation he had joined. For Downs it was a tragedy, for Sherburne it was the greatest time of his life, and in the 1830s when the American people began to look back on the revolutionary era with admiration, Sherburne was more than willing to share his stories of drama and heartbreak on the high seas and to be the hero the American people were looking for. After all, this was a time when young Americans looked to recapture the patriotic spirit of the past and those who served in the war.

He offered himself up as a veteran of the “great war” and used both positive and negative events for the same result, to show himself off as a patriot, not a victim.

Andrew Sherburne was born on 30 September 1765 in Portsmouth, New Hampshire within, as he recalled, “one hundred rods of the Atlantic Ocean.” He was only nine years old when General Gage took possession of Boston, which Sherburne recalled as the “cradle of American Independence.” As the problems in the colonies continued, Sherburne grew weary as to the extent of the hostilities and anticipated his role in a future confrontation. As Sherburne remembered:


Ships were building, prizes taken from the enemy uploading, privateers fitting out, standards waved on the forts and batteries, the exercising of soldiers, the roar of cannon, the sound of martial music and the call for volunteers so infatuated me, that I was filled with anxiety to become an actor in the scene of war.  

At the age of fourteen, Andrew Sherburne confessed to his sister that if his father did not consent to his plan to join a local privateering vessel and go to sea, he would run away and enlist on a privateer without their knowledge. As Sherburne explained, his “mind became so infatuated with the subject that I talked of it in my sleep, and was overheard by my mother.” Sherburne’s mother expressed grave fears of his possible service to his father, but in the end they both consented so that he would not run away to join without them knowing. It was not uncommon for boys and men to leave the countryside with “cheese and a loaf of bread” and go to the city, step on board a privateer, make a journey and return home – all of this in ignorance of friends and family. As Sherburne commented, “Though these rash young adventurers did not count the cost, or think of looking at the dark side of the picture, yet this spirit…enabled our country to maintain a successful struggle and achieve her independence.”

Andrew Sherburne’s maritime narrative is over three hundred pages, with the first third devoted to his time as a privateer. Even though he did spend time as a prisoner of war, he only briefly discussed his prison life from November of 1781 to November of

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117 Andrew Sherburne’s father, a staunch Whig, disapproved of the practice of privateering.

1782, instead devoting more time to his success as a privateer.\textsuperscript{119} Unlike other narratives of maritime life, Sherburne’s account of privateering was one of glorification, but the trauma of his past is horrifically presented, even if indirectly. The most potent remarks that Sherburne made in his work were the “fantastic” detail about his service. He commented,

Parents saw with pain their sons advancing from childhood to youth. My reader can but faintly imagine the feelings of an aged father or an affectionate mother, perhaps a widow, when news arrived that a son had fallen in the field of battle, or had languished and died in an hospital, or still remained a prisoner in the hands of a foe, whose tender mercies were cruel. Danger however did not deter our young men from sailing to meet the foe upon the ocean.\textsuperscript{120}

Sherburne alluded to, but never directly elaborated on the truly disturbing events of his sailing past, but we can nonetheless recognize events that could have inspired the creation of a traumatic memory. He only addressed those moments of past trauma as they could be used to sharpen the image he sought to create. His work is autographical in that it seeks to consider his entire life from beginning to the work’s creation. Yet his memories, as well as traumatic events, that he suffered from, and through, were present in many of the memories he recalled. But the historian must bring his intentions forward.

Sherburne’s experience at the British prison serves as the best example of life inside those prison walls and how one survived, even if Sherburne attempted to use that same horrific time to enhance his self-image. Sherburne noted that “he and other captured Americans were flogged when they refused to serve against the United States and


\textsuperscript{120} Sherburne, \textit{Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne}, 18-19.
demanded prisoner-of-war status.”\textsuperscript{121} Sherburne continuously wrote of the United States as the land of liberty in opposition and a haven from British oppression.\textsuperscript{122} When the privateer \textit{Ranger}, commanded by Thomas Simpson, was ready to ship out, Sherburne took the opportunity to get on board. Through his narrative Sherburne patriotically defined the daily routine of maritime life and his journey to becoming a war hero.

The start of Sherburne’s voyage began rather oddly and almost ended immediately. As Sherburne recalled, once underway out of Boston, it was not long till such gloom and horror fell upon my mind as I never before experienced, such melancholy and despondency as I have never before or since felt, and which it is impossible for me to describe, I resolved to return home, but even in this resolution I could not anticipate the least degree of relief.\textsuperscript{123}

Although Sherburne had second thoughts about his decision to join a privateer, he soon grew more accustomed to this new “sea life” and went about his duty, but his melancholy, as he described it, was a constant source of trouble and would appear out of nowhere. In some way, Sherburne wrote about this start to his revolutionary career as an attempt to identify himself with many of those who might have felt the same as he, but had the courage to see this journey through. From this point, Sherburne crafted a compelling story where he detailed maritime engagements and near death experiences.

One morning Sherburne awoke to find an English ship of war following the \textit{Ranger}. It was around seven o’clock when, as Sherburne recalled, one of the crew yelled out, “A sail, a sail on the lee-bow; another there, and there.” As Sherburne recalled, “Our young officers ran up the shrouds and with their glasses soon ascertained that more than

\textsuperscript{121} Sherburne, \textit{Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne}, 18-124.

\textsuperscript{122} Glenn, \textit{Jack Tar’s Story}, 53.

\textsuperscript{123} Sherburne, \textit{Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne}, 35.
fifty sail could be seen from the mast-head." At this point Sherburne’s ship was in a fleet of American privateers that had left the port of Boston and included the Providence frigate, commanded by Commodore Whipple, the Boston frigate, and the Queen of France. They had encountered the Jamaica fleet, which “consisted of about one hundred and fifty sail, some of which were armed, was convoyed by one or two line of battle ships, several frigates and sloops of war.”

As Sherburne described the fleet, the Ranger was in the rear and he began to grow anxious of the probable encounter. Noticing that the Boston frigate had moved away from the rest of the fleet to give chase to some of the large battleships, the Ranger lost no time in moving to pursue a large ship with guns ready. Sherburne illustrated that the Commodore hauled his wind again and in the course of an hour we came up with the ship, which proved to be the Holderness, a three decker, mounting 22 guns. Although she had more guns, and those of heavier metal than ourselves, her crew was not sufficiently large to manage her guns, and at the same time work the ship. She was loaded with cotton, coffee, sugar, and rum. While we were manning her out, our Commodore captured another and gave her up to us.

As the crew of the Ranger successfully boarded several ships taking them in as prizes, they knew that as night rolled in, they would need to sail “easy” if they were going to return to port with their prizes unharmed. When moving towards home, “we gained sight of three ships to which we gave chase, and called all hands to quarters.”

During the chase the crew of the Ranger grew alarmed by the sight of two larger ships charging directly towards them under full sail. When they discovered one of the

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124 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 21.
125 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 21-22.
126 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 23.
127 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 24-27.
ships to be unarmed, they instantly pressed on to capture the other ship. As they chased that vessel, another vessel flying British colors gave them chase and the Ranger turned to take that ship on. Once they edged closer to the ship, the crew noticed that the ship was not British, but rather the American privateer Providence flying English colors, as a naval act of subterfuge. After securing their prizes, and having ordered their flags lowered and prisoners locked in irons, the Ranger and the Providence set sail back to Boston.

Andrew Sherburne wrote his narrative in 1828, which was over fifty-five years since the American Revolution had ended. Even though he had reminisced about the war a thousand times, he had difficulty assigning a meaning to the war’s significance. Sherburne looked back with awe and satisfaction, and wrote to an audience of patriotic Americans looking to recapture the spirit of 1776. He wrote during a time when people looked to the revolution for inspiration. Sherburne wrote his narrative to those seeking to understand the Revolution, thus offering an adventure story to accompany the legacy of the war. Sherburne created an image of himself as an American champion in a time that honored and respected the military hero. Sherburne might have attempted to write his work to gain financial success, which is evident from his future pension applications in 1832, once privateers were allowed to request pension payments. Therefore, the better and more thrilling the tale, the more copies sold and financial success achieved.

Although Sherburne experienced several traumatic events, he considered them as moments in time and not solely life-altering moments, with exception of one of those memories. In terms of the shipwreck, it was such a horrifying incident that Sherburne considered it the most momentous and unforgettable episode of his young life. The “pen,” as he recalled, “cannot describe, nor can imagination conceive, the terrific scene
of a shipwreck….It must be experienced to be comprehended.”

In one moment, Sherburne recounted that on 19 September 1781 at about five o’clock in the evening, “there were loud and repeated cries from the forecastle, ‘breakers on the lee bow!’ ‘breakers ahead!’” This doleful sound caused every ear to tingle, and every heart to thrill! Suddenly, Sherburne recalled, the ship rounded too “and the following sea phrase was heard…‘stand by to about ship, hard to lee, fore sheet, fore top bowline, jib and staysail sheets, let go!’” As the ship headed into the wind, but before the foretop sail could be properly fitted, the wind, with an immense violence, and waves, with great strength, smashed upon the ship with such force that she was thrown, “stern first, against a rugged bluff of rocks, which was, I should judge, fifteen or twenty feet above the water, almost perpendicular.” He recalled that “the ship struck with such violence as to break off her rudder and knock” two men overboard, “who [were] at the helm; a fourth attempt to reach the rock but failed and went overboard. The two who fell overboard were immediately dashed against the rock and disappeared.”

According to Sherburne the ship was lost, unable to be “governed,” and the crew was in a state of confusion, despair, and panic as they “were at the mercy of the waves.” Sherburne’s memory of that event sheds light on the shocking moments of this shipwreck. With assistance from one traumatic recollection, Sherburne remembered that

The ship struck fast upon a craggy rock which lay under water, about twice her length from the shore, and probably broke in several of her floor timbers. All this took place before half the people were were below, got on deck, which was nearly half of the crew. I was going up the fore hatchway when she struck on this rock, and looking down in the hold, I saw the water gushing up with violence (through

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the gravel in which the lower tier of water casks were stowed,) in stream eight to ten inches in diameter.”

“A most terrifying scene,” Sherburne recalled, “was not presented to my view.” Sherburne remembered that the ship began to roll over so that “her yard arms nearly touched the water: the sea breaking feather white all around us. Under the fog bank which hung over the shore, we could discover the mountain, but could not see the top of it; the wind” continued heavily, the rain “descended in torrents,” the sea roared like thunder, and “night coming on apace, some of the officers raving and swearing, some crying, and others praying, some inactive and desponding, others active and courageous.” They attempted to launch a long boat, but quickly the heavy sea threw itself at their effort and destroyed the boat against the ship “as quick,” Sherburne remembered, “as you could crush an egg shell in your hand.”

For hours the crew labored against the vicious sea, as men were thrown overboard to an uncertain fate, but the crew fought and battled with courage. At one point, as Sherburne attempted to help right the ship so the crew could somehow gain access to the land that they could see but had trouble reaching, a massive wave struck him and threw him into the mighty ocean. His fate appeared sealed, but he held on to a rope that was attached to the ship. Sherburne recalled that although he was a good swimmer,

The first swell and wave which run was in some measure obstructed by the ship, it however buried me for a short time. When the second sea came, I was exposed to its whole violence; while it was running it seemed as if I should have been pressed to death, and the time seemed exceedingly long. I was hanging by my hands and stretched as straight horizontally, as if I had been suspended in the air;

131 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 56-57.

132 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 57.

133 Sherburne, Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne, 57-58.
but before the current abated, my right hand gave way, and was carried back in a moment.\textsuperscript{134}

Sherburne reflected that

Oh the multiplicity of thoughts that rushed into my distracted mind! One among the many was that the left hand would continue its hold until I should drown; another was that I must directly appear before my Judge. I felt my hand and arm faltering, and I expected to be immediately in eternity; I wished to express a thousand desires in one, and I felt disposed to cast myself on the mercy of God….But I am laboring in vain, for I cannot possibly express what my feelings were. God spared me.\textsuperscript{135}

Sherburne survived, as he remembered, by fending off five massive waves that had seemed destined to strike him down and initiate a meeting with his “maker” and “judge.” Eventually the waves pushed him upon the rocks and he gained the ability to stand and observe in front of him the wreck that had nearly and probably should have cost him his life. It was near sundown when Sherburne cast his eyes upon the wreck and thought that he felt “truly thankful to God for such a preservation and deliverance.” As the storm began to abate, the waves grew calmer, and the wind lost its heavy blow, the surviving crewmen found safe passage to land and they began the process of constructing a camp where they might sleep, store supplies from their destroyed vessel, and contemplate a way to return home. At this point they were wrecked on the eastern side of St. Mary, “perhaps ten miles from the pitch, or head of the cape” in Newfoundland. There these seamen remained for one month until the British sloop of war the \textit{Fairy}, a vessel of eighteen guns, came into the harbor. At this time, some of the crew were thrown into

\textsuperscript{134} Sherburne, \textit{Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne}, 60.

\textsuperscript{135} Sherburne, \textit{Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne}, 60.
prison, others promised consul, but Sherburne and a few others “were destined to serve his majesty on board the *Fairy*….commanded by Captain Yeo, a complete tyrant.”

Sherburne, one month removed from a violent shipwreck that almost cost him his life, continued his struggle. He feared that his “fate was sealed to serve his Britannic majesty on board a man of war, all my days; a service which I had detested from my infancy.” Even before Sherburne was six years old, he thought he had heard his parents speak of “their friends who had been impressed on board of men of war….Our sailors and fishermen used to dread the sight of a man of war’s boat, as a flock of sheep would dread the appearance of a wolf.” Like Joshua Davis, Sherburne’s privateering career during the American Revolution had brought him to be impressed and flung upon the brutality and mercy of his British enemy. The brutalities he witnessed, like the impressment and incessant flogging of his countrymen – all added to Sherburne’s American character and may have enhanced his courageous standing in the eyes of the American people.

Although he used shipwrecks, floggings by an inhumane British captain, and scenes of savagery at British Mill Prison to enhance the sailors’ patriotic image, these memories served to display how sailors suffered and coped with traumas, as well as recalled memories, even if Sherburne had no desire to reflect on these memories in that way. This is evident in how he shaded these traumatic moments over through patriotic and maritime languages that implore the reader not to focus on the tragedy, but rather the American will to survive. Of course reading the trauma is important. But even more

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137 Sherburne, *Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne*, 68.
important is not how these traumas reflect upon the subject but how his survival reflects upon the political, social, and cultural attitude of the people who read his memories with awe and satisfaction. This is especially important since Sherburne’s narrative was years removed from the war and people were looking back at common revolutionary sailors and soldiers for their tales of courage. This is why the rest of Sherburne’s narrative is underwritten by his courage, which considered, but inevitably glossed over, the tragedies he experienced and memories he was left to come to terms with.

In the preface of his book Sherburne included a letter that circulated between the publisher of his narrative and himself. This letter discussed the publisher’s apprehensions about publishing the work and then regret for not publishing it sooner. Andrew Sherburne’s work is a celebratory piece that places those who fought in the American Revolution on a higher plane and commemorates their role in that great crusade. It was republished in 1831, which was a time of great change in the United States. By the time this work was written, Sherburne was a Baptist minister and an ad for his narrative written on 7 December 1829 in the New Hampshire Patriot asked everyone to come and buy a copy, calling it an “entertaining auto-biography.” Although Sherburne experienced trauma and intense pain, he used those troubling memories for a nationalistic purpose, unlike Downs and Davis.

Unlike Downs, whose narrative was a tool of self-contemplation, and Davis, whose work sought revenge and war through self-rehearsing pain, Sherburne wanted to use memories of his shipwreck, floggings, and inhuman moments of pain as political and social capital in a more positive and self-enhancing, not self-denying manner. Yet to

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138 “Memoirs of Andrew Sherburne,” 7 December 1829.
enhance his nationalistic stature his memories might have been watered down. This is possible, not solely because the memory had faded or because the amount of time passed resulted from a forfeiture of memory, which is a reality for all types of memory, even traumatic memory, but because his past might not have reflected his current political and national ambitions. Rather, the political, social, and cultural atmosphere of America in the late 1820s and early 1830s valued maritime tales of tragedy less than nationalistic stories of honor and courage. Maritime tragedies, portrayed though fictional literature, did not gain considerable attention or popularity until the late 1830s, 1840s, and ended in the early 1850s. The reading public that came to love a good maritime tale can be observed in the popularity of fictional works like James Fennimore Cooper’s *Red Rover* (1827), Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838), “MS. Found in a Bottle (1833),” “The Oblong Box (1844),” and “A Descent into the Maelström (1841),” Herman Melville’s *Typee* (1845), *White Jacket* (1850), as well as eventually *Moby-Dick* (1851) and autobiographical works, like Cooper’s *Ned Myers; or A Life before the Mast* (1843) and Richard Henry Dana Jr.’s *Two Years Before the Mast* (1834). Fictional and biographical works were the culmination of the sailor’s dark world and the tragedies they observed and experienced.

In terms of the American Revolution readers in the 1820s, 1830s, and after did not want to dwell on national tragedy in the form of a privateer beaten, bruised, and bloodied, a symbolic representation of America itself. Rather it sought celebrations of success and the story of a common man turned revolutionary hero through courage. For this reason, as well as others, quite possibly the Downs narrative differed in its intended audience, effect on the writer himself, and the timing of its publication. Downs described an experience
that was filled with spirituality, not patriotism, and in which disturbing memories formed during a traumatic personal event were the unintended and dominant focal point of his writing. They were memories he understood to be recollections that caused him considerable anguish. Historians must not discard his memoires because they do not represent “the past as it occurred,” but rather must accept the importance of that harrowing past, its disturbing memories, and what that recollection tells us about the subject’s world. Historians read such writings as a reflection of the truth the author believed he was conveying and represents a past that must be reexamined alongside current understandings of the American Revolution, traumatic memories, and maritime history.

**Downs’ Legacy of Trauma and “Extreme Suffering”**

Barnabas Downs published his narrative in 1786, but in December of 1778 he had struggled to survive. As the townspeople of Plymouth worked vigorously to reach the vessel, Downs fell into a deep sleep. With the sun setting and another night approaching, the cold rolled in and was worse than the last evening. Still, help was still not there and many sailors gave up hope and collapsed on deck, falling victim to fatigue and froze quickly thereafter. With below-zero cold the men alive resorted to piling dead bodies around them to keep the deadly wind at bay.\(^{139}\) Doing this enabled them to keep their legs in motion and helped the blood to circulate.\(^{140}\) As Sunday gave way to Monday and the sun rose, the living looked around them to see the dead and dying everywhere. Many of

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\(^{140}\) Downs, *A brief and remarkable narrative*, 12.
those who had frozen to death were bent in to all sorts of horrible positions.\textsuperscript{141} As the number of dead mounted, those on shore worked to reach the brig. They boarded it at noon on Monday and found it was difficult to tell the dead from the living.

Barnabas Downs regained his awareness on Monday afternoon when members of the Plymouth community were looking for survivors. They had thought Downs was dead, but then saw his eye lid move.\textsuperscript{142} Barnabas Downs was then removed from the \textit{General Arnold} and transported back to Plymouth and placed in the tavern of a Mr. Bartlet. He was then submerged in a large tank of cold water for three hours in order to help the blood recirculate through his thawing limbs. Downs suffered what can only be described as excruciating pain during this process and claimed that the sting was worse in regaining his circulation than it had been when he lost it. This process provided Downs with another significant shock and created further traumatic stress. He recalled:

\begin{quote}
I was obliged to pass thro’ the painful operation of having some of my limbs separated from my body: But after all these distresses I am still among the living and praise GOD. Let my spared life be devoted to his service and may I ever be mindful of his benefits.\textsuperscript{143}
\end{quote}

When the shipwreck of the brig \textit{General Arnold} occurred, Downs was twenty years old. He had survived, but spent the rest of his life, forty years, walking on his knees.

Few who joined the war as a privateer came back with an abundance of wealth or an experience that catapulted their maritime image. Of the one hundred and five men who set sail from Boston on the brig \textit{General Arnold} only thirty-three were brought ashore alive, and nine of them succumbed soon after to their suffering and passed. The final total

\textsuperscript{141} Thatcher, \textit{History of Plymouth}, 211.

\textsuperscript{142} Thatcher, \textit{History of Plymouth}, 211.

\textsuperscript{143} Downs, \textit{A brief and remarkable narrative}, 12-13.
of dead was eighty-one. Fifteen men were able to recover completely, while Downs and seven others were crippled for life. Cornelius Marchant, who died in 1838 as the last survivor of the brig *General Arnold* wreck, emerged with “crippled feet.” Rev. Robbins, resident of Plymouth, was instructed to prepare a mass funeral for the *General Arnold* dead, and it was said that when he gazed over the bodies shockingly amassed together on the floor of the courthouse, a sight not for the timorous, he collapsed and had to be cared for by a doctor for weeks.\(^{144}\) Downs endured the “Great Storm of 1778” and lived until 1817. In 1784 he wed Sarah Hamblin and proceeded to have a large family, to whom he routinely recited the tale of his tragedy.

Captain James Magee spent the later part of his life skippering merchant ships out of Salem, Massachusetts.\(^{145}\) Although he moved on, and lived out his life at sea, he had constant anguish over the loss of his ship and crew. Whenever docked in Massachusetts at Christmas time, he called a reunion of the twenty four *General Arnold* survivors, even helping those who were destitute with a gift from his own earnings. Through this “reunion” he kept alive the memory of the event and the traumatic memories that he too must have suffered from. Magee met an early grave in 1801, in Roxbury, Massachusetts, at the age of fifty-one and at his request was buried with the *General Arnold* crew at Burial Hill in Plymouth, Massachusetts.\(^{146}\) It was a memorial and monument that signified both the bravery of the sailor and the brutality of the sea. This monument reflected a powerful public recollection and served as a symbol at the cost the ocean


demanded and those local residents that paid with their lives. For James Magee, and probably Barnabas Downs, it was a place of reflection they knew they might one day join. For Magee, to his dying day, his only regret in life was that he had docked in Plymouth Harbor and had not, like Captain Barrows of the *Revenge*, ridden out the storm off Cape Cod.147

There is a poem, showing the town of Plymouth’s admiration for maritime sacrifice, inscribed on the southwesterly side of the monument in honor of the brig *General Arnold* dead at Burial Hill:

Oh! Falsely flattering were yon billows sooth  
When forth, elated, sailed in evil hour,  
That vessel whose disastrous fate, when told,  
Fill’d every breast with sorrow and each eye  
With piteous tears.

One must remember that James Magee and Barnabas Downs were not the only victims of this event, and many families of the dead and injured attempted to make sense of the disaster in both private and public ways. Among the *General Arnold*’s dead was a twenty-one-year-old physician from Oldtown, which is located in present-day North Attleborough, Massachusetts, named Herbert Mann. He was the ship’s surgeon and had graduated from Brown University and was said to be, by family and friends, the brightest light in an illustrious family. In a family graveyard where he was buried, not in Plymouth with the rest of the *General Arnold* crew, a memorial was erected in his honor. The epitaph begins with a description of the “Great Storm” as one “the worst ever known to the memory of man,” and concludes with a chilling question that reads: “Lord God Almighty, just and true in all thy ways, but who can stand before thy cold?” It was a

147 Snow, *Storms and Shipwrecks of New England*, 49. The *Revenge* survived the storm, though losing virtually all its ammunition. The *Revenge* continued onward making port in the West Indies.
storm that would be remembered, not only those that survived the tragedy on the brig *General Arnold*, but those communities, even generations later, that felt its power.

The “Great Storm of 1778,” was, by 1831, referred to as the “The Magee Storm” and compared, at that time, to another major storm that had devastated New Bedford, Massachusetts. On 19 February 1831 the *Farmer’s Cabins* issued an article about the “Magee Storm” and even provided a short description of the wreck that had occurred over forty years before, reflecting the powerful “survival” of the shipwreck tale. The fascinating part of the article was that it attempted to compare a recent storm to that of the storm that killed so many in 1778. It even discussed two crew survivors, Captain George Pillsbury of Boston, and Cornelius Merchant, Esq., the “respectable Clerk of the Courts in Duke’s County.” The latter was reported to have lost the “extremities of both feet, so as nearly to disable him from walking.” He lived until 1838 – the last survivor of that historic shipwreck.\(^{148}\) The story of the brig *General Arnold*, James Magee, and of course Barnabas Downs was spread throughout all of New England.

**The Great Task of Reflection**

Why did Barnabas Downs write an account of his suffering while on board the brig *General Arnold*? Why did Joshua Davis author a narrative about his decade long ordeal at the hands of the British navy? Why did Andrew Sherburne weave in examples of tragedy throughout an autobiography that sought to catapult his patriotic image to greater nationalistic grounds? These are not easy questions to answer. Another New England farmer-turned-privateer, Ebenezer Fox had grown up poor and a stone throw away from the sea, and at age twelve, in 1775, ran away to Providence, Rhode Island, and

joined two different voyages as a cabin boy. After he returned in 1780, but finding shore employment beaten by the ensuing war, Fox sought to try his luck once again, this time on the Massachusetts ship *Protector*. Eventually Fox found himself prisoner aboard the prison ship *Jersey* and was beaten unmercifully regularly. In the end, as Fox recalled, he was forced to join a British warship as a means of release from this “hell.” It should be known that Fox eventually wrote about his wartime nautical experiences in 1838 because, “I soon found a troublesome cough, which I had in the winter, effectually prevented” him from retelling his war stories to his grandchildren. Therefore, at their urging, he decided to draft his narrative. As Fox recalled:

I at length concluded to commit my adventures to writing….This decision met with general approbation, and I commenced my task. Though I am an old man of seventy-five…the reminiscences of my younger days proved very interesting to myself, I was able to recollect much more than I expected I should; for the events which occur in our youth, especially such as it has been my lot to participate in, make a much more lasting impression on our minds than those of a later period, when we have become more accustomed to the vicissitudes of life. One circumstance after another revived in my memory.  

Fox hoped that his narrative might be an interesting read and allowed for his words to be made available for public consumption. He hoped that “it may prove as interesting to the rising generation, as it has to my own grandchildren.” As Fox concluded,

Should it be thought that my simple narrative does not contain matter of importance sufficient to interest the reader, I can only say, that the partial judgment of friends, and my belief that any circumstances relating to the most interesting period of our history, would prove entertaining to the young, must be my excuse for presenting it to the public.

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Ebenezer Fox reflected back on his maritime career for both its aspects of suffering and its vital importance to the growth of the American republic. Like Downs, Davis, and Sherburne, he found that life ashore offered him no economic possibility, so he left home in search of something greater and, as will be clear, during the course of that expedition collided with extreme trauma. In the end, he decided to write his narrative for reasons that he considered obvious and historians must evaluate and reflect upon.

Although historians can compare Downs’ narrative to those of Davis and Sherburne, Downs did not utilize the same techniques as they did, nor is the memory they address as openly considered. Andrew Sherburne and Joshua Davis’ accounts were written for a specific audience and blatantly attempted to convey a patriotic message with the use of adventure and education. Sherburne wrote for an audience that longed to glorify the Revolution and to learn how average Americans shaped that struggle. Even if Sherburne did experience the same pain as Downs and Davis, the numerous traumatic experiences, which served as the backbone of his extensive narrative, were a carefully hidden component of his work. Sherburne’s pain had served to mold the man he had become. Yet he chose to focus on the living patriotic “invented” man, not the “true” victim that he became.

Although these dramatic memories are only considered in the background, and clearly not given their “due,” Sherburne, none-the-less, has a lot to say by their absence. Davis, on the other hand, connected with an audience of contemporaries, perfected his personal identity through emotional “rehearsal,” and even crafted a community of collective partners who observed, through his words, a union and brotherhood of literate and like-minded thinkers. He asked them to listen to his struggles as an impressed sailor
and demand that the British acknowledge American naval rights. He sought to underwrite his harrowing memories, and decade-long traumatic past, by considering it in direct union with his call for vengeance. But Sherburne, as well as others like Davis, shaded those memories in the propaganda for action. His pain was genuine, even if he did ultimately use it to serve a nationalistic end.

Considering memory and trauma studies allows historians to understand that when a privateer, or any sailor, decided to author a maritime narrative about his life, especially those backed by maritime tragedy, the longer he waited to do so the harder it was to gain a comprehensive telling. The further away from the event the writer moves, the more the story will be tarnished by his agenda and the world he lives in, but the sailors considered their memories a truthful representation of their past. This enhancement is something that Daniel Schacter might consider historical hindsight “bias.” When the world sought to recapture the past and rediscover those who fought in the American Revolution, both Davis and Sherburne were eager to explain their stories and share what they wanted everyone to know. The stories they told were enhanced by their overwhelming need to sell a story, but those stores are historically significant in the way they describe the dangers of seaborne endeavors.\(^{152}\)

The narrative of Barnabas Downs, which expressed a deep devotion to religion, attempted to enlighten the general public to the fact that throughout the American Revolution, and even during its aftermath, there existed a human “element” that had been terrorized by suffering and war. Even though his memory restructured and displayed the shipwreck, Downs discovered that the only reason he survived was because of spiritual

\(^{152}\) Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., The Age of Jackson (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1945), 3-6.
interference. Downs looked toward “God” for salvation, Davis and Sherburne tackled their stories in an informative way to express their own ability to conquer any obstacle and gain notoriety in the eyes of the public. All three individuals displayed their personal fears and emotions, and sought to win the audience with accounts evoking horror, anger, and patriotism. Each privateer-turned-author conveyed a message, and story, that he crafted from his lingering memories to form a conclusion that he wanted his readers to accept and acknowledge.

Downs’ narrative is a powerful work that guides the reader through his traumatic memory with great detail, yet at the same time reflects on a historical realm that is brutal. The objective of Downs’ narrative was to relate on a horrendous instance that was rooted in a religious experience rather than a revolutionary or political one. Downs survived, in his eyes, because of God’s divine providence. Still, no matter how he survived, the stressful memories resulted from the shipwreck and his observing of immense death, remained terribly vibrant. Therefore to make sense of those lasting images, Downs wrote about what he remembered had occurred and those flashes of memory that abused him. He used this opportunity to make an income, but it should be noted that selling a short work for “four pence” was not going to make him rich. Though all three narratives had been written in part for fiscal gain, Downs’ work does not seek to glorify the Revolution in search of that financial success.

It should be understood that Downs lacked something both Davis and Sherburne possessed: a likely audience. Downs may have mistakenly believed that his narrative would win a wide public following. But Downs’ narrative, as Hester Blum, Sarah Purcell, and other maritime historians and maritime scholars understand, was written well before
the arrival of other American Revolutionary War narratives.\textsuperscript{153} He wrote during a time when elite politicians, commissioned officers, and prominent figures were writing about their experience during the war.\textsuperscript{154} The stories of the common man and the sailor had not yet gained recognition or popularity. Downs wrote in a time that was unwilling to consider his tale, except in his home town, and in an era when the common soldiers and especially sailors were voiceless. Davis and Sherburne, on the other hand, wrote in a time when American and maritime literature were exploding on the national scene, and both fiction and non-fiction became popular with the growing republic.

Joshua Davis suffered greatly as a captive on board British naval vessels. Davis’ narrative depicts the horror of impressments, which he had endured during the war. Yet unlike Downs, whose harrowing experience was so great, so consistently vivid, and an experience that refused to let go pushing him to publish his recollection shortly after the war, Davis penned his chilling work in 1811. Historians should consider Joshua Davis a reluctant writer, a timid historical figure, but in the end a powerful political propagandist. His suffering, although not as severe as that of Downs, was brutal, but spread out over not just days, but years. In the end, 1811 was chosen as his publishing date, for, in his own words, “When I arrived home in 1787, I went into business, with the hope of making up my lost time…but by repeated misfortunes, I am nearly reduced to the situation I was when robbed in Ireland.” Therefore he concluded that “being out of employ, I thought I would put my scraps of half-worn papers together, in order to inform mankind how I and many of my fellow-countrymen have fared, and still fare on board his majesty’s ships of

\textsuperscript{153} Purcell, \textit{Sealed with Blood}, 184.

\textsuperscript{154} Purcell, \textit{Sealed with Blood}, 186.
war.” Although because of the material at hand, he could have extended his narrative to a “volume,” “being lame” on the left side of his entire body, he had difficulty writing anything at all.155

Historian Myra Glenn has written that Revolutionary officers were the most common to produce written accounts of their time during the war, but in the 1810s, like Barnabas Downs, a “growing number of men who served as enlisted soldiers and sailors contributed to maritime literature.”156 As one will see in the third chapter, James M’Lean, whose narrative was published in 1814, “was at the cusp of a new subgenre of literature: the memoirs and autobiographies of sailors who had fought against the British.”157 Historians agree that these writings became a staple of American literature, and as Barnabas Downs wrote at the beginning of, even before, this literary trend, Joshua Davis and other privateers who suffered served to promote their tragedies in a compelling literary way. Still Davis’ story is even more remarkable because his memories can be “assured because he kept a journal” of imprisonment and brutality “hidden in his stockings because he had sworn his statements before the copyright clerk.”158 As Sarah Purcell has written, Davis’ published memoir “showed how memories of the Revolutionary War could be made directly relevant to current British aggression.”159 He used reminiscences he suffered from as a political, emotional, and social instrument.

155 Davis, _A Narrative of Joshua Davis_, 72.

156 Glenn, _Jack Tar’s Story_, 52. See also, Arch, _After Franklin_, 62; Davidson, _Revolution and the Word_, 41, 216, 256, 260; Casarino, _Modernity at Sea_.

157 Glenn, _Jack Tar’s Story_, 51.

158 Gilje, _Pirates, Jack Tar and Memory_, 83.

159 Purcell, _Sealed with Blood_, 142.
Since he could not gain employment on land, he elected to sell the tales of his suffering at a time when public opinion of the British had significantly deteriorated over violations of sailors’ rights and American freedom, and a time when maritime literature from Revolutionary War veterans was growing in popularity. His memoir, as Purcell argues, represents “an unflinching view of British cruelty towards impressed seamen.” Purcell continues that “images of American prisoners of war, particularly those who had been held onboard British prison ships,” or served as impressed sailors doing trying physical work “during the Revolutionary War, prompted highly emotional expressions of bloody patriotism similar to those described by Davis.”

Although Davis’ story, as Purcell concludes, can be “assured,” that fact plays well in this discussion of his memory. As a member of a specific “subgroup,” Davis served to display both historic and psychological characteristics in his writings and legacy. Social identity within a sub-culture, like that of privateers during the war, or impressed sailors or even prisoners of war, plays a significant part in the formation of traumatic memories. Whether Downs, whose suffering prompted him to discuss the event with local media, and who every year, met with survivors of the wreck to discuss, reflect and mourn, he was a part of a social group, whose social identity was shaped around a specific moment or grouping. Davis was a part of that era of enlisted sailors who wrote maritime tales for general readership and who, although not finding the financial reward of both his vocation and memories, served as part of a group who wrote about their experiences for both political and emotional release.

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160 Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 142-143.
The publication of Davis’ narrative in 1811 fell one year before America fought for sailor’s rights and free navigation during the War of 1812, and its timing served not only to solidify membership in that social grouping, but as a personal symbol. Davis’ writings reflect acknowledgment of a shared past and personal tragedy. His narrative served to ease his sufferings, which lay beneath the “covers” of his social identity. He used his trauma to promote another war with Britain and satisfy, like Herman Melville’s Captain Ahab, a thirst for revenge. But the origin of that thirst, though presented, became the backdrop not the focus of his words. His focus was reoriented, so that his troubling memories were given precedence and therefore the hazardous world he lived and suffered in became, to us, as tragic as he could have anticipated.

Yet, as we have observed in this chapter, Barnabas Downs and Joshua Davis are not the only privateers who experienced trauma and serve to highlight the importance of horrific memories in the study of early American maritime history. Andrew Sherburne wrote about the years he patrolled the high seas as an American privateer with glorious detail and with the conviction that the experience was image-forming. He wrote of his time as a privateer well after the Revolution and gained a considerable fee for the telling of his tale. As Glenn observes, Sherburne’s account served as one of the most “graphic accounts of the suffering of American sailors during the American Revolutionary War.”161 He was captured several times by the British and “endured a litany of horrors,” especially as a prisoner at Old Mill Prison near Plymouth, England, and later the

161 Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 53.
“notorious prison ship the Jersey, docked in New York’s harbor.”

Sherburne eventually used his memories of disease, starvation, severe corporal punishment, and filthy cells to stir up emotions against the British. Interestingly, his memoir, published in 1828, was released into a society that was beginning to look not towards Revolutionary maritime narratives but rather sailors’ narratives of the War of 1812. His publishing success, though modest, proved inevitably elusive in an era where society’s appetites had begun to change. Still a “republication” of his narrative in the early 1830s was timed to coincide with the return of Gilbert du Motier, the Marquis de Lafayette, and therefore an attempt to take part in a resurgence of patriotism focused on revolutionary heroes.

The importance of his narrative does not derive from its national success, but instead from the memories and catastrophic past that was created through the brutality he experienced and related within the four-hundred pages of his lofty prose. He suffered extreme trauma, but surprisingly his time as a privateer is discussed entirely within the first third of a comprehensive autobiographical work. His suffering, therefore, was placed within that one third, yet his recollections, like those about starvation, he filtered through a patriotic screen. He presents a “red, white, and blue” tale of a common-man-turned-revolutionary-hero. Sherburne’s work was published in 1828 during the “Era of the

162 Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 53. See also, Brian Lavery, The Ship of the Line – Volume 1: The Development of the Battlefleet, 1650-1850 (Conway Maritime Press, 2003), 171; Danske Dandridge, American Prisoners of the Revolution (Charlottesville, Virginia: The Michie Co., 1911), 1, 3, 19, 25, 46, 79, 90-96; Charles W. West, Horrors of the prison ships: Dr. West's description of the wallabout floating dungeons, how captive patriots fared (Eagle Book Printing Department, 1895); Henry Onderdonk, Revolutionary Incidents of Suffolk and Kings Counties; With an Account of the Battle of Long Island and the British Prisons and Prison-Ships at New York (Associated Faculty Press, Inc., 1970); Patrick J. Lang, The horrors of the English prison ships, 1776 to 1783, and the barbarous treatment of the American patriots imprisoned on them (Society of the Friendly Sons of Saint Patrick, 1939); Thomas Andros, The old Jersey captive: Or, A narrative of the captivity of Thomas Andros...on board the old Jersey prison ship at New York, 1781. In a series of letters to a friend (W. Peirce. 1833); Christopher Hawkins, The life and adventures of Christopher Hawkins, a prisoner on board the 'Old Jersey' prison ship during the War of the Revolution (Holland Club. 1858); and George Taylor, Martyrs To The Revolution In The British Prison-Ships In The Wallabout Bay (Kessinger Publishing, LLC. (original publication 1858) reprint 2007).
Common man” that begins with the election of Andrew Jackson, and the timing of its publication was not accidental.163 As Alfred Young wrote, “long before the 1820” places like Boston had simply stopped commemorating the once-famous political events of the Revolution.”164 It was “local military events” that were “observed in the mid-1820s on a scale without precedent, dwarfing the annual Independence Day celebration.”165 However in the late 1820s and early 1830s, just when Andrew Sherburne considered his past in literary form, a new public memory of the Revolution developed for several specific reasons. The first of these reasons was the purported victory over the British during the War of 1812, which led to an increase in patriotism. The second war for independence revived memories of the first and “the sons wanted to be worthy of their fathers.”166

Another reason was that

amid the wave of patriotism and guilt following the way of 1812, the country discovered – and celebrated – the veterans of the Revolutionary War, a sea change in American opinion, which had long held “regular armies” in contempt and soldiers of the Continental arm, in disrepute.167

As Young wrote, on 4 July 1817 forty thousand people turned out to greet President James Monroe in Boston at the dedication of the battlefield on Bunker Hill. In Boston President Monroe said that “blood spilt here roused the whole American people,” and


164 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, 133.

165 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, 133.

166 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, 133-134.

167 Young, The Shoemaker and the Tea Party, 134.
standing there, as a “battle-scarred veteran wearing a suit that made him look like a continental soldier,” Monroe called attention to the old soldiers, even those sailors who served, who had been reduced to poverty in the aftermath of their service. In 1818 Congress passed the first general pension act, which at first was “limited to veterans in indigent circumstances,” but would later pave the way for men like Sherburne applying for pensions as well. The last reason that public memory of the revolution shifted and allowed for men like Sherburne to gain popularity was that “veterans were a clamorous presence” and “by telling their stories in public and in appearances at ceremonies, they laid claim to entitlement. As Alfred Young has written, the memoirs, reminiscences, recollections, and narratives published from 1801 and through the early 1830s became grist for the novelists James Fennimore Cooper and Herman Melville. Narratives like that of Joshua Davis vented the long-pent-up rage felt by many veterans. Finally when Sherburne wrote, he capitalized on the reemergence of public willingness to honor Revolutionary veterans and their forming stature in public memory.

Yet behind the patriotic prose Sherburne’s lengthy autobiography reveals the maritime world as men like him witnessed it. The world that Joshua Davis and Andrew Sherburne lived in was not painted in patriotic colors, but rather was evoked through life and death, trials and tribulations. Even though Sherburne looked back on his life seeking appreciation from his readers, he hid the greatest value of his life, the trauma that he experienced from those moments he perceived as creating the model American citizen, veteran, and patriot. Yet those traumas remained an unbearable reminder of his past. His

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experiences served to enhance the collective memory of those like the Tammany Society, who adopted the memory of prison victims of the Jersey, to build a monument in their honor and, in turn, shape political opinion in their favor.170

The narratives of Downs, Davis, and Sherburne are valuable for the study of the American Revolution, maritime history, and traumatic memories in a historic context. They tell us what they could remember from past tragedies, how ordinary memories were filled with political, cultural, or religious “biases,” which served as literary propaganda, and, lastly, how the maritime world they sailed into was incredibly dark, deadly, and infused its victims with appalling memories. Their writings tell us about a maritime world that proved perilous and one that should be acknowledged. Downs short narrative expressed his religious beliefs and he praised God for enabling him to survive his time as a privateer. Davis’ narrative advocated a patriotic outcry against the British and set the political stage to decry the use of impressments as a tactic of war. Sherburne, who wrote a lengthy memoir, attempted to conceal the catastrophes he endured during his time as a privateer.

All three victims of maritime tragedy spent years discussing their experiences at local taverns and gatherings. With each occasion the story took on a life of its own and was enhanced to entertain those who listened. With time the truthful parts, and those stories that had signs of embellishment, started to become one and the same, yet the trauma of their past could not be changed. Davis and Sherburne attempted to shade the overall shock they experienced within a hyped “language” defined by their maritime, as

170 Purcell, Sealed With Blood, 144-149.
well as heroic, abilities. When they were then asked to write a narrative, there was no difference between truth and fiction.

Downs on the other hand did not rely on distant memory, nor did he provide an autobiographical depiction of his life or even a snapshot of an event that showed a patriotic image. Instead he wrote “shortly” after his experience and sought social acceptance, rather than blind allegiance. Downs showed that demoralizing experiences can render their subject emotionally damaged and therefore in search of closure. Such a memory, though not perfect, could allow the subject to think, reflect, and describe a maritime scene that should be outside the historian’s grasp, but instead slides into today’s collective memory by way of the author’s tormenting experience.

For Barnabas Downs his endeavor to achieve financial success through privateering was destroyed, leaving him a memory that would not dim. He lost his emotional and economic stability in the snowstorm off the coast of Plymouth and had, at times, trouble effectively functioning in society. His twelve-page narrative, written in 1786 eight years after the wreck, may have helped him cope with the nightmares arising from the event and to mourn those who died. Although Davis’ and Sherburne’s accounts shared similar origins, Downs’ account stands on its own, a seamless example of maritime tragedy exhibiting the importance of common sailors in significant events. His trauma is a window into why men chose to fight for independence and how, when the fighting was over, they coped with the tragedies they experienced. Downs sought solace in retelling his story for others to read and endeavored to make sense of his maritime past. It is possible that where death in the maritime world was bodiless, Downs’ narrative served as a form of remembrance for those privateers who were not as fortunate as he to
have survived. The last paragraph of his narratives lists all the seamen, especially those from Barnstable, Massachusetts, that perished on the *General Arnold*. With the help of family and friends, Downs threw himself into a literary realm and found he was overcome by the unbearable thoughts that fueled his stories.

All of these narratives – those written by privateers, impressed sailors, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists – provide understanding of the writer’s personality, their intentions, their trauma’s significance, as well as of the audience they wrote to influence. Whether it was to make sense of a disaster and assuage the continuing agony of traumatic memories, or to express hatred towards unjust imprisonments, or simply to tell an adventurous tale, these works were crafted with purpose. Yet in the end, they each were built around maritime tragedy and in that sense they wrote to free themselves from the burdens of memory. Maritime authors wrote in a decade that was crucial to the success of his memoir – Davis during the impressment crisis of the early national period and Sherburne during the period marked by the growth of Jacksonian democracy. Yet Downs, who wrote his work less than a decade after the American Revolution, has remained distant from his contemporaries in large part because of the manner in which the work was written, his intended audience and his reasons for recollecting. It is therefore important to engage Downs’ narrative, examine his life, words, and experiences as they relate to other sailors who experienced similar tragedies. Through his words historians observe those catastrophic incidents that sparked a lifetime of dogged memories and offer insight into a dark maritime world that had previously gone unnoticed. From his tragic life, and the shocking lives of all sailors, and their narratives, the maritime world of the early American republic is flung open. Once opened social history is infused with new
life as common sailors’ traumatic experiences, and devastating recollections, are positioned at the highest level of historical importance.

These maritime tragedies, and others, stand before the concept of “choice.” As will be addressed later, the maritime world is often one presenting severe gambles and intense consequences. Magee chose to bear the storm in Plymouth Harbor and his memory and emotional state were forever damaged, as evidenced by his yearly need to make amends with those who had survived with him, some still struggling, like Downs, with those terrible memories of a dark and perilous maritime world. When the ordeal of the shipwreck was over, General Arnold survivors learned, from a “contrite” member of the Duxbury schooner that the dread of consequences had discouraged the schooner’s crew from attempting a rescue. They chose to return to shore instead of facing and overcoming their fears. It has been argued that if they had had more courage and fought both inner demons and natural elements, many more of the brig’s crew might have survived. At that point in the event only thirty sailors had died, but the worst lay ahead and in the night to follow the temperatures dropped and the men sat in a circle and rubbed their feet together in a feeble attempt to generate heat. The number of dead that came next was historic and the “choice” of the schooner’s party to turn back proved a sad twist, but in the end the people of Plymouth had “behaved as best they could” under impossible circumstances. Considering this issue of choice, the historian must consider Captain George Pollard Jr. of the whaleship Essex who was unable to exert the strong leadership needed in the aftermath of the destruction of his ship in the South Pacific by a mighty

171 Thatcher, History of Plymouth, 210-211.

172 Thatcher, History of Plymouth, 211.
“leviathan.” He acquiesced to the wishes of his crew not to sail for the Islands of the Marquesas, fearing cannibals, and instead sailed their small whaleboats towards South America. Their “choice” resulted in them being stranded on an endless ocean, their resorting to cannibalism, and the death of more of their crew. Downs chose to stay on board the brig *General Arnold* and that choice cost him his legs and lingering upsetting memories that he sought to cope with by the creation of a brief, but remarkable narrative.

Choice plays an important role in maritime tragedy and for those making the choices, especially throughout this dissertation, the tragedy that followed was an all-too-fitting reminder of the uncertainty of the maritime world. Barnabas Downs, Joshua Davis, and Andrew Sherburne were victims of traumatic maritime memories. Their memories served as painful reminders of brutality and suffering, yet these sailors, and others, used these traumatic memories in different ways. As one will see through the stories of impressed sailors during the War of 1812, whalemen in the South Pacific, and nautical abolitionists, sailors might awake to a terrible shock that left them with years of suffering and eventually the need to put their memories to “paper.” They had their own reasons for writing and used their pain for multiple reasons, not the least of which was to lighten the weight of memory. Through Jack Tar’s recollections, their maritime miseries linger within the historian’s grasp of understanding and, even if not perfect, represent the believed reality of the author and his confidence that, in sketching those brief moments, what he wrote was what had occurred.
Chapter THREE
Impressed and Imprisoned at Sea:
*Joseph Bates, James Durand, Joshua Penney, and James M’Lean*

“He seemed to mean, not only that the most reliable and useful courage was that which arises from the fair estimation of the encountered peril, but that an utterly fearless man is a far more dangerous comrade than a coward.”

- Herman Melville in *Moby-Dick*, Chapter 26 “Nights and Squires”

While resting in a boarding house in Liverpool, England, on 27 April 1810, Joseph Bates was surprised, creating a consequential memory he spoke often of, to be confronted by a “press-gang.” It consisted of an officer and twelve men who demanded he produce documentation proving to “what country I belonged.” Bates and several other American sailors present, produced American “protections,” which proved they were citizens of the United States, but the “gang” was unsatisfied by their certification of legal citizenship. By order of the American government “Protected men” were required to carry documentation, called a “protection,” that identified them, their national origin, and their vocation. In the event that a sailor could not produce this “protection” document on order of the “press gang,” he could be pressed without further question. Still, many times, as was the case with Bates, even providing such documents did not fully protect

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1 A “press-gang” was the name given to groups of British officers who were entrusted with the power to impress foreign, as well as domestic, sailors into the service of the British crown.
the American sailor so far from home. Yet even close to home, as was observed with the USS Chesapeake and HMS Leopard affair of 22 June 1807, which occurred off the coast of Norfolk, Virginia, the British vessel Leopard, searching for deserters “pursued, attacked,” and subsequently “boarded” the American ship Chesapeake. The Leopard’s commander, James Barron, who was caught off guard and after firing only one defense shot, surrendered his vessel, and four of his crewmen were subsequently removed and tried for desertion, one of whom was eventually hanged. This incident created a massive uproar among Americans, and clearly American’s sailors’ rights were subjected to abuse both far out on the Atlantic and, sadly, only a stone’s throw away from the American mainland. Bates, and the rest of the sailors, were arrested and dragged to a pre-arranged meeting place where, on the morning of the following day, they “were examined by a naval lieutenant, and ordered to join the British navy.” Like condemned criminals ordered to the gallows, Bates and the other American sailors were seized and marched through the streets of Liverpool by the lieutenant with his sword drawn. They were paraded to the dock where the ship Princess, which was well-armed and well-manned, and was prepared for them. Once on board the vessel, they were transported to the prison

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room located on the lower deck. There, although feverishly proclaiming themselves to be Americans, they were impressed into the service of the British navy.

On the British naval vessel, the only thought going through the head of Bates and the other American’s onboard was that they had been “unlawfully seized without any provocation” and that any way that they could “regain” their liberty would be justifiable. While on board the vessel, Bates and other captives were thinking of ways to free themselves of their irons, and bust through the “bolts in the port-hole, and made an escape by diving overboard and swimming in the strong current that was rushing by us.”

Feeling that the plan could succeed, Bates and several others broke free of their irons, but just as they were about to jump overboard, the “boats came along-side the vessel with the officers, and our open place was discovered.” One by one, the impressed American sailors were taken and whipped in front of both crew and officers as a warning to any others who might attempt such a daring escape. As Bates remembered,

> We were whipped on our naked backs in a most inhuman manner. This dreadful work was in progress for several hours, and ceased about nine o’clock at night, the officers intending to finish the next day. But they did not have time to carry out their cruel work; for orders were given to transfer us all on board a frigate nearby, that was weighing her anchors to put to sea.

Several days later, unable to get the images of beaten, bloodied, and brutalized men out of his mind, Bates turned to religion, praying for an end to the abuse and unjust treatment. Days later, Bates and the impressed American sailors were shipped to Plymouth, England, where they were “re-examined” and all who were “pronounced in good condition for service in the British navy were transferred to one of their largest-

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sized stationary ships,” which Bates identified as the *Saint Salvador del Mundo*. It was on this “monstrous floating castle,” with one-hundred and twelve guns, that fifteen hundred other impressed Americans were located.

Already put to work and suffering from exhaustion, Bates had a conversation with another young man from Massachusetts who told Bates that they should make an attempt to escape from this confinement even if it meant that they might “perish in the attempt.” They prepared a rope and watched closely as soldiers and sailors were relieved of their guard posts at midnight. Considering this devastating memory created during this traumatic event, Bates recalled that once the change of position was in motion

> We raised the ‘hanging port’ about eighteen inches, and put the ‘tackle fall’ into the hands of a friend in the secret, to lower it down when we were beyond the reach of musket balls. Our rope and blanket, about thirty feet long, reached the water. Forbes, my companion, whispered, ‘Will you follow?’ I replied, ‘Yes.’ By the time he reached the water, I was slipping down after him, when the alarm ran through the ship.\(^7\)

“Man overboard,” was yelled throughout the ship and Bates’ friend dropped the “port” in fear of being detected, which left Bates “exposed to the fire of the sentinels.”\(^8\) Bates then suddenly fell into the water and attempted to swim towards a hiding place under the “accommodation ladder.” By the time he reached it, the “long” boats had been launched, as well as manned with sentinels with muskets and lanterns to hunt them. Quietly, and in a zone of pure concentration, Bates watched for an opportunity to slip away from his pursuers in the opposite direction. Fully clothed, except for a jacket and shoes, which were “fastened on the back of my neck to screen me from a chance shot from the ship,” Bates and his lone escapee mate needed to swim, undetected, a very daunting three miles.

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Just as Bates was to swim off, an officer with men and lanterns descended upon the “accommodation ladder, and sliding his hand over the ‘slat’ he touched” Bates hand and “immediately shouted, ‘Here is one of them! Come out of that, you sir! Here is another! Come out, you sir!’” Knowing he had no other choice, Bates gave himself up and swam around the ladder toward the boat, where he was drawn upon the stage and questioned. “Who are you?” demanded the officer, to which Bates answered that he was “an American.” Bates wrote that the officer proceeded to yell at him and said, “‘How dare you undertake to swim away from the ship? Did you not know that you were liable to be shot?’ I answered that I was not a subject of King George, and had done this to gain my liberty.” From in the water Bates heard orders passed down from the ship instructing the boat to bring the fugitives back and after they were examined they were to be confined with the rest of the “criminals awaiting their punishment.”

After thirty hours of “close confinement,” Bates was separated from his Massachusetts friend, and was sent, along with one hundred and fifty other impressed sailors – all strangers – to the British ship the *Rodney*. With a crew of seven hundred and carrying seventy-four guns, the *Rodney* was a force to be reckoned with and was clearly in need of the impressed sailors in order to maintain the proper operation of the vessel. As soon as they reached the vessel, all of the new crew except Bates were permitted to go below deck for dinner. The Commander, Captain Henry Bolton, handed a paper to the

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first lieutenant who, after reading it, glared at Bates and muttered, “Scoundrel.”\textsuperscript{12} The ship’s crew, one hundred strong, was then assembled on the “quarter-deck” where Commander Bolton made them all look at Bates and told them all that if anyone allowed him to escape in one of the “long boats,” then he would “flog every one of the boats' crew.” He then asked them all if they understood him, to which they replied, “Yes, sir, yes, sir.” Bates was then allowed to have dinner. After that point Bates never attempted another escape and instead would attempt only in a “peaceful manner to quit His Majesty’s service.” As Bates wrote, he had “began to learn something of the nature of his punishment” and felt that to know that others would be inflicted with severe pain due to his desire for liberty was not a prospect he could live with. His crime of attempted escape was, in his commander’s view, unpardonable, and no one would be allowed to forget it. As the Rodney departed “under a cloud of sail,” and steered towards the French coast, presumably to “make war with the Frenchman,” Bates’ heart became sick and his hope of freedom “from this oppressive state seemed to wane” from view “like the land we were leaving in the distance.”\textsuperscript{13}

Bates’ impressment and imprisonment would be a long, terrible ordeal, but so far Bates had suffered and his knowledge that there was nothing else he could do to secure his freedom brought him greater fear and agony. Bates recalled that

All the Americans in the fleet became prisoners of war. During eight dreary months we were thus retained, and frequently called upon the quarter-deck, where we were harangued, and urged to enter the British navy. I had already suffered one for thirty months an unwilling subject; I was therefore fully decided not to listen


to any proposal they could make.\(^{14}\)

As for his trauma, and Bates’ hope for eventual recovery, nothing could alleviate his horror and he would sink deep into a depression. But while sliding into hell, he found a greater devotion to God, and it was in his faith that he found recovery. But that emotional slide would be long and painful.

Judith Herman’s *Trauma and Recovery* can be read alongside Joseph Bates’ autobiography, as it was used alongside Downs, Davis, and Sherburne previously. In Herman’s chapter titled “Captivity,” she argues that “a single traumatic event can occur almost anywhere. Prolonged, repeated trauma, by contrast, occurs only in circumstances of captivity.”\(^{15}\) Barnabas Downs, our suffering privateer from chapter one, is a good example of a man caught up in a distinct distressing event and whose stress and “visions” of this event caused significant pain in the years after it occurred. Both Joshua Davis and Andrew Sherburne also suffered and their experience exemplifies Herman’s theory about captivity trauma. They resemble Bates in that living as a captive affected them and in their subsequent detailing of what they went through. These men suffered from a repeated trauma that “only occurs when the victim is a prisoner, unable to flee, and under the control of the perpetrator.”\(^{16}\) Herman has studied the mind of all kinds of perpetrator, but “since he is contemptuous of those who seek to understand him, he does not volunteer to


\(^{15}\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 74 and Springer, *America’s Captives*, 42-48, 52-64.

\(^{16}\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 74-75. Herman examined rapists, domestic abusers, political oppressors, and individuals with levels of authority using those powers to counter, with brutal force, any type of opposition or difference. “Perpetrator,” therefore is someone blanketing authority over another in an abusive and non-equal manner.
be studied. Since he does not perceive that anything is wrong with him, he does not seek help – unless he is in trouble with the law.”

Joseph Bates’ perpetrators, both the man who “pressed him into service” and Commander Bolton whose orders of impending flogging shook him to the core, sought, like Herman’s hypothetical tormenter, to “enslave their victims and then exercise despotic control over every aspect of the victim’s life.” As was the case with Bates, Bolton demanded respect and gratitude, and his ultimate goal was clearly the creation of willing victims in Bates and the rest of the impressed American sailors. Total control is a common dominator for all those who desire to exert power “over another person.” This is illustrated in Bates’ autobiography and the other narratives that are examined in these pages. Fear, the destruction of one’s autonomy, the use of rewards, and lastly extreme abuse – all served as methods to destroy the will of a captive or impressed sailor.

**Embargo, the War of 1812, and Significance of Nautical Cruelty**

Impressed sailors James Durand, James M’Lean, and Joshua Penny, who will be discussed below, along with Bates and even Joshua Davis, discussed previously, were aware of the “methods of coercive control” and devoted particular attention to maintaining “their sense of autonomy.” Through escape, hunger strikes, and even fighting back or just proclaiming their American heritage over and over again, these sailors refused to fall victim to their perpetrators’ ultimate goal. Although their refusal

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17 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 75.


20 Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 81; Springer, *America's Captives*, 6-10, 13-67; and Doyle, *Voices from Captivity*, 92-110, 195-231.
would initiate their brutal abuse by way of floggings, confinement, and being “hung atop the mast for everyone to see,” these men maintained their dignity and loyalty to their native country. As maritime historians Daniel Vickers and Vince Walsh have argued, in *Young Men and the Sea*, “Ruses to escape impressment” deeply influenced the youthful memories of sailors, which became a sort of ironic game and “there can be no doubt” that young sailors “relished their success in hoodwinking” press gangs and escaping impressment.  

In the end, sailors may have survived, but their emotional state, which suffered so greatly during those years of captivity, was riddled by traumatic memories of what had taken place. They sought a sympathetic ear through an emotional narrative of these experiences. These narratives served a multitude of purposes and in an era when the nautical narrative was growing in literary popularity, their stories served both to share their trauma and to sell their pain in what was the ultimate popular culture story.

This chapter provides additional research inside the world of maritime trauma and reinforces the concepts advanced previously through variations of the “sea eye.”

Focusing on the subject of impressments and its close proximity with political policy, this chapter shows how political culture served as an avenue for literate sailors to publish their heartbreaking accounts for a growing populace seeking to exploit maritime memory in a quest for war with Great Britain. In that regard this chapter displays a side of the maritime world that is normally ignored in the discourse of American exceptionalism. Joseph Bates was one of perhaps ten thousand Americans who were impressed into the

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Even so, as in the case of Joseph Bates, American seamen with citizenship documentation were not safe from press-gangs. Even sailor Joshua Penny, a native of Staten Island, New York, had on several occasions “seen the papers of neutrals torn into pieces by press-gangs, and thrown into the fire – declaring their protections good for nothing.”\footnote{Joshua Penny, \textit{The Life and Adventure of Joshua Penny. A Native of Southold, Long Island} (New York, 1815), 7.} For many impressed Americans, including Penny, impressment was a serious denial of their individual liberty and caused economic havoc, as well as instances of possible traumatic stress. As Marcus Rediker observes in reference to impressment in Revolutionary America:

Peter Warren was correct when he claimed that the sailors of New England were “almost Levellers”; as such, they expressed their opposition to impressment and to slavery…and influenced Jefferson, Paine and a whole generation of thinkers, and showed that revolutionary confrontation between upper and lower classes in the 1760s…was the true precedent to the events of 1776.\footnote{Linebaugh and Rediker, \textit{The Many-Headed Hydra}, 236. For impressments during American Revolution see also, Toll, \textit{Six Frigates}, 97, 193; James Nelson, \textit{George Washington’s Secret Navy: How the American
During their captivity, they were brutally beaten, given terrible food as well as scant shelter, and were not compensated for the hard backbreaking work they were forced to complete. Their decision to recount these traumas in narrative form may have been prompted in part by economic motivations, but their ability to compile devastating depictions and maintain an honest position, as honest as they could be, in their writing points to other motives as well, especially moral and political ones. As if the fight to tame the mighty Atlantic were not hard enough, sailors fought to remain American citizens and lived in terror of the press-gang.

Initially these young men had seen the ocean as an opportunity and avenue for adventure and profit. Whether it was trading timber along the coast or the hunt for the great whale, or exporting and importing goods with European ports, sailors observed the ocean as their “stage,” or theater, where they believed they were destined to achieve the treasures of life.27 The world lying beyond the shores of the east coast had hold of their collective imagination and offered something shore-based work could not. Still, Joseph Bates and many young men found not riches or adventure, but heartache and the struggle to survive as an impressed sailor and then eventually, for some, as a prisoner of war.

As was the case with Joshua Davis, during the American Revolution, many sailors found themselves abused and impressed by foreign governments. Early American sailors who were impressed and whose stories serve as the core of this chapter, all experienced severe trauma, which left them with the need to reformulate their experience for both a

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Revolution Went to Sea (New York: Ragged Mountain Press, 2008), 6; Patton, Patriot Pirates, 26-32; and Volo, Blue Water Patriots, 10, 19, 45, 100-106.

27 Vickers & Walsh, Young Men and the Sea, 2-6.
larger audience and in some cases to find a sense of closure with the past. These disturbing recollections are reflected in their written accounts. Although the first chapter examined men who braved the sea during the American Revolution, this chapter’s primary focus is on men who sailed both before and during the War of 1812, and whose work was important to American political and literary culture. To understand their traumas one must acknowledge their political world. As historian Dan Hicks has argued,

Honor was integral to early American politics, and was of central concern to leading political figures. The War of 1812 had to be fought, many Americans believed, to uphold the nation’s honor. Once the fighting began, codes of honor maintained through violence guided the conduct of many American combatants, especially, the men who held commissions in the army or navy.

The War of 1812 exhibited the theme of honor and with every American victory Americans were given an opportunity to celebrate their national character, which “provided the opportunities to reaffirm sentimental union.” Admiral E.M. Eller wrote that naval celebrations were

the real importance of the unexpected naval victories against the mighty ruler of the sea. The nation that had expected little of its infant navy against the overwhelming power of the British fleets now joined in widespread exultation over the victories. The diverse states were suddenly wielded with a unifying national interest.

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This theme of honor would come into play in the many naval engagements that took place, especially with those sailors that are the subject of this chapter, as national integrity, maritime trauma, and the recollections of the victimized intersect, elaborating on a hidden yet destructive world.

Although sailors engaged the ocean for adventure, the American government was seeking ways to give American shippers more freedom against British and French injustices, while at the same time avoiding all-out war. With the rate of impressments rising, in 1807, in the wake of the *Chesapeake* and *Leopard* affair, President Thomas Jefferson, through congressional authorization, initiated an economic embargo, which drastically changed the waterfront communities in America.\(^{32}\) Although when it came to the violation of American sailing right, both the British and French shared the blame, “the British were more offensive.” Thomas Jefferson had “great faith” in the power and importance of American commerce, as he initiated the Embargo of 1807 to coerce “the Europeans to the negotiating table,” but it did not work and instead wreaked havoc on the New England economy.\(^{33}\) In an attempt to maneuver America into free trade from Great Britain and France, Jefferson prohibited exports from leaving American ports in the

\(^{32}\) Gilje, *Liberty on the Waterfront*, 146-147 and Robert Cray Jr, “Remembering the USS Chesapeake,” 447. The incident between the HMS *Leopard* and U.S.S. *Chesapeake* is commonly believed to be the “spark” that light the fire of discontent in America and called for war against Britain over illegal impressment of American sailors.

hopes that European powers would recognize American neutral navigational rights. Although he had believed that Americans did not require trade with England, he was wrong and the American waterfront suffered the greatest cost.\textsuperscript{34} An act that should have promoted equality and safety for American sailors left them with few fiscal options.

Especially in Massachusetts, the Embargo of 1807-1809 and then the War of 1812 weakened the maritime output and input of the region. New Bedford, more specifically, felt the tightening of legislative restraints. Historians believe that the overall value of all the whaling industries’ exports had dropped from a high of around $600,000 in 1807, on the eve of Jefferson’s first set of economic embargos, to just under $10,000 in 1814.\textsuperscript{35} As a result of the almost calamitous collapse of New England maritime market in the years leading up to war with Great Britain, more ships and New England, and especially Cape Cod, captains partook in new business ventures, many outside legal boundaries, to soothe the crippled regional economy. From 1810-1817 “New Light” Quakers became extremely active in New Bedford, as well Lynn, Massachusetts, especially those of the Elias Hicks ministry.\textsuperscript{36} During the War of 1812 these Massachusetts towns, especially New Bedford, adhered to these “established” Quaker beliefs forcing many to subscribe to prohibited approaches to endure. The significant element that many Massachusetts towns opposed the “war effort” and declined to send troops into Canada, as well as outfit whaling vessels as warships to help in privateering, exacerbated their commercial


\textsuperscript{35} Morison, \textit{The Maritime History of Massachusetts}, 196-206.

In Cape Cod the coastal trade, led by men like Captain Nehemiah Smith of Eastham, Massachusetts, was paralyzed as well and trips to Boston and New York became such wild work that most Cape skippers – particularly those who owned shares in their commands – preferred to stay at home and growl about the treachery of the Administration rather than run the risk of having their vessels scooped up by Commodore Ragget in the *Spencer*, which, together with the *Majestic*, had been assigned to the duty of patrolling the Cape Shores.\(^{38}\)

Trips along the coast, during the War of 1812, “instead of continuing as part and parcel of life, now became rare and wildly adventurous enterprises; and so effective was the work of the British that few even of those who did try to slip through the blockade came home with their cargoes.”\(^{39}\) The most adventurous coastal captains were “deep-water shipmasters, who, their wings clipped for the moment, turned coasters until better days should come. Two such were Captains Winslow Knowles and Matthew Mayo, both of Eastham, who in 1814 succeeded in getting past the *Spencer* and into Boston in a whaleboat full of rye.”\(^{40}\)

Throughout the War of 1812 New England, with its Federalists’ hostility to Jeffersonian policies, opposed the war and outfitted increasingly less vessels engaged in privateering. On 21 July 1814 New Bedford strongly professed that it would, “scrupulously” abstain from “all interest and concern in sending out private armed vessels.”\(^{41}\) New Bedford declared that any privateering vessels, both foreign and

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domestic, that sailed into its Atlantic waters would be stopped and detained. Published weekly, the *New Bedford Mercury* reported on all American vessels captured by foreign privateers in an attempt to sway public outlook against the conflict.\(^{42}\) Even so, some privateering vessels from Massachusetts and the rest of New England did sail out in privateering voyages. As historians Daniel Vickers and Samuel Eliot Morrison have shown, Marblehead, Massachusetts, because of its poor financial standing, supported the war in an attempt to increase promising ground with the national government. The city “provided 726 privateers men, 120 naval seamen and…57 soldiers,” for the war effort.\(^{43}\)

In sharp contrast to New Bedford, Marblehead desired to enhance employment opportunities, revenue, and to reap local backing for the war struggle, trusting such activities would produce economic and political “partners” in Washington, D.C.

Marblehead printed articles in its town newspapers cheering on privateering successes and recorded the “fruits of the war” as they observed them.\(^{44}\) As the War of 1812 continued and Federalist disapproval was reinforced by political will, privateering ships became a rare sight, even in those local townships supporting the war, but lacking the political clout to stand against the New England Federalist wave.

Wiscasset, Maine, home to Daniel Collins, subject of chapter six, is said to have had no equal in any part of Maine as the chief shipping port east of Boston. It was a very prosperous era with so many ships registered here, that it was said you could walk from deck to deck all the way across the harbor and masts were everywhere the eye could see. The Embargo, intended to prevent war with

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\(^{42}\) “Progress of the War at Sea,” *New Bedford Daily Mercury*, 1812-1814.


England, failed and Wiscasset fortunes declined from that time, as shipping dried up and creditors loomed.\footnote{Morison, \textit{The Maritime History of Massachusetts}, 199, 208.}

In New England, the financial unpredictability forced many to participate in smuggling. In the course of these unlawful enterprises, vessels docked all over the country locating supplies that the Embargo of 1807 denied them. “Smuggling,” a secretive process, required “either stealth or subterfuge…the smugglers themselves were not cutthroats or pirates; generally they were ordinary merchants, farmers, and sailors.”\footnote{Dudley, ed. \textit{The Early Republic and the Sea}, 4.} Severe market delays owed to a lengthy distressing embargo, war, and postwar economic decline paved the way for the vast eruption of this illicit action.\footnote{Men like John Clap from New York journeyed to the remote Passamaquoddy region of Maine to engage in the illicit flour trade with Britain} Oceanic smuggling, when “stripped of romance, can largely be seen as a means of survival for those on the periphery of society, often at the behest of those better off than themselves.”\footnote{Joshua Smith, \textit{Borderland Smuggling: Patriots, Loyalists, and Illicit Trade in the Northeast, 1783-1820} (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2006), 45.} Captain John Collins, a Cape Cod seafarer and smuggler, “had shipped before the mast a lad of fifteen; had been a blockade-runner during the War of 1812; had been captured afterwards by the British while he was in command of a privateer, and had emerged from a British prison at the end of the war, wiser then before than before, but no less ambitious.”\footnote{Kittredge, \textit{Shipmasters of Cape Cod}, 129.} Disastrous though it was, “the War of 1812 did not last long enough to ruin vessels completely as the Revolution had done; and after it was over, business everywhere picked up with
extraordinary speed." The riches of Job Chase, Jr., of West Harwich, Massachusetts, exemplify this matter clearly. From 1800 until 1840, he was one of the largest owners of coasting vessels on the Cape and his business ran steady up until 1812, but even during the war Chase had several vessels at work from 1813 to 1815. By 1830 Chase had an entire fleet that was sailing coastwise and the wartime days of forced rationing had become a distant memory.

What started as a presidential desire to protect American sailors gave way to anger and economic devastation, especially in the Northeastern region of the United States. Even as Jefferson enforced these policies and demanded European capitulation, America’s inability to defend the “protections” Americans possessed led to an increase in impressments and stronger call for war. Jefferson’s, and then James Madison’s, inability to control this issue gave many politicians further determination to take on Britain in a Second War of Independence, but this time to secure the independence of American sailors. Commonly overlooked in the historical discourse of impressed sailors is the impressment of “black jacks” or African American seamen. Two of the four men who were impressed by the HMS Leopard from the U.S. ship Chesapeake “were men of color.”

The national memory of impressments and the subsequent War of 1812 is dominated by a “white” consciousness and even Dartmoor Prison, where Joseph Bates eventually ended up, was filled with Northern free-black American sailors who had been killed and eighteen wounded from British cannon fire.

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50 Kittredge, Shipmasters of Cape Cod, 21.

51 Bolster, Black Jacks, 103 and Cray Jr. “Remembering the USS Chesapeake,” 445. During this same event, three Americans were killed and eighteen wounded from British cannon fire.
impressed.\textsuperscript{52} Still, sea service, imprisonment, and impressment inspired an entire
generation of young men with the chance to fuse masculinity with patriotism.

Unlike the collective memory of sailors inflicted with the pain of impressment
during the War of 1812, “Revolutionary War memory was useful…but it turned out to be quite different from other heroic war memories.”\textsuperscript{53} When the public thought about naval
heroes, few did not, at first, consider sailors like Joshua Davis and then seamen like
Joseph Bates, but rather focused on “naval hero John Paul Jones.” Jones, as Purcell
argues, offered the closest thing to a “naval heroic icon” with which Americans could quickly identity in times of trouble. Jones eventually wrote a successful narrative that served as perfect political propaganda. But he first gained prominence due to the
“urgency of the crisis over impressment, images of common sailors and prisoners of war who had been abused by the British during the Revolutionary War became even more effective at rousing American emotions against naval depredations.”\textsuperscript{54} Sailors like Davis, and then eventually Bates, and, as we will see below, James M’Lean and James Durand, spoke directly to the heart of the American public and became the heroes that Jones was only in name and on paper. As the War of 1812 progressed, Davis grew less important as men who were impressed both right before or during the conflict wrote their own narratives and carried the American people even closer to the struggle that tortured them, both emotionally and, in sailors accounts, physically.

\textsuperscript{52} Robin F.A. Fabel “Self-Help in Dartmoor: Black and White Prisoners in the War of 1812.” \textit{Journal of the Early Republic} 9, no. 2, (Summer 1989): 165 and Bolster, \textit{Black Jacks}, 30-31. Black sailors feared impressments and had to fear the assumption on that part of press-gangs that they were slaves. After their impressment many free-blacks were often sold into European slavery.

\textsuperscript{53} Purcell, \textit{Sealed with Blood}, 141.

\textsuperscript{54} Purcell, \textit{Sealed with Blood}, 142.
“Long after the danger has passed,” as Psychologist Judith Herman notes, “traumatized people relive the event as though it were continually recurring in the present. They cannot resume the normal course of their lives, for the trauma repeatedly interrupts. It is as if time stops at the moment of trauma.”55 As time stops, traumatic memories are encoded, formed, and seared deep in the cognitive bank of the traumatized individual and will later act as one symptom, or component, of “post-traumatic stress.” These past disasters “arrest the course of normal development by [their] repetitive intrusion into the survivor’s life.”56 Herman concludes that “traumatized people relive the moment of trauma not only in their thoughts and dreams but also in their actions.”57 The impressed sailors in this study clearly had faced the circumstances necessary to allow for their traumatic memories to maintain their consequentiality and, in the end, their reenactment of shocking scenes relied upon their repetitive storytelling, which, according to historian Paul Gilje, was common in maritime communities after nautical disasters.58 Given their knowledge of “group membership,” considering their link to their particular strong maritime community and identity as impressed sailors, these narrators illustrate an awareness of communal maritime belonging. The formation and maintenance of these devastating memories “derives from the social identity subsystem of the person’s self-knowledge and…this knowledge is shared among individuals who consider themselves as

55 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 39.

56 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 37.

57 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 39. See also, Sobel, Teach Me Dreams, 17-55; Caruth, Unclaimed Experience, 11, 139; Caruth, Trauma Explorations in Memory, 152, 185; LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma, 88, 98-110, 144; Miller ed., Extremities, 25-55; and Shay, Odysseus in America, 31.

58 Gilje, Liberty on the Waterfront, 151.
members of the same social groups.” Although not perfect memories, these sailors’ recollections reflected on a believed truth and, in that sense, sought communal appreciation and acceptance, at first, by discussing their life-changing stories and then selling narratives devoted to those oceanic horrors, which those around them could relate to and understand.

As members of a maritime “social group,” more than four thousand seamen eventually applied to the Secretary of State, James Madison (1801-1809), Robert Smith (1809-1811), and James Monroe (1811-1817), in pursuit of a release from their impressment. During the War of 1812 alone, a total of 1,421 men who had been impressed, including Joseph Bates, were transferred to prisoner-of-war status in England. Sailors like Joseph Bates, James Durand, Joshua Penny, and James M’Lean demonstrated exceptional ability to adapt to the most oppressive conditions. Each sailor lived through catastrophic experiences and eventually sought reassurance for his actions through dictation and the publication of his memoires. The mistreatment they received at the hands of the British in the years preceding the War of 1812, and during it, produced a rallying cry used by citizens and politicians to fight for the rights of sailors. Their writings produced a horrific record that could be used with great literary, social, and political effectiveness. Not only were these sailors affected by this cruelty, but “impressments enraged Americans…and although many issues, such as British violations of the United States’ territorial waters and right to trade, led Congress to declare war.


60 Gilje, Liberty on the Waterfront, 156.
against Great Britain in June of 1812, that of impressments struck a particular resonant chord with the American public.\textsuperscript{61}

The cruelty that many impressed sailors lived through might have triggered traumatic stress. The memory of these instances was severe and their need to write about their experiences may have been motivated by the hope of profit or spiritual justification. In fact, these men experienced a trauma that would have buried itself into their mind and set up a permanent fortress refusing to relinquish the past. Therefore, when they sought assistance to transfer past to paper, they remained honest to the retention of the event, but did possess a political agenda with their message. It was evident that the memory of the affair was strongest when utilized in close proximity to the event itself. Interestingly, most who wrote of their experiences joined the maritime profession as teenagers, one as young as ten, with images of an Atlantic World filled with escapades and hope. Their developing minds, not yet fully prepared for the journey, acted as a catalyst in creating diverse memories that stored the shocking experiences awaiting them. When these sailors put these words to paper, they did so at the perfect time. As Myra Glenn has argued, “Antebellum Americans remembered and mythologized the War of 1812 in ways that resonated with their interpretation of the Revolution.”\textsuperscript{62} Depictions of the War of 1812 as a heroic second struggle for independence underscored this point. Those sailors who wrote about their abuse at the hands of a British enemy “reaffirmed their sense of

\textsuperscript{61} Glenn, \textit{Jack Tar’s Story}, 55.

\textsuperscript{62} Glenn, \textit{Jack Tar’s Story}, 57.
national identity” and insulated themselves with a “print culture” and served as members of Benedict Anderson’s “imagined community” through a joint struggle as united men.63

The years after the American Revolution allowed for officers and men like Barnabas Downs and Joshua Davis to find some popularity, as well as “gratitude,” through their revolutionary deeds. Once a new war ascended the horizon, and then eventually commenced, the sailors who wrote about their traumatic experiences, both during and after the War of 1812, followed the literary path started by Barnabas Downs for a new generation. American sailors were placed at the center of the public discourse regarding the tyranny of Britain.64 Davis’ narrative served to portray naval resistance to British cruelty and sparked greater public need for “revenge” and for the United States to stand up to its European brethren, for a second time. Although his narrative and other revolutionary sailor veterans’ publications often afforded a bitter and graphic recollection of captivity, the narratives of sailor authors who fought during the War of 1812 differed greatly from one another.

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64 Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 58. See also, for discussions of “gratitude,” Purcell, Sealed with Blood, 50-51, 56-57,144, & 207-208.
As Glenn and others have argued, sailors’ narratives from seamen like Joshua Davis offered more “pointed, detailed depictions of how their authors helped defeat” the British enemy in naval battle and how those same sailors suffered at the hands of that enemy. But, be that as it may, seamen like Barnabas Downs, and still Joshua Davis proved to have other motives for their publications, not the greatest of which was to spin a tale of naval success. A revolutionary veteran, Downs sought much more than spiritual comfort, and in that respect, by focusing on the memories, not the “trumped up” prose of patriotic propaganda, which Davis did have, historians can truly understand what they went through and why they wrote their story. Although sailors who found themselves impressed either before or during the War of 1812 fueled the “Anglophobia then rampant in the United States,” they did so through the trauma they experienced at the hands of their British enemies, as well as the ocean itself.65 The men who started this trend were the revolutionaries depicted in chapter one, and while scholars have argued that their works were more flowery and crafted towards a victorious end, this dissertation takes exception to that idea and argues that those men, like all sailing men who experienced trauma, wrote about what they felt, images that appeared out of nowhere, and as a form of “retaliation” towards those powers that abused them.

Privateers, impressed sailors, and, as we will see, whalemen and nautical abolitionists, suffered from those invasive memories and studying what those writings tell us about their world and why they wrote of that traumatic past can open doors to greater historical exploration. It makes their existence historically significant. This allows historians to move past basic assumptions about sailor writings and find a profound

meaning entrenched in their distressing exposure, which, by focusing purely or solely on naval victories or revolutionary mythology, can never truly be appreciated. Sailors’ pain provides a glimpse into what they witnessed, even if their narratives have issues of “bias,” as well as political and economic intent. The impressed men whose stories comprise the rest of this chapter, all experienced terrible oceanic events and used those events for specific reasons. Although their memories at certain points deceive them, the memories of pain, which for years they had constantly lived with, served to maintain a great emotional transparency embedded in their writings.

**Sufferings of James M’Lean**

When James M’Lean, who first set sail at age ten and was later held captive for thirteen years, from 1796 to 1809, as an impressed sailor, published his account of impressments in 1814, his own was fresh in his memory and was a potent reminder of the need to protect sailors’ rights.66 For thirteen years he defended his liberty against British abuse and crafted a message of resistance, which inevitably inspired the American people to push for their government to act on the sailors’ behalf.67 James M’Lean was born in 1786 in Windsor, in the county of Hartford, Connecticut. The consequences of his decision to go to sea befell young M’Lean almost immediately. Yet the first tragedy that M’Lean had to survive through was not impressment or even brutal captivity, it was actually a hurricane and an incident that would resemble the destruction of the whaleship *Essex* and its crews terrible journey into thirst, starvation, and death. As M’Lean wrote,

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although he found “tolerable” success at the start of his voyage, in 1796, still soon after
he had departed from Connecticut, M’Lean undertook a voyage to the West Indies in the
brig Michael. Sailing from New London on the “27th of August until the third of
September, when…we fell in with a severe gale of winds from the N.W. It blew
excessively hard, and having cattle on deck, Capt. Arnold concluded that it was not safe
to heave the vessel to.” M’Lean and the rest of the crew were ordered “hove all our hay
overboard” and clear the decks, then to run down the “top gallant-yards” and take the
entire canvass in, “except our close reefed foretop sail.” Captain Arnold thought it
“prudent to scud,” so they stayed away from the wind and open sea, as it became a fierce
hurricane and continued until late that same evening.

Captain Arnold relieved a Mr. Jepson, who was their chief-mate, and who had
been working nonstop for four hours and needed “some refreshment,” when suddenly the
ship was struck by a commanding sea “upon the larboard quarter, by which our ship went
over with her tops in the water, and the sea breaking in upon us on all quarters.” With
the ship sinking, as M’Lean recalled, Captain Arnold ordered the men to “jump and cut
the lanyards of the rigging, that the masts may go away.” As M’Lean remembered, the
ship at this point was “lying on her beam ends, and every sea was breaking over us.”
As the gale raged and the vessel continued to take on water and slowly drifted closer to
sending ship and crew to “Davy Jones locker,” the crew worked around the clock to save

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69 M’Lean, Seventeen Years’ History, Found in Williams ed., Liberty's Captives, 165. Scud refers to a ship
effecting a strong head wind and carrying little or no sail.
both the ship and themselves. As M’Lean remembered, “The gale still continued, and we
could not move, as we were all lashed upon the taffel, and the sea constantly washing
over us. All this time our cloths were mostly washed off us, and we expecting every
minute our ship to sink.”72 Although losing their clothing, most of their food and water
and, for some, their sanity, the crew stabilized the ship on the sixth of September as the
storm abated. M’Lean recalled that they
dare not stir from our situation. We were suffering much for want of water, being
obliged to drink salt water, and our own. On the 8th it became quite calm, and the
sea smooth; at this time our ship was lying with about two feet of water on her
main deck: with the assistance of an iron bar, we made a hole through her main
deck, and got at part of cask of water; we lashed it to our night-heads, and after
we had quenched our thirst, then we began to want food.73

They were suffering from want of food and therefore, as the ship remained a floating
mess, they sent dive efforts to find barrels of food and “Indian meal,” which they found
and lived on for a number of days. At one point the crew had become fearful of a shark
that was circling the vessel, but one of the crew members decided to catch it, which he
did, and they sliced it open and roasted his “mighty catch.”

Remaining in this state of limbo, on the sixteenth of September the crew of the
Michael spotted “a sail to windward, steering in a direct course towards us. About 4
o’clock P.M. she came to our assistance and took us on board: we were so weak and low,
that we [were] unable to walk.”74 The sloop that rescued them was captained by a man
named Bowman, from Alexandria, who was bound to Cape Nicolia-Mole. Captain
Bowman ordered that they depart immediately, seeing that nothing except human lives

could be salvaged from the wreck of the Michael. As M’Lean and nine survivors of the wreck sailed off, the Michael was given a life-expectancy of three more days. M’Lean’s life had been spared from a terrible fate. Sadly, for M’Lean the shipwreck was only the beginning, and would actually be the shorter of the harrowing events he would live through. On the horizon was a future of impressment and captivity.

James M’Lean survived a devastating shipwreck, and traveled to New York to find work and told of his harrowing ordeal. He went ashore with no money, no clothing, but with a story that could make one’s skin crawl. He remained in New York until November and then, like many other sailors, finding work ashore depressing and unsatisfying, he decided to ship off once again to seek the fortune that had eluded him. With his health and strength restored, M’Lean undertook a second voyage to the West Indies, this time on the brig Juno bound to Cape Francois. Here, as M’Lean wrote, nothing special occurred, except that he returned to New York with plenty of money and his interest in the maritime trade only increased. Seeking to expand his profits even further, M’Lean shipped out on the Glory-Ann of Philadelphia then lying in New York Harbor but bound for Liverpool. During this voyage M’Lean found moderate success, but things changed once he voyaged to Grenada. Here, as he lamented, he “began a second part of my misfortunes, which, if I were to detail at full length, would fill a large volume.”

Historian Paul Gilje relates that in Grenada “sometime around 1798,” M’Lean was “impressed three times by the British.” As M’Lean explained, “We no sooner let go

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76 Gilje, Liberty on the Waterfront, 161-162.
our anchor, than an English Man of War’s boat came on board and pressed me and two
more of the Seamen, and carried us on board the Madrass, a fifty-gun ship commanded
by John Dilks, who immediately asked me for my protection.” M’Lean proceeded to
identify himself as an American and showed him paperwork from a “Notary Public in
New York,” but the officer, a man named “Keyes,” shrugged off his insistence of
American nationality and argued that he “could get” a document, “if I was in America,
for a half a crown, as good as that.” Although M’Lean continued to protest, the first
lieutenant stepped up and argued that he knew M’Lean to be a native of Scotland and that
he was pretending to be an American, for “I knew his friends from Greenock.” After
hearing this evidence, the Captain of the vessel demanded that M’Lean “then do his duty
in the main-top.” There had been no jury, no judge, and although no execution had been
deemed appropriate, M’Lean was judged to be Scottish and his American nationality
stripped away. If he did not comply, he would be punished beyond imagination and such
brutality occurred.

Although M’Lean attempted to do his work, he took little satisfaction in it and
admitted: “I was a sulky rascal.” His disobedience was evident and he maintained a thick
skin and sought some type of release from this “hell.” One day, while the ship and crew
were letting “a reef out of the main top sail, the sail tore,” and M’Lean was immediately
said to be at fault. His reputation did not assist him and he was ordered to be seized, and
the boatswain’s mate was instructed to punish him. M’Lean remembered that the
boatswain’s mate did as he was told and gave “me twelve lashes on my bare back with
cat-o-nine-tails; he then ordered me to be cast off and sent [back] to my duty.” 77 For

77 M’Lean, Seventeen Years’ History, Found in Williams ed., Liberty's Captives, 169.
several years M’Lean was traded from vessel to vessel, all impressing him to serve the British crown and abusing him when needed or required. He served on the *Vengeance*, a warship of seventy-four guns ordered to Gibraltar with Lord Nelson’s fleet, to take part in an attack on several French vessels in the area.

Memories of battles followed by floggings were the routine for M’Lean during those years in captivity. Even on one occasion he was serving on the *Windsor Castle*, ninety-eight guns, and sent on a watering party, which gave M’Lean an opportunity to escape. He did run away and even garnered help from sympathetic local fishermen, who, after M’Lean paid them, helped him locate an American vessel, the *Eliza*, that might be able to assist him in reaching the east coast of America and hopefully Boston. As he recalled:

> I now went on board an American schooner, belonging to Boston, expecting once more to see my native country; but judge of the sad reverse: - while my bosom heaved with joy, and I fondly anticipated the pleasure of visiting my aged parents, and fraternal friends, a sudden storm arose and baffled every effort, to keep our course, and we were driven back, and obliged to put into Portsmouth.  

In Portsmouth, M’Lean went ashore for water and while watering he was approached by an officer who asked him what country he was from. M’Lean, as he had done several times in the past, answered that he was an American, but it did not matter. He was ordered to follow the officers, who put him in a guarded house and where he could be watched, for they assumed, wrongly, that he was a deserter from his majesty’s navy. The next morning M’Lean met the captain of the *Pique Frigate* and told him of his situation and place of birth. The captain would hear nothing of it and again ordered M’Lean to “his duty.” Eventually M’Lean was transferred, yet again to the *Toudryant*,

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which was Lord Keith’s flagship. He met with the Admiral and showed him his
American protections, to which the Admiral replied, “you may be [American], but we
cannot trust to protection.” M’Lean was then again ordered to do his duty on the
forecastle, which he did. On one occasion M’Lean recalled, “hauling a buoy rope” and a
lieutenant criticized his work and struck him in the face.79 M’Lean wrote that suddenly
“He knocked out two of my teeth, and cut my face shockingly, and caused much effusion
of blood, saying at the same time ‘you are one of the Scotch Yankees;’ to which I replied
no I am a true born American; with that he said, ‘no reply, you rascal! Go to your duty.”80

During another incident, which served to extend M’Lean’s traumatic ordeal, he
continued to proclaim his American nationality but was

striped of everything, except a shirt, two pairs of trowsers, and a jacket. I was
put into irons on the lower deck, with nothing to lie upon by the hard planks. My
allowance was half a pound of bread, and same quantity of meat, and a scanty
pittance of water.81

“In this situation I remained until we arrived at St. Helena,” where M’Lean was

“frequently called up, and pointing to the fore yard, the captain,” as M’Lean remembered,

“would say, that as the place he meant to hang me.”82 Burdened by the prospect of death,
M’Lean was constantly in a heightened state of anxiety and fear. He remembered finally
arriving in St. Helena and “I was sent to the main guard house on shore, with a pair of
irons on my legs, weighing fifty pounds, and a guard set over me. I continued in this

79 Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 51.
situation about fourteen days, during which time I became extremely lowzy, and my legs were so swelled that I was unable to move.”\textsuperscript{83} Frequent threats of hanging, terrible physical pain, and constant psychological torment showcased M’Lean’s almost two-decade imprisonment, but he refused to surrender to his “perpetrators,” will and never surrendered to his own physical and emotional stress. For seventeen years M’Lean, the helpless impressed American sailor, was unable to escape from the real world, but he escaped by altering his “state of consciousness.”\textsuperscript{84} He became detached but did not surrender and, as Judith Herman has argued, “While the heightened perceptions occurring during traumatic events resemble the phenomena of hypnotic absorption, the numbing symptoms resemble the commentary phenomena of hypnotic dissociation.”\textsuperscript{85} Tragic events serve as “powerful activators of the capacity for trance” and usually occur “without conscious choice.”\textsuperscript{86}

M’Lean was an Early American “Odysseus.” A man from New England, who after experiencing natural, and unnatural disasters and being captured numerous times by his British enemy, would travel for over a decade to reach his “heart’s” destination. Although M’Lean would be flogged, fight against the French as a means of survival, and act as a reluctant patriot and “escape”–prone sailor, he always envisioned a better day. He sought out a day when he would no longer be under the control of a “perpetrator.”

\textsuperscript{83} M’Lean, Seventeen Years’ History, of the Life and Sufferings of James M’Lean Found in Williams ed., Liberty’s Captives, 173-174.

\textsuperscript{84} Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 42.

\textsuperscript{85} Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 42.

\textsuperscript{86} Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 42.
Our historical journey into the experience of James M’Lean has not ended, and its significance has been explored. M’Lean would eventually be absent from American soil for seventeen years. He ironically would spend more time away from home than he had spent there before he left. He had sailed out at the age of ten and would return a grown man of twenty-seven, old for sailors of that time. M’Lean resembled Odysseus who, during his meeting with his son Telemachus, wept, “both men so filled with compassion, eyes streaming with tears.” As Jonathan Shay observes, Odysseus was “the very last fighter to make it home from Troy and endured the most grueling travel, costing him a full decade on the way. Odysseus’ return ended in a bloody, triumphant shoot-em-up.” Yet Shay persuasively “decodes Odysseus’ adventures in wonderland – the most famous part of the epic – as an allegory for real problems of combat veterans returning to civilian society.” M’Lean would fight to return home for seven years longer than Odysseus had and his trials and tribulations were presumably as horrific and painful. Although not a combat veteran M’Lean was an unfortunate American sailor deemed unprotected by “American protections.” It was in part the abuse of him for whom the War of 1812 was fought and because of men like Joshua Davis, who was away from home for just three fewer than Odysseus, that accounts illustrated the miseries of impressed sailors.


M’Lean’s odyssey brought him severe floggings he would never forget. It was on 18 October 1813, after a thirty-day voyage in American custody, that he finally reached Newport, Rhode Island, and for the first time in seventeen years touched American soil. Once he arrived home, in 1813, M’Lean proceeded to write about his distressing experiences. When M’Lean came to describe his homecoming, like several other sailors, he left it to the reader to judge his feelings. On his three-day journey to his father’s home in Providence, Rhode Island he wrote that “the sympathetic tear could not be suppressed; parental and filial affection were mutually interchanged, and every sentiment congenial to friends was endeavored to be reciprocated.” At the end of his narrative, M’Lean, like Joseph Bates, and Barnabus Downs, found “GOD,” whom he acknowledged as a “Superintending Providence, who guides the fates of men.” Through “GOD,” M’Lean argued, he was secured from danger and it was that “heavenly being” who covered his head in the day of battle and gave him strength equal to his day.

M’Lean published an account of his suffering in 1814, only one year after his return and during the war in which he had been impressed. By the end of his long stay away from home, M’Lean had served in many roles, but too often he was cast in irons and stripped of any protections. Clearly such documents did not protect M’Lean or other American sailors as they were intended. In 1813, he deserted from the thirty-six gun

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90 Interestingly, M’Lean had written a letter to his parents in 1805 conveying to them word of his good health, but telling them that he “had met with great misfortune” and had been in a French brig heading home when it was captured by a British frigate. In this letter M’Lean begged his family to “write to the American Consul in London, and send a Certificate, of my Age, place of Birth, &c. signed be some of the head merchants in Hartford, [if you do] you will, perhaps save my life, as the English Captain seems very inveterate against me.” As M’Lean concluded, “Now, I hope, Dear Parents that you will not neglect to write the Consul immediately.”

91 M’Lean, Seventeen Years’ History, of the Life and Sufferings of James M’Lean Found in Williams ed., Liberty's Captives, 178.
frigate *Chiffane*, commanded by Captain Paul Campbell, his third and final such
desertion from a British ship and, as above discussed, made his way to Rhode Island and
into the loving arms of friends and family. As Gilje argues, the timing of the publication
of M’Lean’s narrative “should come as no surprise…for years the plight of the impressed
sailor had been trumpeted as vital to national interests.”⁹² Myra Glenn observes that
M’Lean, the alleged “Scotch rascal” illustrated in his narrative, “not only how American
sailors suffered when impressed by the British but also how they stood up to their
captors.”⁹³ Like Glenn, Hester Blum claims that M’Lean’s text “was at the cusp of a new
subgenre of literature: the memoirs and autobiographies of sailors who had fought against
the British.”⁹⁴ They argue that these types of works came in “two overlapping stages,”
with the first being established by Revolutionary heroes like Joshua Davis and the last
“phase” by men who had served during the War of 1812 in some capacity.

**The Literary World of Maritime Trauma and Captivity**

Memories of impressed sailors transcribed into maritime narratives written
during, and soon after, the War of 1812 were “trumpeted” as a dynamic issue to national
interests. Americans were angry at the British and wanted retribution for the violations
and injustices enacted against American sailors. As Hester Blum has observed, “The
world of print helped sustain sailors intellectually and financially during the crisis of
impressment…when their narratives of captivity were published, reviewed, and taken up

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⁹³ Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 50-51.
⁹⁴ Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 51 and Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 2,5, 42-45, & 74-75.
by the popular press.”\textsuperscript{95} The growth of the “print culture sphere in America, and especially the technological innovations in the 1830s that helped fuel an explosion of magazines and cheap editions of books, created readers and writers. Sailors were both.”\textsuperscript{96}

Blum reiterates that “narratives of sailors who were both authors of the stories of their own captivity and readers of their fellow sailors’ captivities positioned themselves primarily for an audience of their own kind, but this did not mean that their audience was narrowly circumscribed.”\textsuperscript{97} In a large sense although the threats and perils of British impressments “traversed the indeterminate national boundaries of the Atlantic Ocean…narratives proposed a means for the physical and textual circulation of American sailors in an Atlantic world characterized, paradoxically, by terrific mobility and repressive confinement.”\textsuperscript{98} No matter their reasons, nor their audience, their writings offer insight into their memory of what life sailing the ocean was really like. They unlock the potential to recognize the psychological rationale of those American sailors who sought to move a country to defend them and then fight a war to free them. James M’Lean was “no sooner released from African captivity than he was pressed into service on an English man-of-war whose commander insisted that his American papers were

\textsuperscript{95} Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 4-5.


\textsuperscript{97} Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 47.

\textsuperscript{98} Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 47.
forged and that he was a native Scotsman.” As Blum has shown, the likelihood of a recently “redeemed” captive being “impressed before he had a chance to return to American was a special danger in which seamen saw little irony,” but whose irony they could not ignore.

What James M’Lean experienced was nothing short of sustained horror, with an ironic twist. As M’Lean moved forward into then unforeseen dangers, the path laid out for him was seemingly in perfect harmony with how others had also fallen victim to such tragedy. The initial response to the thought of being captured by an enemy, whether for a sailor or soldier, had the power to transform him and how he adjusted to the next chapter in his life. For Bates the trauma of his capture motivated him to continue to attempt to escape until, in the end, he chose to fight peacefully against his unjust imprisonment, rather than see other American sailors beaten for his attempt to win his freedom. He would bear the brutality and the scars of trauma, all with the hope that one day he would see an end to his captivity. Even Angelo Crapsey, the subject of Dennis Brandt’s *Pathway to Hell*, captured during the Fredericksburg Campaign in the American Civil War, descended further into madness through each traumatic event he encountered. As Brandt wrote, Crapsey’s friend Charlie survived the battle of Fredericksburg and even eluded capture thanks to the arrival of reinforcements. He concluded that

Official accounts list Angelo as wounded at Fredericksburg. Charles may have reported that fact to superiors because everyone knew that Angelo would never give up. Everyone would have been wrong. No bullet touched Angelo. He had conceded defeat. The Rebels had given him no choice. The lad who once vowed

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100 Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 67-68.
never to compromise had thrown up his hands and shouted, ‘I surrender!’ A bullet in the head would have been more merciful.\textsuperscript{101}

Overcome with fear and panic, Crapsey gave up the fight and would be transferred to the infamous Libby Prison where, as Brandt argued, Crapsey’s slide down the pathway to hell began. Evident from his written letters, Crapsey suffered from frustration and begged to be visited by family, which Brandt argued would have saved his life, and although eventually he was released, the days of starving, endless work, and brutal conditions caused Crapsey to suffer from an emotional breakdown from which he never recovered.\textsuperscript{102} Historians can examine his state of mind and traumatic exposure through these written recollections, just as historians can observe the same reactions in sailors’ narratives.

Like Crapsey, many sailors who were subjected to British abuse suffered in a way that destroyed their will to live. Although we have seen that Bates’ determination was not lost, but devoted to an attempt to survive without regard to his own sanity. Many sailors found that to let go of who they were in order to survive proved a valuable mechanism in order to see a comparable tragedy through to the end. Still, even as Crapsey illustrates the minority whose captivity shoved them closer to their grave, as we will see in a later chapter, a man named Daniel Drayton, a nautical abolitionist, confirmed Judith Herman’s theory that

Prolonged captivity undermines or destroys the ordinary sense of a relatively safe sphere of initiative, in which there is some tolerance for trial and error. To the chronically traumatized person, any action has potentially dire consequences. Even after the victim has escaped, it is not possible simply to reconstitute relationships of the sort that existed prior to captivity... basic trust is in

\textsuperscript{101} Brandt, \textit{Pathway to Hell}, 105-106.

\textsuperscript{102} Brandt, \textit{Pathway to Hell}, 109-115.
question…prolonged captivity also produced profound alternations in the victim’s identity…. These profound alterations in the self and in relationships inevitably result in the questioning of basic tenets of faith. 103

Herman concludes that “these staggering psychological losses can result in a tenacious state of depression… during captivity, the victim cannot express [his] humiliated rage at the perpetrator, for to do so would jeopardize [his] survival,” and thus in the end the survivor may “direct [his] rage and hatred against [himself]. Suicidality, which sometimes served as a form of resistance during imprisonment, may persist long after release, when it no longer serves any adaptive purpose.” 104

For men like Crapsey, and as one will see in the case of Captain Daniel Drayton, these “fits” created, transformed, and cemented during captivity proved too traumatic to maintain controlled. These men found some solace in suicide, which they could not find in life or remembrance. Although each sailor tried to make sense out of his traumatized past through a present and future acknowledgment in “literary form,” he found no answers in public support or attention. Those moments of terror, through a battle where the subject witnessed a man killed in front of him by a bullet to the head, or simply being captured when all seemed perfectly normal, created a painful memory that served to aggravate and agitate the subject. For sailors like Drayton those recollections proved too much to handle. Even so, as we will now see, those moments of shock, for other sailors,

103 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 92-94. See also, Bessel A. Van Der Kolk, Traumatic Stress: The Effects of Overwhelming Experience on Mind, Body, and Society (New York: The Guilford Press, 2006), 85, 92, 200, 448; and Babette Rothschild, The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), 133-134.

could be used to move forward. They chose not to forget the past and did so in an effort to use the past in a political and economic struggle, yet seemingly never losing sight of the traumatic center that helped form these memories.

Hester Blum asserts that “sailors were keen to show that the typical Jack Tar should not be thought of as ‘a mere machine, - a mass of bone and muscle.’” Sailors sought to depict who “real sailors” were and felt compelled to relate traumatic events as realistically as they were illuminated in their own minds. The timing of such narratives proved especially efficient based on the fact that the maritime world was an “inviting landscape for both literary exploration and national definition,” and this was particularly true as “nationalist periodicals of the early antebellum era issued the call for a distinctly American literature.” After the War of 1812 sea writing capitalized on popular interest in the lives of common American sailors. Sailors took advantage of this popularity, as well as political environment, to relay their trauma in a constructive and productive way. In one way they wrote to come to terms with their upsetting past, but in another they served as nationalistic examples of the American way. But there was still another way they found popularity, which was through these same literary depictions of their lives in the service of popular reading.

Even though sailors’ narratives could be used as a singular case of inspiration for an American public seemingly in search of answers to political controversy, these writings could also inspire literary greats, who in the end overshadowed their “muse” in search of their own success. Still, in terms of their importance to the depiction of war and

105 Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 23.

106 Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 71.
suffering, these narratives played a significant role in shaping the popular imagination, even if that original intention was solely the depiction of a horrific event that seemed unexplainable outside the maritime community. Their literary adventure was an escape into their own cognitive realm, where they continued to relive moments of suffering and those recollections that proved consequential years later. Their inability to forget allowed them to paint the powerful and intense tales that audiences were empowered by. Their hope somehow to stop “flashbacks,” survivors’ guilt, feelings of shame, or just to appreciate how far they had come, and how far they still needed to go, was coupled with a response to literary national urgings with that of a “moment of American naval confidence” following the War of 1812.\footnote{Blum, The View from the Masthead, 75. See also, Foulke, The Sea Voyage Narrative, preface and Fabian, The Unvarnished Truth, 2, 10-20, 29-36, 38-42, 183, 193, 210, 248.}

Their memories were eventually used by, and inspired, literary writers and by acknowledging that fact here, and now, historians can appreciate the suffering those sailors sought to understand, even if it was “shuffled” into the backdrop of a more nationalistic performance. By acknowledging that idea, as Glenn and Blum have done, and shifting attention to dramatic recollections, can one appreciate the horrific events sailors experienced and those they were forced to retell over and over again for both their own psychological well-being and an audience of patriotic readers. Their “forced” rehearsal acts as the historian’s window into both their physical and emotional trauma.

Although it is clear that these writings “whipped up” resentment against the British, what is rarely examined is how these narratives described the significance of specific devastating memories. Several times M’Lean alludes to moments of “shock” and fear that must be acknowledged and understood for their emotional importance. In terms
of trauma a lot of what he wrote, as is the case in Bates’ writing, fits comfortably with Judith Herman’s studies in captivity trauma and concepts of post-traumatic stress. Although a clinical diagnosis of M’Lean is not possible, his narrative allows historians to entertain a certain “understanding” of how these experiences affected him and how he utilized those experiences for political and social purposes. Through a close examination of his words, one can see how and when M’Lean expressed a recollection of a distressing nature, and how those tragic episodes, as well as ordinary incidents, reflect a oceanic reality. The recollection of the appalling pain of a cat-o-nine-tails conveys a maritime truth that expresses the dark side of the nautical vocation. Still, even as the memories that he suffered from helped him to write a dramatic maritime narrative, there were, of course, moments of the narrative that were recounted in, as Glenn and Blum infer, to serve a specific political and economic reason.

Whether political or economic messages are included, in sailor’s narratives, they are not essential to the power of the traumatic recollection possessed or revealed. They illustrate the types of tragedies that befell sailors and the motivations behind their eventual autobiographical publications. Captive sailors like M’Lean often are a minefield of emotional and psychological issues. For seventeen years M’Lean suffered repeated, sometimes constant distress. His memories of that time allude to a dark maritime world that few historians have paid attention to and even fewer historical subjects themselves were willing to convey.

When M’Lean first went to sea, he was ten years old, very young even for a sailor at that time, and his “abuse” by British officers, notably admirals, may find comparisons in modern “child abuse” clinical cases and considerations. As Herman argues, “When
abused children note signs of danger, they attempt to protect themselves either by avoiding or placating the abuser. Runaway attempts are common." M’Lean followed these patterns and did so in order to survive and through these negative “persistent” memories thrived in an environment of disappointment, sadness, and regret. The pain M’Lean was burdened by is manifested in his narrative, retold in his letter home, and clear in his description of his homecoming. Even so, M’Lean reverts back to explaining how it was not he who survived, but “GOD” who had saved him. Even in terms of his letter home, like Angelo Crapsey, M’Lean seemingly longed for human compassion and familial contact, which went unanswered and his dire situation underappreciated. Already emotionally scarred, M’Lean realized that he would have to live, or die, and then eventually survive through his own courage. He found “God” to be his guardian when it appeared that both his nation and his family had apparently abandoned him.

As Daniel Schacter has written, “Studies of trauma survivors indicate that nearly all of them experienced troubling intrusive memories in the days and weeks after a trauma occurred,” but “those who continue to experience intrusive memories long after a traumatic event, and who as a result cannot return to normal functioning in their everyday lives, are likely to receive a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress disorder.” Avoiding, or even unable through dissociation, to discuss, reflect upon or communicate a distressing

108 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 100; Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 114, 129-133, 215, 246; Daniel Schacter, Searching for Memory: The Brian, The Mind, and The Past (Boston: Basic Books, 1997), 256, 263, 267-274. See also, Caruth, Trauma, 3; Caruth, Unclaimed Experience, 11, 148; LaCapra, Writing History, Writing Trauma; and Daniel L. Schacter, ed. Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains, and Societies Reconstruct the Past (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).

109 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 174-175. See also, Brandt, Pathway to Hell, 157, 189-190; Dean, Shook Over Hell, 5, 13-15, 42, 81-87, 194-202; Faust, The Republic of Suffering, 176, 186; Coleman, Flashback, 3-4, 22-26, 38-44; Shay, Odysseus in America, 1-2, 33, 79, 98, 164, 192; Shay, Achilles in Vietnam, 165-181, 193, 208-209; Rick, War and Soul, 1-6, 97-118, 151-152, 169-171, 244-247; Miller, Extremities, 7-9; and Ron Eyerman, Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 2.
past only serves to make the symptoms of post-traumatic stress more persistent. By writing a narrative of these traumatic events, M’Lean may have been harboring an attempt to take on his disquieting moments for both personal and popular reasons. Only one year removed from his reentry into American life, M’Lean thought back seventeen years to the shipwreck of the *Michael* to craft a heart-rending picture of his ordeal. Although some memories, like those of his early life and shipwreck played little, or no, political role, they did add an air of “irony” to the maritime tale he crafted. In the end, as scholars have recognized, his tale served a literary, as well as a political purpose.

**The Adventures of James Durand**

James Durand was born in Connecticut in 1786 and first went to sea at the age of fourteen. In his earliest days he traveled to the West Indies and observed the revolutionary results in St. Domingue, where Durand helped several “whites” escape a bloody event.\(^{110}\) Historian Pail Gilje writes that Durand “visited the site of one mass grave said to contain the bodies of 120 whites massacred by blacks during the revolt against slavery.”\(^{111}\) As a common sailor, Durand escaped a harrowing experience during the loss of a ship he was serving on. Durand recalled that while he had the watch on deck from “twelve o’clock until four in the afternoon,” but then took the helm from two until four and at about “half past three, I was standing very careless as the weather was quite moderate, when suddenly the tiller gave me a blow on the side which hurt me

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considerably. However I made no concern on account of my own carelessness.”\(^{112}\)

Durand noticed the ship was acting strange and when it “pitched,” it did not rise as usual.

Although Durand felt that something was wrong, he remained quiet, knowing that it was he who had put the ship in this condition and he, seemingly, hoped that the problem would correct itself. After several minutes, and noticing that the ship was still acting in the same manner, Durand contacted a “Mr. Cooper, the mate,” and told him of his observation, but the mate replied, “I see nothing of the matter.” Moments later, as the “captain was asleep in the hen-coop,” the brig made a “pitch. The water came in upon her deck and it appeared she would never rise again.” Durand called for Mr. Cooper again and an alarm was sounded for the crew to get to stations and begin pumping the water out of the ship. This soon proved fruitless as they discovered about five feet of water had already gained control of the ship’s hull. Frightened and anxious, Durand stared at Mr. Cooper as he called out, “All hands get out the long boat,” and they cut “her lashings and put her overboard.” The worst of this nightmare was far from over.

As Durand and the rest of the crew attempted to get as many provisions as they could and “jump into the boat,” having only rescued “but one bottle of sprits,” only five men, including Durand, made it to the long boat. Durand recalled how he called out to the captain and the eight remaining members of the crew. As Durand remembered, “to our great surprise, the brig made one plunge and never rose again. The last thing we saw was the Captain and two others running up the masthead.”\(^{113}\) The captain and the rest of the crew perished with their vessel and Durand’s experience left a harrowing memory that


would obstinately punish him for having caused and yet surviving this wreck. Durand
recalled that the long boats, soon after the disappearance of captain, crew, and ship,
“were at the mercy of the waves, and without a compass and with no food or water except
two biscuit and one bottle of rum for five persons to subsist upon. We knew not which
way to steer and saw no friendly sail for six days and nights.”

In the shadow of painful memories formed during this ordeal, on the seventh day
Durand expressed delight as a vessel came alongside and “took the rest of the crew in”
and provided them with food, milk, and rum. Durand recounted that the crew was so
hungry and, refusing to relive the nightmarish hunger of the last eight days, wanted as
much as they could eat. As he recalled, “the Captain was a sensible man and dealt it out
to us with great caution, lest we kill ourselves from overeating.” But the survivors wanted
more, forcing the captain of their rescuing vessel to tie all of their hands behind their
backs and order them away from the food. At one point, Durand fell into a deep sleep and
awoke with shocking “hunger pains” that prompted him to steal food, even with his
hands tied behind him. Durand had eaten two mouthfuls when the captain, “finding me
with my hands in the locker… [dragged] me away and bound me to one of the stanchions
in the cabin.” The captain then told Durand that “You are welcome to all that is good for
you, but you have not yet the discretion to feed yourself, your appetite is so voracious.”
At age seventeen, Durand had experienced such a horrific event that it alone might have
filled his memory with tragic visions, but for Durand the misfortune was far from over.

Durand went on to serve in the American navy and observed a near mutiny, a
little-known event, while serving on the frigate *U.S.S. Constitution* in 1807 in the
Mediterranean fighting the Barbary pirates.\(^{114}\) With his enlistment up, and after returning to Boston from the Mediterranean, he joined the Merchant Marines. He was ultimately taken captive by the British after leaving France, but released after several months because the ship, which the British held him on, was condemned as a blockade runner.\(^{115}\) In March of 1809, as a sailor on a Swedish vessel, Durand was impressed into British naval service with twelve other Americans. He provided protection papers attesting to his claim of citizenship, but that was of little help. Angry at his captors, he refused to eat for twelve days, but finally acquiesced and obeyed their authority after being flogged.

Durand quickly began to demonstrate his ability to serve his British captors, even offering his services in war against the French. Twice he was wounded in battle. For the first three years of his impressment, Durand was not allowed to go ashore, and when he was finally granted “shore liberty,” he began to think of his captors as comrades.\(^{116}\) But the treatment that had improved for Durand rapidly deteriorated when war broke out between the United States and Great Britain. Durand asserted that English officers took pleasure beating and whipping him and felt that this was their way to “vent their damnable fury on us.”\(^{117}\) Unlike Joseph Bates and thousands of impressed American sailors, Durand refused to offer himself to the British as a prisoner of war. He continued to work for the British until 1814, when, off the coast of New England, he refused to do


his work and was placed “in irons.” In September of 1815, “well after the war was over,” Durand was released and returned home for the first time in thirteen years.\textsuperscript{118}

Durand utilized his past oceanic trauma and wrote a narrative of his maritime experiences in 1820, ostensibly in an effort to understand the offensive memories that would not disappear, but also to infuse a fighting spirit into a public that was divided over what their nation was and should be.\textsuperscript{119} In a non-apologetic and patriotic manner, he wrote with the determination to convince his reader of the sailor’s significant role in American political events. Durand focused his writing on reshaping the image of “Jack Tar” and used his own dramatic past to reposition the sailor as the most significant symbol of liberty for the new nation.\textsuperscript{120} In Durand’s mind, the brave sailor had transformed the American image through the systematic abuse and disrespect of their rights and liberties by the British. Durand sought to gain a political role and historical significance for the sailor who faced unusual hazards during this period.

Durand exemplified one reason why impressed sailors wrote about the painful maritime episodes of their past while Joseph Bates, among others, chose another. Bates remained devoted to religious interpretations and hoped to persuade his readers of God’s devotion to the abused sailor. Bates’ argued that God listened to the cries of his maritime flock and through divine obedience troubled sailors could be saved. Even as Durand’s narrative touched upon the brutality of the British, like Bates, he sidestepped the issue with political and religious messages. Rather than advocating a message rooted in the shadow of the trauma and the horror it inflicted, they both sought religious and political


\textsuperscript{119} Hicks, Broadsides on Land and Sea, in \textit{Pirates, Jack Tar, and Memory}, ed. Paul Gilje, 152.

\textsuperscript{120} Gilje, \textit{Liberty on the Waterfront}, 130-131.
capital through the glorification of their perceived role. Whether a sailor joined the maritime profession for adventure or profit, Americans rallied behind those sailors, both before and during the War of 1812, who ushered in a new era in American maritime history with their nautical success and oceanic trauma.  

Joseph Bates’ Oceanic Ascension

Joseph Bates was born in Rochester, Massachusetts, in Plymouth County, on 8 July 1792 and in 1793 his family moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts, in an area that would eventually become Fairhaven in 1812. Bates would eventually become the founder and developer of “Sabbatarian Adventism,” a religious movement that eventually transformed itself into the “Seventh-day Adventist Church.” To this end according to historian George R. Knight, Bates was the one who convinced James White and Ellen G. White of the “validity if the seventh-day Sabbath. Eder James White, who edited Bates’ volume for publication and wrote in the forward that

The life of Elder Joseph Bates was crowded with unselfish motives and noble actions….he became a devoted follower of Christ, and a thorough practical reformer, and ripened into glorious manhood a true Christian gentleman, while exposed to the evils of sea-faring life, from the cabin-boy of 1807, to the wealthy retiring master of 1828, a period of twenty-one years. Beauty and fragrance are expected of the rose….But we pass over the expected glory of the rose to admire the living green, the pure white, and the delicate tint of the water-lily whose root reaches way down into the cold filth of the bottom of the obscure lake. And we revere that Power which causes this queen of flowers, uncultivated and obscure, to appropriate to itself all valuable qualities from its chilling surroundings, and to

121 Gilje, Liberty on the Waterfront, 158.
124 Knight, Joseph Bates, 150.
reject the evil.125

Bates was the son of Revolutionary War volunteer Joseph and his mother was “the daughter of Barnabas Rye of Sandwich, Massachusetts.”126 During Bates’ school-boy days he had a desire to follow the life of a seaman and sail the Atlantic to destinations beyond his young grasp. Bates advanced into adolescence with a passion for adventure and an urge to see what was “on the opposite side” of the Atlantic wall. Because he was only fourteen years old he needed parental permission to leave home, but he had difficulty garnering the courage to ask for consent. Eventually, his parents learned that his dreams were too resilient to ignore and they granted him their permission to set sail. For Bates, this brought him to gain a berth as a cabin boy on the ship Fanny, commanded by Captain Elias Terry, out of New Bedford to London via New York. During the course of the journey across the Atlantic, Bates defended his captain against a near mutiny, survived when his ship struck an “Island of Ice” and nearly sank, and was imprisoned by a Danish privateering vessel that stripped him of his wages and destroyed the American vessel.127 He was left penniless and tired in Ireland and seeking refuge at home when he went to Liverpool in 1810.

Bates wrote his autobiography in 1868, nearly fifty years after this series of incidents occurred. Although it is correct to be wary of the information he provided, it is important to consider the events he remembered for how Bates understood them to have transpired. The troubles that Bates encountered before and during the War of 1812, first

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as shipwreck survivor, then as an impressed sailor, and finally as a prisoner of war, ironically gave Bates the ability to justify his later “religious” career. It was after the war, during his time sailing as a captain, that he first read the Bible and sought a life of spirituality.\textsuperscript{128} His autobiography is brimming with religious themes and warrants his belief in God’s will for his faith. Bates went on to become the leading founder of “Sabbatarian Adventism,” which was a religious sect that evolved into the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Still, even though the greater part of his autobiography was filled with his spiritual connectedness and efforts in America to fight social ills, his experiences before and during the War of 1812 were clearly what he saw as pivotal in shaping his ability to find God and recognize evil. Arguably, his narrative was written in a sense to stabilize his newly created religious image. Like a shepherd tending his flock, Bates sought to win souls through relating his nautical trials.

Still, Bates’ experience as an impressed sailor was exhausting. During that time he was forced to prepare vessels for battle, he was starved, and he was flogged for “attempting in a quiet and peaceable manner to quit His Majesty's service.” For a year Bates was ordered to work, beaten if he refused, and on one occasion he even ran away from a flogging, then stood his ground in face of a brutal assault. On one occasion Bates wanted to do the simplest task of washing his clothes and for once to be able to wear a “clean” shirt and trousers whenever he wanted. To do so, Bates needed to find water on shipboard and then dry his clothing without being detected. As he said, “Orders were most strict, that whoever should be found drying his clothes at any other but this time in the wash day, should be punished.” To avoid detection and punishment, Bates scrubbed

his clothes early in the morning and then attempted to dry them “in a concealed place behind the maintop sail; but the sail was ordered to be furled in a hurry.”129 Soon the lieutenant discovered Bates’ clothing and ordered about fifty maintop men from their dinner hour to the quarter-deck. The officer asked whose clothes he had found and Bates, not wanting to get anyone else in trouble, declared, “They are mine, sir.”130 The lieutenant then began to curse at Bates and ordered the boatswain mate from dinner and instructed him to give Bates “the worst flogging” he ever had.

Bates expected that the enraged officer would “wreak his vengeance on me by having the flesh cut off my back for attempting to have a clean dress, when he knew I could not have it without venturing some way as I had done.” Bates argued that he thought about the injustice of this incident and considered fighting back against his flogging. The lieutenant looked at him and knew he was thinking of something and said, “If you don't want one of the ___ floggings you ever had, do you run.” Bates looked straight at him, anxiety heightened and then heard the under-officer, who seemed to feel the injustice of my case, repeated, “Run!” The lieutenant cried to the man with the rope, ‘Give it to him!’ ‘Aye, aye, sir.’ I bounded forward, and by the time he reached the head of the ship, I was over the bow, getting a position to receive him near down by the water, on the ship’s bobstays. He saw at a glance it would require his utmost skill to perform his pleasing task there. He therefore commanded me to come up to him. ‘No,’ said I, ‘if you want me, come here.’131

In that position, Bates argued, “the devil, the enemy of all righteousness, tempted me to seek a summary redress of my grievances….if he followed me and persisted in inflicting on me the threatened punishment, to grasp him and plunge into the water.” Bates had had


enough and, as he recalled, was ready to fight back for the first time, believing that he had endured more brutality than any “GOD fearing” man should. As Bates stood his ground for about “an hour” and watched as the lieutenant eventually “issued no orders respecting me, neither questioning me afterward, only the next morning” did he learn that he was among a number of men to be “black-listed” for six months. As Bates recalled, he thanked “the Father of all mercies” for delivering him from premeditated destruction.

While confined to the prison room of the ship for six months, Bates found time and the ability to notify his father of his situation. After receiving word of his son’s condition, Bates’ father promptly contacted the Governor of Massachusetts, who in turn called upon President James Madison to see what could be done to get his son released. But by this point war had been declared by the United States against Great Britain and there was nothing his father or anyone else could do for him. Bates found himself in the middle of a national crisis, and even capturing the attention of the president was futile.

Days turned into months and Bates remained impressed until he received word that nothing could be done because of the war. His only option was to address the commander of the vessel and demand to be labeled a prisoner of war. He wrote,

> We understand, sir that war has commenced between Great Britain and the United States and we do not wish to be found fighting against our own country; therefore it is our wish to become prisoners of war….From our ship the word spread, until about all the Americans in the fleet became prisoners of war. During eight dreary months we were retained….we were urged to enter the British navy. I had suffered on for thirty months an unwilling subject.

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132 “Black-listed” means that Bates was watched closely by his commanding officers and that any action of subordination would be met with a severe and grave punishment. This punishment would include flogging, being starved, and even possibly a death sentence.


Bates refused to fight against his own country, declaring that he was from New Bedford, Massachusetts, and demanding to be treated as a prisoner of war. Interestingly, it would be an American captain from New Bedford named Reuben Delano who would relay a message to the British ship holding Bates proving his American citizenship.

Finally proven to be an American, Bates was recalled from “British sailor” to American prisoner, which meant that he did not have to fight against his own flag. Yet it still meant that struggle, hunger, and abuse would remain. As Bates wrote, “by this time, hunger and the want of water, and especially fresh air, had thrown us into a state of feverish excitement. Some appeared almost savage; others endeavored to bear it as well as they could.”

Bates spent nearly four years serving aboard British ships as a prisoner, even as these same ships fought successfully against French blockades. His autobiography is filled with daily accounts, incidents of battle, resistance, and the turmoil he experienced watching the British destroy American vessels. In 1814, word spread that he, along with other American prisoners of war, were to be sent to Dartmoor Prison. This information proved accurate. In the summer of 1814, Bates was transferred to the infamous penitentiary for French and American prisoners of war at Dartmoor Prison. Home to criminal gangs, prostitution, and illegal gambling, Dartmoor Prison was the scene of brutality, massacres, and where Bates spent the rest of the war.

Bates eventually survived the war and lived through the terror of Dartmoor Prison, even surviving the massacre of American prisoners in 1815, well after the peace

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treaty had been signed. Although the war ended with the Treaty of Ghent in December of 1814, many American prisoners were still held captive at Dartmoor. On 6 April 1815, seven of them were killed and thirty-one wounded when guards opened fire, Joseph Bates witnessed this event. It is believed that the “massacre” was committed on the order of an “allegedly” inebriated British officer in charge, a man named Capt. T. G. Shortland. He believed that the Americans were attempting to escape and ordered the guards to fire.137 Two-hundred and seventy-one prisoners of war, mostly American seamen, were killed on Shortland’s order. These men, many from New England, were laid to rest on Dartmoor’s grounds and a memorial, erected years after, sits in front of their graves as a reminder of the dangers of maritime service and international war.

Bates’ autobiography does not reflect an angry emotional resentment towards the British, as it serves to showcase his own religious strength. He discussed scripture and expressed gratitude to his faith, as did M’Lean, for observing his ascension from the evil pits of British abuse to the glowing grace of American liberty and Christ’s salvation.138 Bates recognized that the road to American liberty was secured through spiritual protection. He survived shipwrecks, impressment, Dartmoor Prison, and the War of 1812 because, as he wrote, his dedication to the teachings of Jesus Christ. His writings were constructed not to condemn British abuse, which he did address, but the process of his salvation from that desperate captivity. He understood that the War of 1812 was fought because men like him had found themselves stripped of their liberty through impressments, but his survival rested upon the grace of God, not merely the swift work of


American forces. The difference between Joseph Bates and other maritime authors of this period was that he found no need to write a work dedicated to American exceptionalism. Instead, he sought to exhibit his own wonderment. He sought to communicate the story as it shaped him, not as it shaped the country or his own political will.

Like Andrew Sherburne, Bates crafted a story with himself as the ultimate hero, but instead of a political hero, Bates sought religious immortality. Also in contrast to Bates, Sherburne’s traumatic experiences could not be solely featured in his work because they did not serve to ignite his revolutionary image as a victorious hero. Bates, on the other hand, could use his beatings and starvation as a method to introduce his religious epiphany and its importance. Although both individuals experienced severe trauma, they diverged on how to use those memories appropriately in their narratives. As psychologists Robyn Fivush, Jennifer Bohanek, Kelly Marin, and Jessica Sales conclude, “Individuals are consistent in the extent to which they recall negative emotion associated with highly aversive experiences even years after the event occurred.”139 This pattern is limited to highly emotional events, such as the ones that both Sherburne and Bates experienced. Similarly, both sailors chose to write their memoirs decades later and, interestingly enough, both serve as unique stories with a traumatic twist, but “burdened” by varying uses of that tragic past. Fivush has argued that “rehearsal is a critical factor” and it “has been argued that traumatic memories are consistent over time exactly because they are of events that are most likely to be discussed and rehearsed with others.”140 But they are not perfect and are prone to memory’s normal inconsistencies. Maritime

139 Robyn Fivush, Jennifer G. Bohanek, Kelly Marin, and Jessica McDermott Sales, “Emotional Memory and Memory for Emotions,” in Flashbulb Memories, ed. Luminet and Curci, 176.

communities, under this theory, serve as vital links, and networks in transmitting memories of traumatized maritime survivors to both land-based audiences and other sailors who understood the dangers these seamen related.

Places like New Bedford, or Fairhaven, Massachusetts, where Bates was deemed a local celebrity, or Boston, and many other areas of New England Sherburne frequented on his “book tour,” had strong seafaring communities that often spoke of and about the maritime past.\textsuperscript{141} Both men, Sherburne in 1828 and Bates in 1863, wrote when the maritime communities of New England were about to give way to the preeminence of factory towns and manufacturing. This is especially true about Bates, whose work was released at a time when many people were feeling nostalgic for “old” seafaring days and found few people able to recapture that nostalgic feeling. Sherburne wrote during the decline of some facets of the New England maritime economy and the rise of whaling. But, as was addressed in chapter one, he did capitalize on the nostalgia toward the revolutionary past, which many attempted to retouch through recollections for veterans like Sherburne, and others like George Hewes.\textsuperscript{142} Both men found an audience in search of nostalgia with whom their recollections could gain persistent attention and reconsideration. It is as individuals try to understand the “stressful events of their lives

\textsuperscript{141} For discussions of specific maritime communities see Shockley, \textit{The Captain’s Widow of Sandwich}, 8, 12, 16, 180-182, 190; Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 3, 23; Morison, \textit{Maritime History of Massachusetts}, 6, 122-123, 156, 216-217, 315-319; Vickers & Walsh, \textit{Young Men and the Sea}, 3, 28, 33, 40; Gilje, \textit{Liberty on the Waterfront}, xiii, 143; Bolster, \textit{Black Jacks}, 4-5, 17, 34-37, 45, 70, 159; and Norling, \textit{Captain Ahab Had a Wife}, 86, 204.

that the story evolves and emerges,” and their past is brought forward through

Therefore understandings may be gained by combining stories of personal oceanic misfortune and the study of historical maritime subjects who were exposed to traumatic events and then wrote about them. This interdisciplinary approach allows historians to see these sailors for who and what they were, and yet also for whom they wanted future readers to see them as. The reasons for their writing, which become vital background scenery, as it did with Alfred Young’s study of the memory of George Hewes, must be brought forward while also considering these sailors “emotional language” and how they fit into a greater psychological study of episodes of trauma and brutal realities that were inherent in maritime life.\footnote{Young, \textit{Shoemaker and the Tea Party}, xiii, 7, 11, 61, 81. See also, Eustace, \textit{Passion is the Gale}, chapters four, six, and nine.} Yet as demonstrated, their literary importance must not be overlooked and many times success in such fields assuaged their troubles temporarily through monetary good fortune. But in terms of historical significance, their narratives ironically serve to brighten dark recesses of maritime episodes. This shadowy corner, one now targeted with a spotlight, is an area where shipboard suffering, death at sea, and horrendous captivity regain prominence over youthful imaginations of the world beyond the horizon atop the masthead.

\textbf{The Struggle of Joshua Penny}

The immense wealth of Joseph Bates’ family allowed his forfeiture of wages from these voyages and five years in British captivity, two and a half impressed and two and half as a prisoner of war, to be less than catastrophic. This was the circumstance for
Joshua Penny. Penny was born on 12 September 1773 and first set sail in 1788, at the age of fifteen. He was eager to earn a profit and see the world. Like Joseph Bates, in 1793 he had been attacked by a “press-gang” in Liverpool, but managed to escape by joining the crew of a slave ship to the Caribbean. Even so, while in Jamaica in 1794 he was impressed by the British and his treatment was unthinkable. “In a bitter and matter of fact manner,” Penny’s British captors administered malicious and cruel treatment he endured.\(^{145}\) He did manage to escape and join the French warship, La Diable a Quatre, which meant “the devil on all fours,” but found himself part of an expedition on route to St. Domingo to put down an insurrection. An armament was fitted out for St. Domingo under General Le Clerc, the brother-in-law of Bonaparte.\(^{146}\) They sailed in December 1801 and entered the bay of Samana on 28 December and, as Penny recounted, “put into Cape Francois” with “20,000 troops.” Of the slave uprising Penny wrote,

> As our squadron was entering, we received a few guns from the fort; but on returning a broadside the blacks blew up the fort; as we continued our course the negroes blew up another magazine, said to contain 1500 barrels of powder, and set the town on fire. The Sailors were permitted to plunder on shore; and entering houses in flames, we forced open desks and bureaus with the chimney crane….Such scenes of murder and rapine as were witnessed are too shocking to relate, Pandemonium seemed let loose.”\(^{147}\)

Like Durand Penny watched, as impressed American sailors, as the French battled Haitians during the revolution in St. Domingo. As impressed sailors, they served as eye


witnesses to history and through reports of their disturbing memories historians can observe this historic rebellion from a different angle.

Penny would go through many more troubles such as escapes, and being flogged for allegedly stealing. On one occasion Penny took passage on the brig Minerva, of Portsmouth, NH, captained by an E. Schofield, which was lying at Savannah bound to Cork. Penny had brought a live wolf on board the vessel in the hopes of transporting it to Ireland and gaining a small fortune, which he was promised. Recalling one memory, Penny wrote that the Minerva

Was within three days sailor of our destined port, when the brig was boarded from a French privateer, the precious wolf, chained on deck, attracted the first notice of our Frenchman. The officer amused himself by pricking it with his sword…the officer inadvertently approached too near the offended wolf, who revenged the affront received, by thrusting his teeth through the boot of his antagonist…This enraged him – he drew a pocket-pistol with which the wolf was instantly dispatched. Thus were my prospects of amassing wealth blasted in a moment.148

Penny was haunted by press-gangs, constantly hungry and tired, thrown in jail numerous times, threatened with unmerciful brutality on several occasions once impressed, as well as watching other sailors beaten in front of him, and left to volunteer his service to the British in an attempt to bypass some of the brutality imposed on him. On one occasion Penny attempted to escape to an American vessel at St. Helena, but was unsuccessful. Three days later the captain of the Sphinx questioned the crew and impressed Americans about the escape of three “Yankees.” Penny was ordered to relate what he knew about the “Yankee mess.” He told the captain what he considered a falsehood, but was not malicious, and the commander, knowing of his “treachery,” asked him if he could swim. Penny answered “No,” and then watched in heightened anxiety as the captain took a book

out of his pocket and said, “You are a Yankee, sir, and have been seven years in the navy without ever being flogged, and now I’ll flog you [as] if you are God Almighty’s first lieutenant!!!” All hands were called on deck to witness Penny’s punishment and he was immediately “seized up” and “I received three strokes of the cat.”

Penny wrote that I fell (so I was afterwards informed) hanging by the wrists, with my head on one shoulder, until the whole number of stripes had been applied. The surgeon informed the captain of my condition, when the captain said, ‘he shall take his dozen, dead or alive!’ I was cut down, and at the first recollection of myself, they were washing my face with a tub of water.”

Penny had been beaten so severely that he had passed out from the immense pain and emotional agony. This experience, which Penny wrote was “shocking,” served as one of the most vivid recollections of Penny’s life as an impressed American sailor. Penny eventually made his way home to New York in 1805, but the story did not end there.

With our previous impressed sailors Penny serves as our final American maritime Odysseus. The first two thirds of Penny’s narrative reflect upon his impressment by the British and subsequent trauma’s he lived through. It also included dozens of letters he wrote detailing his condition while held “captive” almost twelve years. Away from home from over a decade, the last third of Penny’s narrative discussed his actions during the War of 1812. During that time, Penny returned to the sea by joining American privateers hoping to achieve vengeance on his British “abusers.” Penny was again captured by the British and imprisoned for nearly a year. In 1813, Penny was involved in a radical political and military operation on “Long Island Sound, which was led by America’s

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149 Penny, *The Life and Adventure of Joshua Penny*, 45.

150 Penny, *The Life and Adventure of Joshua Penny*, 45.
foremost naval hero, Stephan Decatur.” This operation was intended to work within the law by following the “Torpedo Act,” which was passed in March of 1813. The act pledged financial capital to anyone who “burned, sank, or destroyed a British warship” in the amount of half of the total value of the ship. As it turned out, Penny was involved in the attempted destruction of the British ship Ramalies, which resulted in his incarceration on Melville Island with hundreds of other Americans until the end of the war.

Penny wrote not only to ease the brutality he had endured, but to set aside his nightmares and provide a warning to other American sailors who found themselves in similar positions of political captivity. He detested Britain’s “maritime code” and observed the British to be opposed to the “rights and immunities” of all other nations, including those men who sailed under the American flag. In his mind that flag offered no protection. Interestingly, he wanted others to know that although American sailors are American citizens, when serving on the Atlantic such loyalties and understandings were worthless. Even sailors with orders of protection could be stripped of their liberty and forced to endure great pain at the pleasure of their adversaries. Written in 1815, Penny’s self-published work serves as a window into the turmoil of his experience. Penny asked:

How wretched is that government, which compels men to become murderers of their own countrymen, and exerts her power to entrap and enslave those whom

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152 Penny, *The Life and Adventure of Joshua Penny*, 36-42.

153 Cray Jr., “Remembering the USS Chesapeake,” 447.

154 Cray Jr., “Remembering the USS Chesapeake,” 447-450.
she professes to preserve free! A government of force, like that of England, is worse than the government of the American Indians.  

Penny pronounced these actions to be an English attack on liberty and examined English activities as a mockery, “designed to compel a man to abandon his wife, his children, and everything else he values in the world, to become your slave on ship-board! How do you call that a land of freedom, where this practice prevails….Where liberty dwells, there is my country.”

Myra Glenn has argued that what Penny “found most objectionable about British captivity was not the arduous labor or harsh discipline but, rather, the lack of freedom. He repeatedly depicted impressment as a form of enslavement and portrayed British press gangs as ‘man stealers’ who ‘mocked’ liberty by enslave[ing] free men.” Penny depicted the severe punishments inflicted by the Royal Navy; he was beaten, slashed with a “cat-of-nine-tails” and forced to watch English ships capture and destroy American vessels. On several occasions he tried to escape, but with no luck and finally fell ill to the hunger and disease that surrounded him. For Penny, as Glenn emphasizes, a “British naval vessel was ‘a Pandora’s box – a nefarious floating dungeon, freighting calamities to every part of this lower world.”

The Historical Implication of Distressing Impressment

While seeing the importance in both Penny and Durand’s narratives, Historian Glenn has taken issue with some of the perceived inaccuracies that she argues is evident

155 Williams ed., *Liberty’s Captives*, 204.


157 Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 60.

158 Glenn, *Jack Tar’s Story*, 60.
in their writings. In both cases, they each were listed on ship logs as volunteers, but why they each would have volunteered, unlike Bates and M’Lean, to fight against their own county is unknown. It is possible, Glenn argues, that “they might have been making the best out of a bad situation,” maybe they volunteered in the hopes of getting better treatment. But in the end both men refused to remain in their situations and sought freedom outside their British “captivity.”¹⁵⁹ In any case, their narratives tell us a lot about the dark maritime world they had survived and then reconsidered in literary form. Their memories may not have been perfect, but represent a reality these sailors considered consequential and life changing, or as Robert McGlone termed these memories, aphoristic.¹⁶⁰ They left home in search of adventure, patriotism, and wealth but were bombarded by a nautical fate that was tragic and emotionally crippling. During the course of those events they were changed, many seeing these events as the peak of their adolescence and the dawn of their manhood, but they eventually wrote about these horrors for diverse reasons and reflected on their sufferings with a “sea eye” that was unparalleled and pictured an oceanic realm that was deadly and to be feared. Yet these sailors’ eventual literary recollections, while reflecting this dark world, could be swayed by politics, anger, and fear of national embarrassment.

In the case of James Durand, he clearly was at emotional odds with his decision to fight against Americans as a sailor and only came to the idea as a means of survival. He recalled that after being hit by an “18 pound shot” that had struck the “planking next to

¹⁵⁹ Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 65-66; Durand, James Durand: An Able Seamen of 1812, 67-74; Doyle, Voices of Captivity, 36-42; Springer, America’s Captives, 12, 26-28, 31; Thompson, The Suffering Traveler, 15-17, 59, 72, 91, 272; Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 74-96; and Shay, Odysseus of America, 160. See also, Burnham, Captivity and Sentiment, 89, 99, 129, Strong, Captive Selves, 17, 28.

¹⁶⁰ An aphoristic memory epitomizes a “distinctive class of reminiscences characterized by unquestioned belief about special moments in life.” This will be discussed in greater depth in Chapter Six.
me and a splinter of it broke my leg just below my calf” that all he “could do was to
ruminate on the various incidents of my life and there was nothing to reflections by the
pain of my leg.”\textsuperscript{161} He wrote that

Therefore, like Hamlet, I reasoned with myself. I had been in the service of the
British for more than a year and if I continued seven more, I decided I would see
my limbs scattered all over the globe and like the wages promised me by the U.
States’ service, it would get me nothing material. “If I kill or am killed,” said I to
myself, “who is there to benefit except King George?” The world’s a stately bark
– On dangerous seas – To be boarded at your peril, said I, with the poet.\textsuperscript{162}

He wrote that fighting for the British was not voluntary, but was forced and his decision
the only proper conclusion to maintain some sense of manhood, money, and life. At one
point Durand wrote that he asked his captain, “what he supposed my countrymen would
think, if they knew I was fighting against [them].” The Captain replied, “In case of attack,
you may go below.” Durand responded in his memoir that

I must here leave it to the reader, to fancy what must be the feelings of a man
confined on board a British ship of war for eight to ten years and obliged to
undergo every kind of hardship and then, at the least, forced to fight his own
father and brother and every kind of kindred. It was only to satisfy those haughty
British tyrants, who are divested of every concern but that of self-interest.\textsuperscript{163}

Durand was writing in an attempt to explain to his American audience why he was found
in British ship logs as a volunteer, not a prisoner of war. Although the traumas he
experienced were severe, his captivity had played tricks on his aging mind. He was still
young, but after years of captivity and changing political clouds, Durand had time to
think and reflect and inadvertently use bias to reflect back on his decision with changing
or muddled eyes. It is not that he was wrong, or that his memory was misrepresented, but

\textsuperscript{161} Durand, James Durand: An Able Seamen of 1812, 54-55.

\textsuperscript{162} Durand, James Durand: An Able Seamen of 1812, 55.

\textsuperscript{163} Durand, James Durand: An Able Seamen of 1812, 75.
rather he was making sense of his decision at that time in response to the tragedies that befell him and his need to maintain an American position.

Durand justified volunteering through self-survival, and as Judith Herman has observed with regard to captive stories that many prisoners of war, or political captives, do seemingly join their oppressor’s side, a form of psychological domination, in an attempt to gain favor or rewards, a process Herman calls “Total Surrender.” Herman wrote that “prisoners, even those who have successfully resisted, understand that under extreme duress anyone can be ‘broken.’” The strength to escape disappeared, “simple survival took everything,” dignity was stripped away, and “making it to tomorrow was a victory.” In this situation Durand was broken, changed, and his self-image reconfigured. Yet as Herman argues, and this is evidently the case with Durand, “the state of psychological degradation is reversible. During the course of the captivity, victims frequently describe altering between periods of submission and more active resistance.” Though not in Durand’s case, there is a second, “irreversible stage” in the breaking of a person, which eventually leads to suicide. Although Durand sought to make clear that he did what was required to survive, that survival was dependent upon ideas of liberty, even if it “seemed” that he was acting in the opposite manner. What he did was not uncommon for abused and brutalized people under duress, but his actions and “cognitive state” later made sense of those actions through patriotic biases and national “understanding” lenses.

164 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 83-86; Burnham, Captivity and Sentiment, 82; Doyle, Voices of Captivity, 62; Springer, America’s Captives, 4; Tick, War and the Soul, 275; Felman, Testimony, 70-72; and Shay, Odyssey of America, 111. See also, Thompson, The Suffering Traveller, 15-16 and Dean, Shook Over Hell, 105.

165 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 86.

166 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 86.
Another important consideration is the fact that historian Myra Glenn found discrepancies in both Penny’s and Durand’s narratives when compared with logbooks of the ships on which they sailed. Glenn wrote that “the inaccuracies in these men’s stories make it tempting to dismiss their narratives as mostly fabricated yarns, tall tales concocted by ex-mariners seeking money and sympathy. But that would ignore the fact that the main parts of their accounts are grounded in historically verifiable evidence.”

To go one step further, it would also dismiss their traumatic remembrance, which gains value and importance when seen in its historical context. Penny and Durand suffered and expressed those sufferings in detailed accounts, yet as Glenn would agree, they did add details and accounts that are not verifiable and appear to sustain a seemingly patriotic or economic purpose. Penny for instance was flogged and flogged severely. This is written in the log books of the Sphinx, and Penny goes through great pains to retell this story. But he attempts to move past it in an effort to provide a more glorified tale of his redemption from evil to freedom once again. He wrote about that catastrophic exposé with forcefulness, but it is not the sole object of his focus. There were possible additions to his story and his memory of those events was not perfect, but his traumas and those brutal events he suffered from allow historians to engage in a unique exploration that charts their understood reality and the political anger that fueled their narrative constructions.

Penny’s narrative of his experience as an impressed sailor is different from that of Joseph Bates and James Durand. Penny wrote his narrative in 1815 less than a decade after his impressment and less than two years after his imprisonment by the British for conspiracy to destroy a British vessel. His narrative was published only months after the

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conclusion of the War of 1812, which observed an American victory and an upswing in American nationalism throughout the United States. He wrote about what he remembered and what was embedded, even if imperfectly, in his story. It was almost “Impossible for him to have kept a journal; yet he may rest assured, that nature has endowed him with a retentive memory, and that his memory has received impressions too deep to be effaced, until he ceases to exist.”168 Clearly, Penny was a fighter and a survivor, but he had suffered greatly. Penny’s narrative, notably his descriptive account of the planned attack on the British on Long Island, sought to enhance his image as a proud and brave “tar” who defended his independence as well as that of their “fledging nation against British imperial might.”169 The writing of his narrative may have played a therapeutic role in understanding what he had gone through and seeking relief from the agony of such thoughts. He wrote forcefully about his anger towards the British and wrote fearfully of seeing this happen to anyone else. Although the reasoning behind why he set out to write such a narrative may have been purely monetary, it is clear that it served several goals. The American public eagerly read the narratives written by impressed American sailors and these same sailors found acceptance through their stories of survival.

Historical narratives tell future societies about the events that have shaped the present and, of course, what the past world looked like. Each American sailor who was impressed into the service of the British admiralty encountered a different set of traumatic circumstances. Still, each sailor who put pen to paper wrote of the denial of American rights and liberties and the abuse suffered at the hands of his captors. Joseph


Bates wrote a massive autobiography discussing his several impressments, but focused more on the religious dedication that helped him see it through. Bates described the British as sinful, but his salvation was his to claim, not the British admiralty’s to destroy. Although Bates wrote fifty years later with religious fervor, Durand wrote five years after the war when America was starting to find its national legacy. He positioned American sailors, “tars” like himself, as the focus of that evolving image, but conveying both their maritime suffering and wartime oceanic survival.

The War of 1812 had commenced in part to defend the nation’s honor, had been fought to free those pressed into service, and to earn free navigation for American merchants and sailors. Yet when considering the origins of the War of 1812 historians argue that although sailors’ rights were crucial, it was not the only reason war was declared. As historians Norman Risjord and Kate Caffrey argue, trade restrictions created and used by Great Britain to stall American trade with France was a significant factor, as was impressments and the humiliation of the “Cheesecake and Leopard Affair,” discussed previously, which built an American desire to “uphold national honor” in the face of British insults. Still, Canadian historians, like W. Arthur Bowler and C.P. Stacey, argue that Americans used maritime abuses as a “chance” to declare war and seize parts of Canada, while others, like Wesley Turner, argue that “introducing” the fear of such a seizure was merely a tactic, used by the United States to get Great Britain to the

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bargaining table.\textsuperscript{171} Even as these issues were being worked out politically, Durand recognized the British as the enemy and he, as the war raged on, discerned a possibility for political and economic success through his patriotic message. Durand, with his image as an American hero, brought American readers the drama of war and the brutality of impressments, but did so to create a symbol of American freedom. Sailors’ freedom meant American liberty. The protection of sailors’ rights and autonomy was observed by many as the symbolic fortification of all American independence.

James M’Lean and Joshua Penny wrote with great depth, helped by a traumatic past illustrated through devastating memories that occupied significant positions of their minds and assisted them in eventually seeking literary prominence by advancing a unified call for vengeance against their British oppressor. They each illustrated past wartime pain and in turn sought to be included in the growth of national fame and prosperity. Their writings targeted the emotions elicited from their experiences and were written in close proximity to the event. Their unwillingness to think about certain events and inability to forget others seemed to reflect their everyday pain. Both suffered a trauma, but each chose to deal with the resultant suffering in different ways. The longer privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemens, nautical abolitionists, and other traumatized sailors waited to write narratives or autobiographies, the more these manuscripts, as well as common memories became distracted by clichés and abstractions set in motion far beyond the event itself. Although Schacter’s “hindsight bias” theory may have taken hold of some of these troubled sailors, their traumatic recollections convey not only their

future political hopes, but also their past sufferings. What they found beyond the Atlantic Wall might have been a common occurrence then, but, in a historical sense it has been forgotten and painted over by the lore of oceanic beauty. Through their narratives they sought to be remembered, sought to remember those they suffered for and with, and lastly, sought to unleash either their political, religious, social, or cultural capital. Their sufferings were what they had earned and they sought to use them in whatever way they could. As a literary exploration in an era of nautical appreciation, their words carried weight and their stories could be considered by both the political elite and commoners seeking to respect and honor those who had sailed in defense of American liberty.\footnote{Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 72-75.}

Penny’s work was published once in the United States but sold next to no copies, as did James M’Lean’s short narrative. Durand’s copy was immensely successful and Bates’ work as well, especially in religious circles.\footnote{For discussions on the literary success of these narratives, autobiographies, and memoirs see Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 72-75; Glenn, \textit{Jack Tar’s Story}, 50-57; Gilje, \textit{Liberty on the Waterfront}, 130-136, 140-141, 158,161-162, 172, 239, & 245-246; Williams ed. \textit{Liberty’s Captives}, 164-165 & 197-199. See also, Arch, \textit{After Franklin}; Baker and Zinsser, \textit{Inventing the Truth}; Casarino, \textit{Modernity at Sea}; Fabian, \textit{The Unvarnished Truth}; Fass, “Memoir Problem”; Hunsaker, \textit{Autobiography and National Identity}; Lane, \textit{Nineteenth Century American Shipwreck Narratives and National Identity}; Manson, \textit{Unmaking History}; and Neisser, \textit{The Remembering Self}.} In a time when narratives written by impressed sailors were hot commodities, Penny’s work, specifically, should have been a quick avenue to financial prosperity and help make up for the fact that he only earned “four dollars during the eleven and a half years he was held in captivity.”\footnote{Penny, \textit{The Life and Adventure of Joshua Penny}, 10.} Yet it was not the ticket to success he expected. It was possible that the graphic, unbending, and reality of what it meant to be impressed as an American sailor was too sad, and people wanted to read a story with a patriotic or religious message. Penny’s narrative served a
much different purpose, as is clear in M’Lean’s troubled story. Penny’s one dimensional prose reflects his attempt to take hold emotionally of a traumatic memory and confirm that what had been a nightmare was grounded in one long distressing incident. M’Lean and Penny were ahead of their time in what they depicted and how they attempted to understand such horrific events.

The importance of a sailor’s particular memory generally lies in its association with the consequences of specific traumatic events, as well as that the repeated “post-event rehearsals” further facilitate the retention of heartbreaking memories. Although the status of these maritime memories is different for diverse groups of people, they can find common ground based in the socially constructed grouping surrounding these recollections. The “testimony” of sailor survivors is preserved in their own words through their own recollections. Although some sailors utilized that suffering in the service of their nation, as Joshua Davis did in publishing his Revolutionary War remembrance or James Durand did with the War of 1812, not all sailors did so. James M’Lean wrote stories that found a large political audience. In the next two chapters, whalemen and nautical abolitionists are the subjects of study as they serve to unleash a dark maritime world. Whalemens serve as the best example of men who wrote, not with political intent, but rather in many cases with economic hopes and to tell a “good yarn,” but whose writings reflected terrible tragedy. Their recollections did not serve a national identity purpose, but rather would enhance the field of American literature and unlock the reality of maritime employment.

Still, the era of sailor narratives’ influence over popular political thought did not end with privateers or impressed sailors. Rather it would be enhanced and perfected with
the writings of nautical abolitionists like Jonathan Walker and especially Daniel Drayton. Both whalemen and nautical abolitionists served the literary world well, and their narratives tugged at the heartstrings of a reading public that both identified with their ambition, courage, and bravery, and sought to maintain, and in the end to reclaim, that maritime spirit. Historians gain access to the sailors’ world of suffering through these traumatic memories, and their reflections of that dark maritime world. “Persistence,” the repeated recall of disturbing past incidents that people would rather have “banished” from their minds, has long since called a “sin” of memory by Daniel Schacter. But for privateers, impressed sailors, and, as we will see, whalemen and nautical abolitionists, dogged maritime memories proved, for the most part, not a sin, but rather a powerful accomplice in their struggles to move forward.

175 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 5.
Chapter FOUR

Whalemen’s Tragic Memories of the Hunt:
Horace Holden, William Torrey, and Mutiny Onboard the Globe

“No mercy, no power but its own controls it. Panting and snorting like a mad battle steed that has lost its rider, the masterless ocean overruns the globe.”

- Herman Melville in Moby-Dick, Chapter 58 “Brit”

In July of 1831 the ship Mentor out of New Bedford, Massachusetts, which was owned by eminent South coast Massachusetts merchant William R. Rodman, was preparing to set sail to the Indian Ocean for a whaling voyage. The ship’s company consisted of twenty-two men, notably Edward C. Bonnard, as captain, and Hillsborough, New Hampshire native Horace Holden, a young seaman born on 24 July 1810, looking to the sea for adventure and profit. Less than a year later and after hunting the mighty whale around the world and finally into the Pacific basin, on 21 May 1832 the Mentor, Holden remembered, struck with “great violence upon what we afterwards found to be the coral reef extending to the northward and eastward of the Palau Islands. The ship ran directly upon the rocks and around us with tremendous violence.”¹ As the ship struck the reef a

¹ Horace Holden, Narrative of the Shipwreck, Captivity, and Sufferings of Horace Holden and Benj. H. Nute; who were cast away in the American ship Mentor, on the Pelew Islands, in the year 1832 (Boston, 1836), 12.
second time, Holden was in the “steerage” and remembered that “so great was the shock that I was thrown from my berth against the opposite side of the steerage; but, soon recovering myself, I rushed upon deck.” Confusion, horror, and dismay were clearly evident on the deck of the Mentor, as the ship struck the reef for a third time, which brought her “starboard side to the windward, and was in a moment thrown upon her beam ends.”

With waves constantly breaking over the vessel and crew, “threatening,” as Holden recalled, to “overwhelm us in a watery grave, or dash us to pieces against the rocks, the captain came upon deck” to see what had taken place and to locate the second mate. To the captain’s dismay, he was told that land had been struck and that it appeared that the destruction of the ship was inevitable. In the midst of all the confusion Captain Bonnard gave orders to lower the “larboard quarter boat, which was quickly done, and ten of the crew proceeded to “throw” themselves into it thinking it safer to commit themselves to the mercy of the waves than to remain on the vessel itself. Holden watched as these men chose the waves instead of remaining on board to face “the prospect of certain and speedy termination of their existence.” In the end, the men’s choice to take on the waves proved fatal for them all. Holden observed as “the oars were fastened to the sides of the long-boat, someone asked for a knife or hatchet, which was used to cut them loose. The request was complied with; and, quitting their hold upon the ship, they parted from us, and we never saw them no more!”

Holden argued that although some believed that the men survived and lived on to whale another day, he knew better. Even in hindsight, Holden was overcome with despair.

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and knew that such a possibility was remote. Thinking back, Holden recalled that the next morning, as the ship’s hull continued to smash against the reef, he was horrifically stunned to observe pieces of wood floating by and observed a “long-boat” meeting the specifications of the Mentor’s quarter boat amongst the outcropping of the reef. Holden observed that the boat “on the rocks, at a distance of about fifty-yards from the ship, bottom up, and with her sides stove in. The water being clear and shallow, we could see that she was held there by a harpoon and lance, which constituted a part of the fishing implements, or crafts, in the boat when she left.”

It was assumed that the boat became, as Holden described it with a “melancholy” sense of reflection, “fast in place” and that the waves beat against the crew members and smashed into the boat at a harrowing rate. In the end, those suffering men were swept overboard into a watery grave, but were spared the “extremity of suffering” which many of the ship’s company “were destined to experience.”

Holden’s reflections on his fellow seamen’s deaths were fueled by memories indicating a post-traumatic pain. He recalled that

> Were such deaths, or the pains of captivity endured by my associates and myself, to be the only alternatives, I have doubted whether I should not prefer the former. To be far from kindred and friends, among people but one grade above the most ferocious beasts, sick at heart, and deprived of necessary food, stripped of our clothing, and subjected to unheard-of severities, -- to endure all this, was to purchase a continuance of life at a dear rate.

Holden would soon see that terrible leadership, wrong decisions, and great horror were not left solely to those ten former crew members, but rather would be a constant reminder

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that the career of the whaleman was difficult. As Herman Melville explained in *Moby-Dick, or the Whale,*

Death seems the only desirable sequel for a career like this; but Death is only a launching into the region of the strange Untried; it is but the first salutation to the possibilities of the immense Remote, the Wild, the Watery, the Unshored therefore, to the death-longing eyes of such men, who still have left in them some interior compunctions against suicide, does the all-contributed and all-receptive ocean alluringly spread forth his whole plain of unimaginable, taking terrors, and wonderful, new-life adventures; and from the hearts of infinite Pacifics, the thousand mermaids sing to them - Come hither, broken-hearted; here is another life without the guilt of intermediate death; here are wonders supernatural, without dying for them. Come hither! bury thyself in a life which, to your now equally abhorred and abhorring, landed world, is more oblivious than death. Come hither! put up thy grave-stone, too, within the churchyard, and come hither, till we marry thee!"7

Melville continued, “All men live enveloped in whale-lines. All are born with halters round their necks; but it is only when caught in the swift, sudden turn of death, that mortals realize the silent, subtle, ever present perils of life.”8

With the ship slowly being torn apart by the reef under them, Captain Bonnard, declaring the situation dire and doomed, ordered his own boat to be deployed. Yet some men, Holden included amongst them, were resolved upon remaining on the ship to the last possible moment, perhaps hoping for some sort of divine “providence.” At the least, Holden knew that the first long-boat ordered out had been destroyed, so he may have been apprehensive to take part in another seemingly doomed departure. Considering it impossible for the “ship to live,” Holden and several other crew members, “expostulated with the captain, for the purpose of persuading him not to hazard the experiment.”9 With

sadness, Holden reflected that the captain could not be persuaded to give up on his plan and ordered the men to assist in lowering the boat to the ferocious waters. Soon after cutting away the masts and rigging, in an attempt to position the long-boat in a most desired location for the chance of success, Captain Bonnard and three other crewmen descended into the boat and prepared to depart. At the captain’s request, a rope was tied around his waist, so that if the boat was destroyed, there might be some chance to rescue him from the waves.

As Holden tellingly recalled the episode, the brave voyagers had appropriate log-books, nautical instruments, clothing, and a small quantity of food to sustain them if their attempt was successful. With the captain at the stern, the boast departed and was immediately overpowered by the mighty ocean they lived upon, but seemingly had little understanding of. Holden watched as a tremendous swell broke over the vessel, destroying it in an instant. Two crew members, William Jones and William Sedon, were killed instantly, but Charles C. Bouket, an experienced swimmer, swam around to the leeward” side of the ship and “caught hold of some part of the rigging, and thus escaped.”10 Captain Bonnard was instantly washed one-hundred and fifty yards away from the wreck, as well as the long-boat, and it was with the “utmost difficulty that we retained our hold on the rope which had,” at the captain’s request “been fastened to him.” They rescued the captain and drew him in after hearing his cries for assistance.

After another failed attempt to leave the doomed vessel, morale proved terrible and thoughts of death were a constant theme of their persistent recollections. The crew, after consulting with the captain and gaining his authoritative approval, declared that they would remain on board the vessel until daybreak and hope that in the morning they would

be able to observe some sign of relief. But, waiting until morning proved to be a frightening and terrible experience, as it had been for Barnabas Down while shipwrecked off the coast of Plymouth in 1778. Holden remembered that

In this state of suspense and suffering, we clung to the rigging, and with much difficulty kept ourselves from being washed away. Our situation and prospects during that awful night were such, that no ray of hope was permitted to penetrate the dreary prospect around us; our thoughts and feelings, wrought up to the highest degree of excitement by the horrors of our situation, continually visited the homes we had quitted, -- probably forever, --and offered up prayers for the dear friends we had left behind.11

With a commitment of their spirits to “Him” who alone could control the sea and their fates, the crew braved this harrowing night, acknowledging that if they were to fall asleep, they might not awake. They sat and suffered, constantly bombarded by shocking images that stamped their memory and produced a lifetime of pain, which they would later have to deal with. Years after Holden acknowledged that he was unable to forget these images, but at that moment he did not know if he was going to survive such a terrible ordeal. Such “hindsight bias” reflected his current state of stress at how those memories could not in fact be “shaken” from his everyday recollection.12 He constantly lived with these painful memories and wrote them down in hopes that that he could make sense of such horrendous images. Although he knew he would live and would experience even more pain and suffering, he explained to his audience that the images of that specific night on the Mentor, as it was being thrown constantly against the reef and destroyed piece-by-piece, were devastating memories that plagued his days following the disaster. Suffering from a terrible experience, and what may have been “post-traumatic


12 Hindsight bias, a term developed by Daniel Schacter is attributed to developing memories that are changed or molded by present political, cultural, social, or economic concerns. These “biases” affect ordinary memories.
stress,” Holden recounted the terrors that he experienced, in the end reflecting upon the tragic realm of whaling and the uncertain fates of those who chose that vocation.

As daybreak approached, the crew who survived the night noticed a patch of reef that appeared calm and dry, which, as Holden wrote in 1832, “afforded us some comfort.” Moments later they spotted land about thirty miles towards the east, which gave them cause to hope that this horror would soon come to an end. Without delay the crew prepared a third long-boat that would attempt to transport them all to the stretch of land they had noticed. With the sun two hours high, the crew completed preparations for the boat and soon departed. With them, as Holden recalled, they brought a chest of bread, some water, a quantity of wearing apparel, a canister of gunpowder, one musket, a brace of pistols, three cutlasses, and a tinderbox. In this frail bark, and with these poor means of substance and defense, with little to rely upon but the mercy of Providence, we took leave of the ship; not without feelings of deep sorrow, and with small hopes of improving our forlorn condition.¹³

Holden recalled knowing of the fate that would befall them when they landed in Palau. In his narrative he paid considerable attention to how they lacked appropriate defense, something that was not a predominant thought in his mind as they abandoned the Mentor, but certainly meant something to him when he penned his narrative. He provided just enough information on their food and water to satisfy his reader’s curiosity, but paid considerably more attention to their supply of weapons. This “tips” Holden’s “historical hand” showing that although he could lucidly recall these tragic events, he placed some “hindsight facts” in the foreground. He did this because of the knowledge he had about what he wished they had had to defend themselves against, – the indigenous population of which he then knew little. As Ian C. Campbell has argued, “The moments when different cultures first came into contact were occasions of wonder and uncertainty, full

of dramatic potential.”¹⁴ This dramatic potential became traumatic for sailors like Holden. Wishing to go back and change his past so that he would have been prepared for a dire future, Holden inserted his present into his memoir and exposed a “bias” that he may not have known he had employed. For Holden the Mentor’s survivors’ arrival on shore did not prove the end of their ordeal; it was actually just the beginning.

**American Whaling and the Importance of Painful Memories**

The history of American whaling, especially during its “Golden Age,” which occurred from the 1820s to the outbreak of the American Civil War in 1861, has been covered by many scholars at varying times. Arthur Power Dudden observes that

> The Civil War interrupted or diverted American ocean shipping…Clipper ships and whalers alike were scuttled deliberately by the dozens to block Confederate ports, while a flotilla of rebel sea raiders haratookssed the remainder. Petroleum products for lighting and lubricating replaced whale oil; steel substituted for whalebone….Grass grew in the streets and dockyards for New Bedford.¹⁵

But neither comprehensive surveys such as A.B.C. Whipple’s 1973 book *Yankee Whalers in the South Seas* and his 1979 *The Whalers*, nor Eric Jay Dolin’s *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America*, have exhausted the subject. American Whalefishery scholars like David Chappell, Ernest Dodge, Michael Dyer, Daniel Francis, Frances Ruley Kartunnen, Lisa Norling, and others have brought in strikingly diverse stories to give the history of American whaling a much broader and more global scope.¹⁶ American whaling began soon after the first establishment of New England, but gradually diminished north of

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Cape Cod, and in the eighteenth and early nineteenth century it was concentrated on the island of Nantucket.\textsuperscript{17} Still, by the dawn of the second quarter of the nineteenth century this maritime business was controlled by New Bedford, Massachusetts, merchants and in 1850 New Bedford was the wealthiest city on earth.\textsuperscript{18} Ernest Dodge, future Director of the Peabody Museum of Salem, stated in reference to the whaling industry and the Jack Tars who made up its labor force, “whaling was a conservative occupation and changed only slowly over the years…and as the demand for whale oil increased, so did the fleets of ships, and the numbers of men employed in the industry.”\textsuperscript{19} In reference to the “whaler” itself, Dodge found that the striking vessel was built in a manner to withstand the brutal force of all oceans, both Atlantic and Pacific. Built to withstand the ocean for up to four years, the “whaler” ship was “square-rigged on three masts…but the bark with its fore-and-aft mizzen mast became favored in the later heyday of whaling.”\textsuperscript{20} The typical Pacific whaling vessel proved much smaller than the Atlantic ship used prior to the “Golden Age” of whaling and, the Beaver of Nantucket, weighing only 240 tons, and together with cargo, cost a little over $10,000. Fifty years later ships “ranged from 300 to 500 tons and cost from $30,000 to $60,000. Unless lost by storm or accident, they cruised the seas for years.”\textsuperscript{21}

Numerous and imposing during their day, yet rare and nostalgic today, it was whaling ships themselves, like New Bedford’s Charles W. Morgan, many times manned

\textsuperscript{17} Dodge, New England the South Seas, 27.


\textsuperscript{19} Dodge, New England the South Seas, 29-30.

\textsuperscript{20} Dodge, New England the South Seas, 28 and Dolin, Leviathan, 226-227.

\textsuperscript{21} Dodge, New England the South Seas, 28 and Dudden, The American Pacific 13.
by Hawaiian harpooners, which proved the most important instrument in the “whaler” voyage and endeavor. In the narratives of many of the whale men who are covered in this chapter, the whaleboat itself proved their “life-raft” after a terrible shipwreck or a mutiny. Massive whaling ships normally carried a total of four whale boats on “davits” and two spares in case of loss. They “were the most graceful and finest pulling boats ever built,” Dodge maintains, and “twenty-eight to thirty feet long, double-ended, sleek, and buoyant, they were rowed by five oars with a steersman.” These small boats were used to hunt and slay the mighty whale that would then be pulled back to the vessel and slaughtered for its oil. A hard existence, as historian Daniel Vickers has argued, the career of whalemens was long and arduous. Whalemens only returned home when they had hunted, killed, and drained as many whales as their ship’s cargo allowed them to carry.

It is therefore not surprising, and significantly pertinent to this dissertation, that psychologists, as well as New Bedford Whaling Museum curator and historian Stuart Frank, have argued that whalemens can be compared to combat soldiers. Frank stated in the PBS documentary Into the Deep: America, Whaling & The World, that one can “marvel at the skillset that one needs to have to go whaling; the courage, the acuity, and alertness and physical stamina.” In terms of post-traumatic stress affecting American whalemens, Frank argued in Into the Deep that the heroic enterprise of whalemens is “really no different than marveling at the skillset that one needs to be a successful soldier. They are both under intense pressure and, in fact, there have been psychologists who

22 Chappell, Double Ghosts, 42-46.

23 Dodge, New England the South Seas, 28.

have reflected on the post-traumatic stress dimensions of whaling voyages, likening them
to experiences in wartime because of the level of stress.”25 It was during the course of
these whaling “cruises” that tragedy befell many, fueling episodes of traumatic stress.

Death, for these whalers, almost always seemed an imminent possibility.

Yet to understand the vessels and boats that served as these sailors’ “land” upon
water warrants one to gain an appreciation for the odds these men faced when
confronting certain doom. Although Holden stood on board the *Mentor* as it was being
ripped apart around and below him, he also watched as a whaleboat was destroyed in an
attempt to escape. His ship served as his home away from land. In the end, the vessel
being destroyed proved to be an extension of his national origin and enhanced his identity
as both an American and a whaler. Without his ship, as evidence of his nationality,
one may ask, who was Horace Holden and who would he become in the face of tragedy
without that source of his identity?

Before continuing down the “pathway to hell” for whalers like Holden it is
important to see just how and why a place like New Bedford, Massachusetts, became the
“hub,” or center,” of American whaling after the War of 1812, had “temporarily”
suspended its activities.26 Although scholars have written endlessly about the growth,
height, and eventual decline of American whaling, it is crucial, at least, to say a brief
word about the communities from which many of these whalers came and shipped out of. As observed in the last chapter, the War of 1812 proved to wreak havoc on the New
England economy with its prolonged blockades and the use of Northern ships as

Experience of PBS, 2012).

privateers. New Bedford leaders fought against using its ships for the war’s benefit, arguing against the conflict and serving as a strong opponent to the buildup and force.\(^\text{27}\) Even though, as several scholars have written, many New Bedford whalemen and “whalers” had voyaged into the Pacific Basin, during the war they were few and far between and their returns even fewer. As historian Leonard Ellis concluded, at the end of the War of 1812 New Bedford was

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\text{in a sad condition….The wheels of industry had long since ceased to move, and her fleet of vessels that had brought wealth and prosperity had been driven from the ocean. Her sloops and shipyards were closed, the wharves were lined with dismasted vessels, the port was shut against every enterprise by the close blockade of the enemy, and the citizens wandered about the streets in idleness.}\(^\text{28}\)
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As Eric Dolin has argued, New Bedford “sprung back quickly” and with its deep harbor, heavily wooded forest, and town’s location on the mainland it rose “quickly to leadership in the whaling field and became a greater port than Nantucket had ever been.”\(^\text{29}\) It was in the 1820s when New Bedford outpaced Nantucket to gain the crown of whaling eminence, leading the world in “all things” whaling and its success had to do with the “intensity with which it perused whaling, bringing with it an extreme devotion to the industry that gave it a competitive edge.”\(^\text{30}\)

New Bedford, Eric Dolin observes, was constructed and rebuilt around its economic dominance of the whaling industry. The streets were lined with shops, artisans,


\(^{30}\) Dolin, *Leviathan*, 212-213. Just how far New Bedford outpaced Nantucket can be observed in fleet numbers. By 1850 Nantucket had a fleet of 62 whalers as compared to New Bedford’s fleet of 288 whalers. New Bedford would continue to grow until the dawn of the American Civil War, which proved the death blow to American whaling. See also, Dudden, *American Pacific*, 13-17.
and agents, all of whom kept the whaling engine operating. As whaling was an intensely dangerous occupation. Farther up, on Johnny Cake Hill, where today stands the New Bedford Whaling Museum, Dolin wrote, “toiled the insurance men who reduced the monetary risks of whaling, and the bankers who helped finance the voyages.” In this neighborhood losses and profits were calculated and counted up by whaling merchants, like William Rotch, who, like other merchants, calculated a seafarer’s life in terms of dollars and profit. Whalemen served as “expendable” pawns in a growing need to gain wealth and esteem through the whaling trade. Whalemen served as the “grunts” thrown out into battle, sometimes green, sometimes seasoned, given enough pay to survive, sometimes more, yet most times less. They were drawn to the sea through visions of “greener” monetary pastures, yet had to endure long days and several years of grueling backbreaking work. Adventure, local maritime communities, and thoughts of a better life pushed these young men towards the sea on marvelous whaling vessels that were just as much “factories” as they were ships.\(^{31}\) New Bedford docks proved to be constantly in motion and busy, “chandlers pressed, molded, and packaged spermaceti candles,” and blacksmiths, cooperers, and outfitters were always busy equipping merchants and ship owners with their whaling supplies.\(^{32}\)

At the top of Johnny Cake Hill, with penetrating views of a relentless and beautiful ocean, a congested maritime city, and an intense harbor with hundreds of ships coming and going, there stood, and still stands, Seamen’s Bethel. As Herman Melville wrote, “In the same New Bedford there stands a Whaleman’s Chapel, and few are the moody fishermen, shortly bound for the Indian Ocean or Pacific, who fail to make a

\(^{31}\) Linbaugh and Rediker, *The Many Headed Hydra*, 150.

\(^{32}\) Dolin, *Leviathan*, 212-213.
Sunday visit to the spot.”\textsuperscript{33} Seamen’s Bethel, immortalized in Melville’s \textit{Moby-Dick}, was constructed between 1831 and 1832 serving as a house of prayer for New Bedford’s whalemens. There, as Eric Dolin argued, New Bedford whalemens “went to pray for forgiveness and protection before heading to sea. The spiritual comfort these men received was tempered by the words on the walls.”\textsuperscript{34} The chapel, originally inspired by the local community fearful of the lifestyle of the local seamen, came to serve as a memorial to fallen seamen. On 2 June 1830 the \textit{New Bedford Port Society} took the lead in promoting the “moral and religious improvement of Seamen” and served the leading voice in constructed Seamen’s Bethel. Standing at eye level in the chapel are thirty-one black marble “cenotaphs” that tell the tragic stories of whalemens who met disaster at sea and display the names of those whalemens and fisherman who never came back. Those names served as constant reminders to sailors who were preparing to depart and is perfectly depicted by Melville in \textit{Moby-Dick} as well as the opening scene to the film, by the same name, staring Gregory Peck.\textsuperscript{35}

Whaling out of New Bedford and elsewhere in New England created several family fortunes. In \textit{Island World} Gary Y. Okihiro wrote that “like the fur trade, whaling supported industries and their owners and workers beyond those directly involved in the depletion of the oceans resources…the business of whales thus made ‘an immensely valuable contribution to the nineteenth-century American economy.’”\textsuperscript{36} He concluded that New Bedford’s wealth could be “drawn quite literally from the oceans of the world”

\textsuperscript{33} Melville, \textit{Moby Dick}, Chapter VII “The Chapel” page 27.

\textsuperscript{34} Dolin, \textit{Leviathan}, 213-214.

\textsuperscript{35} See Melville \textit{Moby-Dick} or film version, also titled \textit{Moby Dick} (1965) staring Gregory Peck and directed by John Huston.

\textsuperscript{36} Okihiro, \textit{Island World}, 155.
and, as Melville wrote, “Nowhere in all America will you find more patrician-like houses, parks and gardens, more opulent, than in New Bedford….Yes, all these brave houses and flowery gardens came from the Atlantic, Pacific, and Indian oceans.”

New England fortunes especially were created, established, and built upon South Sea connections. Mark Twain once wrote that “The Whaling trade of the North Seas centers in Honolulu. Shorn of it, this town would die,” and so important did Honolulu become as a whaling port that many ships from New Bedford sailed out of Honolulu regularly and the oil was “transported back to New England.” As Dodge and other scholars have concluded in regard to New England connections to the Pacific, “the influence of the Pacific Whaling resources on New England is still apparent also, for the wealth they brought provided a substantial part of the money to finance the rise of the textile mills and speed up the region’s industrial revolution.”

Historian David Chappell has argued that there was an immensely strong presence of Pacific Islanders, especially Hawaiians, that had taken part in the American whaling venture, and many of these same Hawaiians eventually established communities in New England, in places like New Bedford, Fairhaven, and Nantucket, Massachusetts. New England shipping, Chappell states, served as a link between the “Untied States” and the “Pacific long before its land frontier reached California.” Chappell explains, “New England vessels soon controlled much of the fur and sandalwood trade to China,” and

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38 Dodge, New England the South Seas, 43.

39 Dodge, New England the South Seas, 56.

40 Chappell, Double Ghosts, 131-136 and Okihiro, Island World, 156-160.

41 Chappell, Double Ghosts, 131.
“they so dominated whaling that even French and British ships relied on captains from Nantucket” and eventually New Bedford. In the end, Pacific Islanders made homes in the New England region, especially in seaport communities, and, as Melville wrote of New Bedford docks, “actual cannibals stand chatting at street corners; savages outright; many of whom yet carry on their bones unholy flesh.” As Queequeg, Melville’s fictional representation for a Pacific Islander mariner, David Chappell notes, was portrayed, by Melville “as an idol-worshiper and preserved-head salesman, who brought his harpoon to breakfast.” As one can imagine, American “whalers” relied heavily on “Hawaiian labor and supplies…and port cities like Honolulu, Lahaina, and Hilo were built in the image of New England towns, with their framed houses, stores, and taverns.” The connections created and established between New England and the Pacific were more than monetary, they were social and cultural. It is then not surprising that towards the end of the whaling industry’s supremacy, as well as New Bedford’s whaling greatness, the racial, cultural, and social mixture of New Bedford, as well as its maritime location, would make it a perfect staging region for attacks against southern slavery.

Captivity of John Jewitt

Born on 21 May 1783 in Boston “a considerable borough town in Lincolnshire, in Great-Britain,” John R. Jewitt was not born a New Englander, or even an American, but would prove to become a popular narrator of the tragic story that befell the whaling ship Boston, of which he was the only survivor. He would eventually settle in New England and his narrative would captivate the minds of New Englanders and spark interest in the

42 Chappell, Double Ghosts, 132.
43 Melville, Moby Dick, 26-39 and Chappell, Double Ghosts, 132.
44 Okihiro, Island World, 156-157.
exploration of the Pacific and the peoples whom Jewitt, as well as the crew of the *Boston*, had encountered. Jewitt was the son of a blacksmith who, as he explained, considered a good education as the greatest blessing he could bestow upon his children, and in that respect made sure that his son was learned and could add his knowledge to a growing British society.

Jewitt lost his mother at an early age and as he described, her loss was painful for she was a “most excellent women, who died in child-bed, leaving an infant daughter, who, with myself, and an elder brother by a former marriage of my father, constituted the whole of our family.”

Jewitt would eventually be enrolled at an academy at Donnington, about twenty-miles away from Boston, England, and he was taught Latin and mathematics. He was frequently visited by his father and was provided with all he needed to excel in school and in life. For two years he lived what he considered the happiest days of his life, until his father, “thinking that I had received a sufficient education for the profession he intended me for, took me from school at Donnington in order to apprentice me to a Doctor Mason, a surgeon of eminence at Reasby, in the neighborhood of the celebrated Sir Joseph Banks.” After a year in this service, Jewitt was brought by his father, with the rest of his family, to the port town of Hull, England. As Jewitt related in his memoir:

Hull being one of the best ports in England, and a place of great trade, my father had here full employment for his numerous workmen, particularly in vessel work. This naturally leading me to an acquaintance with the sailors on board some of the ships, the many remarkable stories they told me of their voyages and adventures, and of the manners and customs of the nations they had seen, excited a strong

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wish in me to visit foreign countries, which was increased by my reading the voyages of Capt. Cook, and some other celebrated navigators.  

For four years Jewitt lived in Hull, where his father was looked upon as an esteemed member of society and “as a worthy, industrious, and thriving man.” Then, as Jewitt wrote in hindsight, he was afforded the opportunity to join the maritime profession and in doing so set himself apart from his educated “brethren” seeking not an academic or learned profession, but to explore the world as a waterman and whaleman.

Among their principal customers, Jewitt remembered, were Americans who frequented the port and gave Jewitt a “favorable opinion of that country.” It was during 1802, a time of peace between England and France that the American whaling vessel *Boston*, under the command of Captain John Salter and belonging to the port of Boston, Massachusetts, arrived in Hull. After a few days in port and several conversations with Jewitt, and after befriending Jewitt’s father whom he had hired to do repairs on his vessel, Captain Salter asked him if he would like to accompany him on his next voyage. Jewitt answered that “it would give me great pleasure, that I had for a long time wished to visit foreign countries, particularly America, which I had been told fine stories of, and that if my father would give his consent and he was willing to take me with him, I would go.” After much debate and anxious arguments, Jewitt’s father permitted his young son to sail out on the *Boston*, feeling that it was a pity to keep “a promising and ingenious young fellow, like myself, confined to a small shop in England, where I had tolerable success, I might do so much better in America, where wages were much higher and I

could live cheaper.”50 After an exchange of money, for the promise of his son’s return, Jewitt’s father said his goodbyes and watched as his son left on the Boston toward the fur-trading center of the Pacific Northwest. As Jewitt would soon discover, this voyage to a world he had only read about would prove to be an experience he would not forget. Along the way, the trauma that he experienced would prove emotionally crippling and burden him with devastating memories that he would eventually share when conveying that dark maritime world with enthralled audiences.

In September, with a crew of twenty-seven, the Boston departed from Hull and, even though focused predominantly on a fur-trading venture, headed to the Pacific with Jewitt, as Dolin has written, “excited to start his grand adventure.”51 After being seasick for a few days and sailing in company with “twenty-four sail of American vessels, most of which were bound home,” Jewitt, who “had never been out of sight of land,” had taken over as the ship’s forge, repairing everything from muskets to daggers and knives.52 It was on 12 March 1803, after passing Cape Horn in December, that Jewitt and the crew of the Boston arrived at Woody Point in Nootka Sound on the Northwest Coat of America. There they were going to supply the ship with wood and water before proceeding up the coast to trade. Even though anchoring the vessel five miles north of a local village they had spotted, in an attempt not to upset any local “natives,” in an area called Friendly Cove, the next day the ship was greeted by natives from the village of Nootka and their king, Maquina. Jewitt provided an interesting and clear description of the encounter between his captain, John Salter, and the king and his entourage. Noting everything from

physical descriptions to clothing, mannerisms, and language, Jewitt paid very close attention to these “natives” whom he had never seen, but had read stories about.

After several days of failed attempts at trade the crew was ultimately successful in replenishing their ship’s supply of food and fresh water, which had been their goal in this area. “Salter was gracious to the Indians who visited the following week,” and at one point he invited Maquina to have dinner with him and at the end presented him with a gift of a “double-barreled fowling gun.” As Jewitt described the incident, the next day Maquina returned to the ship enraged, arguing that Salter had given him a broken gun and that it was “peshak,” which meant bad. Offended by this charge, Salter considered it a mark of contempt for his gift and called the king a liar, adding, as Jewitt recalled, “other opprobrious terms….Taking the gun away from [Maquina]” and tossing it “indignantly into the cabin.” Salter then ordered Jewitt to see if he could mend it. After a tense couple of moments, Jewitt watched as Maquina, who was speaking to Captain Salter, “repeatedly put his hand to his throat and rub it upon his bosom, which he afterward told me was to keep down his heart which was rising into his throat and chocking him.”

King Maquina and his companions eventually left, appearing extremely angry over how the situation had transpired. But, as Jewitt would later find, the incident did not end there and instead would carry into the 22nd of March when, at noon, Maquina and his group returned to the Boston, appearing, as Jewitt recalled, in good spirits and inquiring when the ship was set to depart “back to sea.”

Maquina then asked the captain if he loved “salmon,” which were abundant in Friendly Cove and invited Salter to “go then and catch some?” Captain Salter, not fearing any trap or confrontation, thought this a desirable idea and consulted with his “mate,” Mr. Delouisa, who agreed that a party should be sent to procure their dinner. Maquina and his group “staid and dined on board” but what happened next could only be recalled by Jewitt who had gone down below deck to clean several muskets. In an intense matter of moments, Jewitt heard several men above deck hoisting in the long-boat, which,

In a few minutes after, was succeeded by a great bustle and confusion on deck. I immediately ran above deck, when I was caught by the hair by one of the savages, and lifted from my feet; fortunately for me, my hair being short…I fell from his hold into the steerage. As I was falling, he struck at me with an axe, which cut a deep gash in my forehead, and penetrated the skull, but in consequence of losing his hold, I luckily escaped the full force of his blow; which otherwise, would have cleft my head in two.  

Stunned and senseless, Jewitt had no idea how long he had been unconscious on the floor of steerage. When he finally regained consciousness, he could hear “three loud shouts or yells from the savages,” which gave him the fateful impression that the natives, under Maquina’s command, had taken control of the vessel.

As Jewitt related, his emotions, stimulated and impaired, made it impossible for him even to describe what he had felt at the moment he heard that “terrific sound.” As he wrote of this catastrophic moment, “Some faint idea may be formed of them by those who have known what it is to half waken from a hideous dream and still think it is real.” In a state of complete shock, Jewitt was descending down a path of severe suffering and he transcribed later in his memoir, “Never, no, never, shall I lose from my mind, the impression of that dreadful moment.” Jewitt had come to the conclusion at that horrible moment that he was to “share the wretched fate of my unfortunate companions,”

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56 Jewitt, Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, 26-27.
especially when he “heard the song of triumph, by which these infernal yells was
succeeded, my blood ran cold in my veins.” Jewitt recalled that after he had regained
control of his senses and “wiping the blood from my eyes,” he noticed that the “hatch to
the steerage was shut,” which was done, as he would learn later, because Maquina had
ordered him kept alive because of his usefulness as an “armorer” who would be valuable
“in repairing their arms.”57 “But to me,” as Jewitt recalled, “this circumstance wore a
very different appearance, for I thought that these barbarians had only prolonged my life
in order to deprive me of it by the most cruel tortures.”58

Remaining in this “horrid state” of suspense, Jewitt was eventually ordered to the
deck by Maquina, who called him by name. Jewitt climbed out of the hatch almost
“blinded with the blood that flowed from my wound, and so weak as with difficulty to
walk.” After his wound was washed, as ordered by Maquina, Jewitt “was able to see
distinctly with one of my eyes, but the other was so swollen from my wound, that it was
closed.” With only one eye Jewitt observed a “terrific spectacle.” He recalled seeing “six
naked savages, standing in a circle around me, covered with the blood of my murdered
comrades, with their daggers uplifted in their hands, prepared to strike. I now thought my
last moment had come, and recommended my soul to my Maker.”59

Knowing a good amount of English from trading with Americans in the past,
Maquina then spoke to Jewitt. Jewitt explained that Maquina

addressed me nearly in the following words – “John – I speak – you no say no –
You say no – daggers come!” He then asked me if I would be his slave during my
life – if I would fight for him in his battles – if I would repair his muskets and

57 Jewitt, Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, 26-27.
58 Jewitt, Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, 27.
59 Jewitt, Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt, 27.
make daggers and knives for him – with several other questions, all of which I was careful to answer, yes. He then told me that he would spare my life, and ordered me to kiss his hands and feet to show my submission to him, which I did.\textsuperscript{60}

Jewitt was then brought to the quarterdeck. On the quarterdeck, “people were clamorous to have me put to death, so that there should be none of us left to tell our story to our countrymen and prevent them from coming to trade with them; but the king, in the most determined manner opposed their wishes.” Jewitt, at this point, was without his coat and with the “coldness of the weather, my feebleless from loss of blood, the pain of my wound and the extreme agitation and terror that I still felt, I shook like a leaf.” Jewitt then observed “the most horrid sight…that ever my eyes witnessed.” He observed “the heads of our unfortunate Captain and his crew, to the number of twenty-five, were all arranged in a line, and Maquina ordering one of his people to bring a head, asked me whose it was: I answered, the Captains.” This same process was done for all other heads and, one by one, Jewitt was forced to identify them and soon “discovered that all our unfortunate crew had been massacred, and…what I felt on this occasion, may be more readily conceived than expressed.” Interestingly, John Thompson, the Boston’s sailmaker was missing among the massacred crew. He was, as Eric Dolin recalled, found the next day, and the natives wanted to kill him, too, but “Jewitt was able to save his life by quick thinking, claiming that the older man was actually his father.”\textsuperscript{61}

As Jewitt explained, if of course he had not survived this ordeal and what was to occur next, then he would not have a warning for all those who would seek to trade with Maquina and others in the area of Friendly Cove. He wanted his prose to serve as a

\textsuperscript{60} Jewitt, \textit{Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt}, 28.

\textsuperscript{61} Dolin, \textit{Furs, Fortunes, and Empires}, 158.
cautionary tale, so that no one else would have to suffer as he had and would. Just four
days after the massacres, two vessels came into the cove, but, using the weapons taken
from the *Boston*, the natives fired upon those vessels and they soon departed apparently,
as even Jewitt speculated, not even considering that someone could have been captured
and turned into a slave. Thus began, as Jewitt recollected, his two-year ordeal as a captive
amongst the “Savages of Nootka Sound.”

While providing his accounts of distressing moments occurring during the
massacre of the *Boston* crew, Jewitt’s narrative also delivers a well-written, as well as
disturbing, recollection of his two years as a captive. Examining the indigenous
inhabitant’s manners, living styles, and religious opinions, Jewitt went to great lengths to
record his observations, memories, and distressing past to elaborate and enhance valuable
historical information on this native group. Although, as scholars have observed, Jewitt
was treated very well by his “perpetrators,” and his captivity fits into the traumatic
pattern described by psychologist Judith Herman, he longed to be reunited with another
vessel that would take him out of this place and back to family and friends. “To hasten
that day” as Dolin wrote, “Jewitt wrote sixteen letters on paper salvaged from the ship,
telling of his plight and pleading to be rescued. He gave those letters to visiting Indians,
asking that they deliver those to any white men they saw. But no ships appeared. Word of
the massacre had spread, and ships scrupulously avoided the area.”^62 Jewitt was alone
and would suffer, as Odysseus had, captivity by a foreign master, while holding out hope
for a reunion with a familiar world.

Jewitt’s disastrous story ended two years later as one ship finally arrived in search
of trade and Jewitt used this opportunity finally to procure travel home for Thompson and

himself. Maquina, fearing retaliation for what occurred to the Boston, instructed Jewitt to write a letter to the new ship, the Lydia, which had arrived in Friendly Cove on 19 July 1805 telling its officers that they had treated both Jewitt and Thompson well. Jewitt seized this opportunity to write a letter that was dissimilar from the one Maquina had instructed him to write, supposing this to be his “only chance of gaining…freedom.”

The plan worked and although Maquina told his followers not to worry because “John no lie,” and he climbed into a canoe and paddled with the letter to the Boston based ship the Lydia. Upon reading the letter, the Lydia’s captain, Sam Hill, placed Maquina in shackles and instructed the “king” that he would be released only when the two “captives” were released to him. When the “natives” realized what had taken place, they attacked Jewitt and threatened to kill him and carve him onto “pieces no bigger than their thumb nail.”

Jewitt remained courageously composed at that moment and cried “Kill me…if it is your wish, throwing open the bear skin which I wore, here is my breast, I am only one among so many, and can make no resistance, but unless you wish to see your king hanging by his neck to that pole, pointing to the yard arm of the brig, and the sailors firing at him with bullets, you will not do it.” They did nothing and finally, when Jewitt reached the brig and spoke with Captain Hill, he told him that it would be wise to free Maquina and avoid a bloody conflict that would surely take place if retribution was carried out. Captain Hill agreed with Jewitt and proceeded to free Maquina and sail away from Friendly Cove. Jewitt and Thompson began their journey home.

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John Jewitt eventually made it to Boston, Massachusetts, and felt he had achieved that “sea story” that many men had told him while he was in Hull, England. He would not make it to Boston in America, a Christian country, until 1807 after remaining on board the *Lydia* and participating in trading enterprises throughout the Pacific and in China. As he recollected, “My feelings on once more finding myself in a Christian country, among a people speaking the same language as myself, may be more readily conceived than expressed.”66 His family was joyful to hear that he was not among the massacred of the *Boston* crew, but Jewitt continued to be haunted by their deaths and his memory of the sights and sounds of death that occurred above him while he was bloodied and bleeding in the steerage of the *Boston*. In more ways than one, Jewitt remembered the anxiety that continued to plague him in the years after his tragedy occurred. The nightmares he wrote of and the harrowing reminiscences that plagued him had a strong hold on his emotional state well after he made it to Boston and, to his recollection, was treated well as a “stranger in distress.”67 By the publication of this narrative in 1815, Jewitt had settled in Middletown, Connecticut. There he would live until 1821 with the head wound, as well as constant agony about how close he had come to death.

**Suffering, Post-Traumatic Stress, and the Whaleman**

Jewitt persistently remembered these events. The memories were encoded and transfixed into his brain so that he could, even if it was not by choice, retrieve that recollection and the haunting images seemingly burned into his memory. Yet one concept that sets Jewitt apart from sailors like Barnabas Downs, as well as James Durand and Joseph Bates, was the inconceivable violence he observed committed against his “ship

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mates." Although Durand observed men beaten and bloodied and Downs witnessed immense suffering, and loss, on board the brig General Arnold, Jewitt beheld severe violence that resulted in the murder of twenty-five men, all of whom he had called friends. William Lay, who will be discussed shortly in this chapter, will share some of these experiences with Jewitt and serve to distinguish the life of the whaleman from the life of the privateer, impressed sailor, and eventually the nautical abolitionists. The violence that Jewitt observed was terrible and can be examined through a psychological lens that is used to study combat reactions to violence in events like the American Civil War, or even in the 20th century conflict in Vietnam. Although the Civil War soldier, as Eric Dean has written, was “used to the near presence of death,” and whalemen knew of the risks that were at play when they set sail, the violence perpetrated against Jewitt came as a shock. This surprise and past tragedy illustrates the dangers facing whalemen and other seafarers, but their acceptance of those possibilities seemed to be overshadowed by their youthful, sometimes joyous attempts to participate in oceanic adventure and triumph. When they experienced the world of maritime “hell” they suffered, many of their comrades perished, and they were left with disturbing memories that, after some time, acted like nightmares and fueled their literary endeavor.

Jewitt watched as his comrades were “butchered” and their heads displayed for him to identify. This traumatizing moment, as even Dean would agree with respect to Civil War veterans, served as a “game changing” moment from which a soldier, sailor, or any victim of systematic violence can rarely be free. As Dean wrote of his traumatized Union Civil War soldiers,

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68 Although, as we will see in Chapter Six, Daniel Collins witnessed similar atrocities.

69 Dean, Shook Over Hell, 71.
The bluster and apparent ruggedness of the veteran should not always be taken at face value, however; when one carefully examines accounts of men professing to be unconcerned about the dangers and terrors of war, one often discovers that these stoic declarations of indifference hid a deeper fear and horror, held at bay for the time being, but lurking within nonetheless.\textsuperscript{70}

The horrors and atrocities that Jewitt witnessed and could not forget are consistent with what Penny Coleman and Judith Herman refer to as “dialectic of trauma.” Jewitt could not forget his ship mates’ heads held in front of him on display or the sights and sounds that occurred during the massacre and as he was then almost killed. These types of intolerable memories, as Coleman wrote, “provoke imperfect psychic defenses, which are, in turn, equally vulnerable to penetration.”\textsuperscript{71} As Coleman concludes, it is unrealistic “to defend against anything that might trigger a traumatic memory, but it is equally impossible to find an acceptable way to live with that memory in the frenzied back-and-forth between two equally repellent states of being.”\textsuperscript{72}

As Jewitt recalled in his narrative, he suffered from the constant back and forth of that tragic recollection of the massacre of his comrades, his near death, and his two years of captivity.\textsuperscript{73} What Jewitt, as well as most of these sailor witnesses, was doing can be deduced perhaps with the assistance of current theory. The dreadful moments he, and they, experienced have the features and conditions necessary to produce devastating, if distorted memories. His level of anxiety was at most likely so extreme during this tragedy, as psychologist have found through similar present day studies, that his cognitive mechanisms were primed to imprint taxing memories, and after a time of conceivable

\textsuperscript{70} Dean, \textit{Shook Over Hell}, 72.

\textsuperscript{71} Coleman, \textit{Flashback}, 4.

\textsuperscript{72} Coleman, \textit{Flashback}, 4.

\textsuperscript{73} Jewitt, \textit{Narrative of the Adventures and Sufferings of John R. Jewitt}, 26-29.
“dissociation,” possibly produced traumatic stress. From the moment he heard the commotion on the deck of the Boston to when he was attacked and knocked out, after his fall into the steerage hold, Jewitt began a long and harrowing journey both physically and emotionally.

What Judith Herman has argued about trauma and what scholars like Penny Coleman have applied to societies as well, can be shown in the recollections of whaling and traders who experienced terrible violence. What I have shown with privateers like Barnabas Downs and impressed sailors like James M’Lean is that oceanic traders like John Jewitt and Horace Holden can be examined in a way that unleashes the memories they suffered from and the traumatic stress created by a distressing ordeal. They each chose the ocean and all encountered terrible suffering, but in the case of whalingmen and traders, who more often than not encountered distant worlds and peoples, they found misunderstandings, or cultural struggles, which in turn resulted in conflict, death, and suffering. “Trauma studies,” Jonathan Shay has argued, “will be…influential in other fields of knowledge….The field of trauma studies is the only new thing emerging…that is likely to have a sweeping…effect in philosophy, literary and other arts criticism, history, political science... and on and on.”

Considering again Jewitt’s witnessing of the massacre of his “ship mates,” it is probable that he had some feeling of guilt about the deaths of his mates and his own survival. Although his pleasure in being alive is recognizable, he found displeasure in his captivity in ways that brought him to the conclusion that he wished he had died with his crew instead of having lived through almost three horrible years as a slave and prisoner. Jonathan Shay has done a tremendous job in exploring the world of guilt and memory,

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74 Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 246.
especially as they relate to Vietnam and Homer’s the *Odyssey*. Veterans of war, Shay wrote, or even in cases of traumatic ordeals where friends and comrades perish, “carry the weight of friends’ deaths *in* war and *after* war, and the weight of all those irretrievable losses among the living that, like the dead, can never be brought back.” Shay examined Homer’s epic tale for signs of “survivor guilt” and characteristics that could allow for comparisons to be drawn from other events, in his case, the Vietnam War. As Shay claimed, Homer’s writings broaden the collective understanding of what “is conventionally called ‘survivor guilt’ – the lesson being in the contrast – Odysseus’ almost complete *absence of moral pain, guilt, self-reproach, and self-criticism*.76

It is clear that Barnabas Downs, and to a greater degree, James Magee, captain of the brig *General Arnold*, displayed signs of “survivor’s guilt.” Downs suffered yet survived, so his guilt was less intense perhaps because he had been deemed disabled in the years after the accident. Magee, on the other hand, lived on with no physical problems, but displayed emotional difficulties in how he coped with the tragedy. Magee survived, as he argued, because of pouring the alcohol into his boots, which stopped his feet, and the feet of those who listened to him, from freezing. Those who drank the alcohol, as has been claimed, died almost instantly. In an interview done for a Boston newspaper, Magee explored this incident again and spoke of his continued “guilt” that he could not have saved more people from instant suffering.77 Scholars like Amy Mitchell-Cook, and even survivors of his own crew like Marchant, argued that Magee displayed “an excellent example of leadership” and Downs recalled that

75 Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 78.

76 Shay, *Odysseus in America*, 78-79.

In the hour of difficulty and danger he was calm, hopeful, and self-reliant. Without these qualities, the most experienced and energetic often fail...None would have survived if our master’s sprit had not been there to cheer them by his works, and encourage them by his example.\(^{78}\)

Although displaying such exceptional bravery, Magee was traumatized by thoughts that he could have done more. Yearly, he tried to make amends to the dead and suffering by caring for all of the latters’ wants and needs and holding a get together where the survivors could converse freely about their troubles and hardships since the accident. Eventually, as I have noted, he sought to be buried under the same monument that had proved a constant reminder of his greatest failure. In death he sought to return to those General Arnold men whose deaths he felt he was responsible for, but whose legacy he championed, whose deaths he honored, and whose names Magee constantly made sure the Cape Cod community did not forget.\(^{79}\) Horace Holden, who is discussed below, was plagued by this same type of guilt, maybe even shame. The suffering he endured put him in line with Downs, and Magee, whose “survivor guilt” was worsened by his upsetting memories, nightmares, and the knowledge that the hazardous maritime world continued to cast its shadow over the youthful desires of New England sailors.

**The Shipwreck and Survival of Horace Holden**

After witnessing the destruction of his home away from land, the Mentor, Horace Holden and the survivors of the wreck “rowed” their long-boat towards a dry patch of reef in order to plan a way towards land. Upon the “barren rock,” wrote Holden,

> in the mists of a waste of waters, far from kindred and friends, and the abodes of civilized man; the ship which had been our home, and on board of which we had

\(^{78}\) Gilje and Pencak eds., *Pirates, Jack Tar, and Memory*, 166-167 and Downs, *A Brief and Remarkable Narrative of the Life and Extreme Sufferings of Barnabas Downs*.

\(^{79}\) Thatcher, *History of Plymouth*, 211.
embarked with high hopes, lay within sight, a useless wreck; still we were enabled to enjoy a moment of relief. Eventually they all made it to a neighboring island where a native group treated them with contempt. “No sooner had they landed than they commenced their depredations upon the few articles, which at that time constituted all” the earthy positions that crew had. Nautical instruments, muskets, and clothing were immediately appropriated by the local group, but at the quick order of the captain the cutlasses were hidden between the “crevices” of a rock, which denied the natives access to the entire “booty.” Holden’s narrative provided historically important descriptions of the natives they encountered, but such images tell more about Holden than they do about the natives themselves. His fear, apprehension, lack of understanding, and misguided hatred are all clearly represented in his wiring. His anxiety about the unknown and fear of death at the hands of “savages,” as he described them, served to agree with outdated and misguided modes of reason that were prevalent among sailors who traveled to the Pacific Basin.

As Ian C. Campbell has argued “The relationship” between EuroAmericans and Pacific Islanders “in their early encounters is bound up with the evolving philosophical classification of races and the coincidence of the most influential meetings with the efflorescence of eighteenth-century science.” According to Holden, the crew’s minds were “not long in coming to the conclusion, that an open sea, with Heaven to protect us, would be far preferable to a chance among beings like those.” With little delay the crew


83 Campbell, “The Cultures of Culture Contact,” 63.
once again boarded their lone long-boat and departed in search of more promising areas. Facing new complications and hazards, the crew dedicated themselves to the compassion of the waves. They steered in the direction of a new island, which would eventually be Babelthuap Island, the largest of the Palau group, and sought to row in deeper water to avoid the reef. Along the way, they watched as local natives, using their gifts of sail, went out to the crippled Mentor and took as much “booty” as they could carry. Holden watched as they left with muskets, gunpowder, and much more, then darted for land unharmed and relatively undetected.

At about this same time, Holden watched as several canoes rowed out to them and ordered them to follow them to land. Not able to get the crew to follow, many of the canoes gave up and rowed back to land, but one remained and as Holden explained, “after a while they offered, with an appearance of friendship, to render us some assistance by towing our boat; and after some deliberation we concluded to throw them a line.”

Holden wrote that what he did not know at that time, but would soon discover, was that their signs of friendship were actually the “opposite” and that the natives suspected that the crew was concealing valuable goods, and they wanted to make the crew their prisoners for gaining advantage over other foreigners who might follow in their place. While being towed toward land Holden and the crew, by then understanding the natives’ true motive, fought to loosen their ropes and flee the area. Holden recalled that

We considered it altogether desirable to get ourselves out of the reach of their war clubs, spears, and battle-axes…we were still held fast to their canoe, and so completely within their reach that it required not a little courage to make any attempt to leave them; but Mr. Nute, whose resolution had been wrought up by the previous contest, took a knife and deliberately cut the line.

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With the intention of throwing themselves astern and sailing directly towards the “wind’s eye” and escaping, they succeeded, but not without suffering and toil. Mr. Nute, as Holden remembered, was the object of much disdain by the natives and after he cut the line, they proceeded to beat him “unmercifully” before they could free themselves from the canoe’s hold. As this moment passed, Holden hoped that the traumatic experience and their captivity had ended.

At times keeping away from the native canoes seemed an impossible task. Even so, with only three oars, the boat progressed at a snail’s pace, but was able to journey to a safe distance, no longer being followed by any native canoes. Holden recalled that “after they left, we continued our course, which was directly into the open sea, until about sunset, when we discovered land ahead, apparently at the distance of forty miles.”

Holden described the difficulty of rowing all those miles and through tough waves and, at times, a fierce sun; many of the crew became exhausted by the time they reached land. They were “suffering beyond description from want of water” and their first priority when reaching this “new” land was to “find some means for quenching our thirst; and to our inexpressible joy, we soon found a spring, which, in that extremity of our sufferings, was of more value than a mine of gold.” This proved a temporarily relief because, as Holden would soon discover, they were the prey and the natives in the areas the predators who had been stalking them and had done so the entire time.

Horace Holden and the remainder of the castaway crew would eventually be brought under the property of the local inhabitants in the Palau Islands and traded between Palau and Celebes Islands, where some were placed into slavery by the natives.

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of those remote islands. For two years, according to Holden’s harrowing account, they were brutalized, beaten, and suffered from exhaustion, hunger, and constant thoughts of impending death. At one point they did meet a “tattooed Englishman” named Charles Washington, who had lived there for thirty-nine years and who was living as a beachcomber. Washington had successfully integrated into the local culture and advised that they do the same. Washington, as Holden recalled, had been a private in the British naval service, on board the Lion, a man-of-war, and during that time had been found guilty of a “trifling offense; and, apprehending that he should be severely punished for it, had left the ship, and taken up his residence upon the island.” Washington was content with his situation, having no desire to return to his native country and having attained, Holden wrote, “great celebrity, and was the sixth chief among them. His authority seemed great, and he exercised it with exemplary discretion.” The beachcomber Washington served as the perfect example of the type of beachcombers whom David Hanlon, H.E. Maude, David Chappell, and François Hazel have described as hiding out on remote Pacific Islands and crafting a new life as middle-men between two worlds.

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According to Susanne Milcairns, in her work *Native Strangers*, many EuroAmerican sailors who were castaways or beachcombers were required to play roles in order to survive in their foreign and dangerous environments.\(^{89}\) Interestingly the first appearance of “beachcombers” in print was in *Omoo* in 1847 and was used, by Herman Melville, to describe a population of Europeans who lived in the South Pacific islands who combed the beach for “flotsam, jetsam, or anything else they could use or trade.”\(^{90}\) As has come to be known, most beachcombers were unemployed sailors. After enduring a voyage of hardship, like the one Holden experienced, it was not infrequent for seafarers to desert a ship when it arrived in Tahiti or the Marquesas.\(^{91}\) Whaleman David Whippy, who deserted his ship in 1820, lived among the “cannibal Fijians” for the rest of his life and acted as a mediator between local Pacific islanders as well as between islanders and visiting ships. Like others before and after him, Melville lived according to the idea of maritime choice. According to Whippy, as discussed in ABC Whipple’s *Yankee Whalers* and an article written by one of his descendants, Serra Whippy, Fijians would capture the crew of a stranded EuroAmerican ship for ransom and eat them if they resisted.\(^{92}\) Whippy

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\(^{89}\) Castaways and beachcombers had always had a small number of “residents” in the South Pacific since the arrival of the earliest Spanish explorers. Even so, the number of EuroAmericans increased in droves in the early 19th century as whaling exploded into the Pacific basin after 1819. Many Pacific Island historians have argued that seventy-five percent of beachcombers were seafarers, particularly whalemen, who had deserted their maritime vessel.


\(^{91}\) Especially in Tahiti this type of desertion was observed during Captain James Cook’s famous voyages and William Blight’s notorious stay. Melville in *Typee* deserted twice.

would try to rescue them, using his status as beachcomber in an attempt to help those with whom he shared a national origin, but many times found only roasted bones.\footnote{Whippy, “David Whippy’s Long Journey Home,” in http://www.fijitimes.com/story.aspx?id=156316. Ultimately Whippy remained in Fiji and became a British Consul.}

Pacific Historian David Hanlon, in his article \textit{Beyond “The English Method of Tattooing”: Decentering the Practice of History in Oceania}, has wrote about Pohnpei beachcomber James O’Connell, whom Hanlon argues “demonstrated openness to the island and its people not evidenced by most foreign visitors.”\footnote{Hanlon, “Beyond the ‘English Method of Tattooing:’” 19.} Sailing from Salem, Massachusetts, on the brig \textit{Spy} in 1833, O’Connell was possibly a “shipwrecked sailor or escapee from a prison vessel bound for Australian penal colony,” and such a condition left no room for native compromise.\footnote{Hanlon, “Beyond the ‘English Method of Tattooing:’” 19.} As Hanlon acknowledged, O’Connell’s willingness to be incorporated into Pohnpeian society included the act of getting painfully tattooed. Holden would go through this same process, as had Washington as well. It was a sign of “surrendering” to one’s environment and being willing to partake in any local tradition, or experience, in order to survive. Beachcombers and castaways like Holden, O’Connell, and Washington, as well as Jewitt, did whatever they could to assist local leaders and acted as traders, middlemen, and warring strategists as a way to gain favor and power within a native structure they barely understood.

With the exception of Captain Bonnard and Mate Rollins, who would eventually escape, and Holden and Mr. Nute, only two other men would survive, actually remaining captive on Babelthuap when Holden departed. Only four crew members from the \textit{Mentor} would eventually make it home, but soon after one of the men remaining captive would
escape and the other would perish. For Holden as the weeks turned into months and months into years, and watching as his shipmates, one by one, died in front of him, or escaped without him, “the idea of death…had become familiar; and often did we desire release from suffering which that alone could afford.”\(^96\) As Holden continued, nothing, as it later appeared to him,

> but the kind interposition of Providence, could have continued our lives, and have given us the power of endurance to hold out so long as we did. We were frequently so reduced as to be unable to walk, and were forced to drag ourselves on our hands and knees to same place where we could lie down under the shade of a bush, and take rest. But the small comfort to be obtained in this way was greatly lessened by the annoyance of [mosquitoes], which could attack us with great impunity in our helpless and feeble condition.\(^97\)

At one point Holden remembered being in terrible pain and looking to see that his “flesh had fallen away, that on lying down, his bones would actually pierce through the skin, giving me the most severe pain.”\(^98\) Holden continued that “after I was tattooed, the parts operated upon were, for a long time, running sores; and when exposed to the sun, the pain was excruciating.”\(^99\) Holden’s entire narrative described his days as a captive and his continued interest at being home in Massachusetts. Descriptions of work, the painful process of tattooing, being “traded” like commodities from one tribe to another, and being beaten for the smallest infraction, proved to encompass all of Holden’s two years as a prisoner. As he transcribed in the conclusion of his narrative, seemingly expressing the post-traumatic stress that soon began to burden him, “some things which we

\(^97\) Holden, *Narrative of the Shipwreck, Captivity, and Sufferings of Horace Holden*, 44.
\(^98\) Holden, *Narrative of the Shipwreck, Captivity, and Sufferings of Horace Holden*, 44.
Holden and Nute’s eventual escape from captivity owed much to their desire for life and their refusal to give in to thoughts of death.

After providing an account of how they continued to “survive the horrible sufferings to which we were constantly subjected” and served “tyrannical masters, in despite of our agonies of body and mind,” Holden recalled how they were released from this “hell.” In the autumn of 1834, even though emaciated, feeble, and sickly, and only after learning the native “tongue,” Holden wrote that they commissioned their “masters” for release from their labor, which they succeeded at doing at long last. To Holden’s dismay, though, he was instructed that if he did not work, then they would “cease” to furnish him with food and water and that he would be “turned out” and forced to fend for himself. Literally turned out to die, they crawled from place to place, “subsisting upon leaves, and now and then begging of the natives a morsel of cocoanut. In this way we contrived to live for about two months, when the joyful intelligence was brought to us that a vessel was in sight, and was coming near the island!” The British barque Britannia, captained by Henry Short, had arrived in the Palau Islands and was bound for Canton. Upon hearing of the existence of Holden and Nute, Short at once agreed to offer them safe passage back to America and to their homes. With this turn of events, the story of Holden’s harrowing shipwreck and eventual captivity came to an end.

On the last page of his narrative, Holden conveyed his deepest feelings on his emotional state at being returned to “the company of civilized men.” He voiced his deepest gratitude to Captain Short and his pleasure at observing, for the first time, the American ship Morrison, which was bound to New York and would take Holden and Nute on the rest of their journey home. On 5 May 1835 Holden arrived in New York and

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was overtaken by friends and family who conveyed their happiness in seeing him alive and well. As Holden concluded, “Of the twenty-two persons who composed the ship’s company of the _Mentor_ when she sailed from New Bedford,” hunting the mighty whale, only four have returned. It has been reported, that one of the three who was left at the [Palau] islands escaped a few months since. If such be the case only two remain there; and it is hoped that some measures will soon be adopted, either by the government or by humane individuals, to rescue them from their painful and distressing situation.\(^{101}\)

He could not close his narrative without “expressing the most heartfelt gratitude to that kind of Providence which has sustained us under trials and sufferings the most severe, and returned us to our homes and friends.”

**The Sailors’ Literary Endeavor**

Although the story of Horace Holden is one of terrible suffering, one must examine the printed historical evidence he left behind to understand why Holden decided to write such a horrific tale. Did he want to sell a great tale and recover a monetary loss, which the whaling voyage had undeniably cost him? Did Holden seek to make amends for causing a disaster that cost eighteen young men their lives in the Pacific and in consequence exhibit “survivor” guilt? Or possibly, like the privateers and impressed sailors we have examined, was Holden attempting to make sense of this tragedy and the painful memories and stress that he admitted he still had? Pacific Historian Francois Hezel concluded that

Scarcely six months after his return to New York, Horace Holden completed a popular account of the _Mentor’s_ shipwreck, which he soon afterward published in an effort to raise funds for the rescue of the three seamen who had remained on Palau as hostages. The book became something of a best-seller, but Holden’s noble-minded gesture proved superfluous. Even before he had finished the

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manuscript of his *Narrative of a Shipwreck*, the US naval sloop *Vincennes* was on its way to Palau to pick up the survivors.\(^{102}\)

Even so, in the conclusion of his narrative, Holden wrote that he was asked to write about his “adventure” by friends in New York and family in Massachusetts who observed a “simple” possibility in the retelling of his tale. Holden was requested to write a “disaster tale” in an age when the literary market for sailor narratives was “exploding” and public interest was intense. As Hester Blum has argued, the market Holden wrote for was well documented and sailors in the Antebellum era were very literate, as Marcus Rediker has written, and their narratives’ “truth” was tied directly to the “accessibility of the picture of maritime life,” in this case notably maritime trauma, that was presented.\(^{103}\) Ever the “literary tar,” Holden produced a narrative that focused on his “sea eye,” which described ship life and was built upon maritime tragedy. “Such observations,” argues Blum, were considered the “seamen’s actual view” of the sea.\(^{104}\)

Once the shoreline of New Bedford disappeared at his back, Holden was at the mercy of the waves and the endless ocean in front of him. This, as Blum has written, was an unsettling experience. “It is certainly a great event in the life of every man when land for the first time fades from his vision and he experiences the feelings of a wanderer upon the trackless ocean,” she asserts.\(^{105}\) Nathaniel Taylor, a whaleman, continued that “Oh, what a throng of deep thoughts and feelings moves the heart and imagination at such a

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\(^{103}\) Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 20, 31, &41 and Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, 128, 158.

\(^{104}\) Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 31-33.

\(^{105}\) Blum, *The View from the Masthead*, 116-117.
time – thoughts which find no voice, for they are unutterable.”¹⁰⁶ For Holden this proved not to be the beginning of his trauma, but the start of his thrilling narrative. He left New Bedford at his back and sailed to the Pacific during which voyage he met with disaster, felt death, and observed brutality, yet voyaged home a changed man with a changed mind. After being asked to write a story about what occurred, Holden chose to follow the recommendation of family, as well as friends, and “submitted” his narrative to the public. He did so “with the hope that it may not be entirely uninteresting, and not without use. Every statement may be relied upon as strictly true; and it is believed, that, simple and unadorned as is our story, it may serve to afford some information of a little spot hitherto supposed to be uninhabited, and to present to view of the curious and intelligent some knowledge of a portion of our race among whom no white man has ever before lived.”¹⁰⁷ Serving to inform, regale, and yet, as he recalled throughout his narrative, he sought to enable his readers to understand what befell them and the memories he was overcome with. Like Downs, Holden wrote in his own way to find some semblance of closure and put his faith in “God” for having delivered him from that pain.

Towards the end of his time in captivity, as has above been argued, Holden was overcome with thoughts of death that filled his days and nights. Observing his “shipmates” die, one by one, brought him to see death in diverse and opposing lights. Although those who died while in captivity could be buried and given a proper and “somewhat” fitting farewell, those who died on the Mentor, or those lost in the destruction of their long-boats, proved invisible and “an epistemological emergency to


sailors, whose knowledge system was predicated on material practices."

The reminder of death was ever present for Holden, a man who shipped out from New Bedford, which had the most notable reminder, Seamen’s Bethel, of the tragic possibility that the ocean had in store for anyone who sailed out to sea. Like Barnabas Downs, Jewitt, and Holden watched men die and could possibly have feared the “invisibility of their passing” at sea. It is possible that their narratives served to remind the reader of the names of the men who did perish so that their labor, their dreams, and their very existence, do not fall into the invisibility of their ocean death and missing body. It is possible that these narratives, by men who watched other sailors perish at sea, served as written memorials serving a purpose, not unlike that of the “cenotaphs” in the mariner’s chapel in New Bedford.

By considering their distressing memories in a moralistic light, men like Holden sought to use their “persistent” memories to memorialize the men lost and innocence destroyed. Yes, the story could sell, capital could be achieved, and some recognition granted, but men like Holden, whose “sea eyes” observed death, as well as dying, and lived to tell the story, sought something much deeper. Holden and Downs, and even Jewitt, expressed fear because they continued to experience their traumatic past in intense recollections in sight, sound, and smell. Seeking something greater than money, something greater than contributing to the antebellum age of maritime literature, they sought to tell a real maritime tale of tragedy. In so doing they often gave inspiration to writers like James Fennimore Cooper, Edgar Allen Poe, and of course Herman Melville. The realities of Holden’s trauma proved to be the inspiration for the fiction of these literary greats. For Horace Holden his return home and harrowing memories, coupled with a literary age “pleading” for his tale, as well as friends and family begging him to

108 Blum, The View from the Masthead, 161.
put thoughts to paper – all gave him the inspiration and need to write it down. Like stereotype descriptions of native Pacific islanders by white explorers, his writing tells more about Holden, his tragedy, the dark oceanic world, and his mental state, than it does about those peoples he encountered and came to hate.

Horace Holden’s narrative fits into what Hester Blum has called “conventional” eighteenth- and nineteenth-century maritime narratives, which are either prefaced with details about truthfulness or “take care” to “foreground the conditions of their work.”

The production of his work was created at the scene of the incident. Often sailors like Jewitt kept journals or wrote letters home as evidence of their constant rehearsal. They suffered from the absence of time to write at “leisure” or in sanctuary, but stressed truthfulness in their work that is only enhanced by those maritime men who suffered from traumatic experiences. Through their tragedies they shed light on their maritime surroundings, their everyday work, and how, when placed in danger, they survived based on their knowledge and random insights picked up in public and literary interactions between diverse crews and harbors. Sailors shared the world they lived in with readers of all “facets” of life and through their “truthful recollection” of both maritime life and maritime trauma, they illustrated a unique world that could only be observed through the sailors’ “sea eye” and then, in our seamen’s cases, illuminated through consequential terrible events. As Blum has written,

The sea eye is an industry that helps process the broader forces that produce maritime literature….the perspective of the sea eye has practical as well as imaginative applications and reflects the paradox of space at sea. Though the

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109 Blum, The View from the Masthead, 31.

110 Blum, The View from the Masthead, 114.
ocean appears boundless and vast, the experience of shipboard life is characterized by confinement and tight regulation.\textsuperscript{111} Trauma is represented in waves that elucidate ghastly instants yet seem frozen in time.

The bravery of seamen like Holden and Jewitt, and their “risking life and limb in the noble pursuit of the “leviathan,” was, as Lisa Norling has written, “explicitly associated in popular opinion with the heroic suffering of their loved ones at home.”\textsuperscript{112} Although men went off to earn a wage and hunt the mighty whale, women and children stayed home, effectively living a separate life in the absence of husbands and fathers. Wives who were left behind from a whaleman shipping off became known as “Cape Horn Widows” and the houses that filled the waterfronts of New Bedford and Fairhaven were constructed with impressive peaks where women would watch the mouth of the harbor waiting for their husband’s ship to sail through it. Many waited months, years, and some even waited a lifetime, like Penelope waiting for Odysseus, for their whaling husbands to sail home, many of whom never did. The “widow’s walk” sat upon the roof of a home, with a clear view of the ocean and returning vessels, and although its “mythological” purpose has been brought into question, it is clear that at one point it did serve as a reminder of the danger of the ocean and hopelessness of family and friends who watched as loved ones sailed off and never returned.

The \textit{Boston Reader} reported an article that was then used by the \textit{Sailor’s Magazine and Naval Journal}, in its column “Perils of the Sea,” that “sea’s perils were felt as much by women onshore as by the men at sea.”\textsuperscript{113} As Norling reported, the report

\textsuperscript{111} Blum, \textit{The View from the Masthead}, 114-115.

\textsuperscript{112} Norling, \textit{Captain Ahab had a Wife}, 192.

\textsuperscript{113} Norling, \textit{Captain Ahab had a Wife}, 192.
listed some “shocking statistics compiled by the Barnstable County” Cape Cod Seaman’s Friend Society. Norling concluded that “the number of Cape Cod seamen lost during the year 1837” was seventy-eight, “and the number of seamen’s widows then living on the Cape” was nine-hundred and fourteen.\(^\text{114}\) As both Norling and other scholars have noted, the report speculated “on the kinds of deaths men suffered at sea.” The report noted that deaths were mainly “violent and terrible…thus they were swept away, while hope of the future is high in their hearts, and they indulge in golden dreams of one day returning from their perilous employment, to the unbroken comfort of their domestic circles.” But as Norling and Margaret Creighton have strongly argued, “pathetically, the domestic circles are far from unbroken or comforting.”\(^\text{115}\) In the end, the *Boston Reader* observed that the misery of “the mother, the wife, the sister,” with their greatest dreams and hopes for the lost seamen are “slowly and painfully extinguished as every rattling wheel and footstep passes by,” and discontent impales “anew the bleeding heart.”\(^\text{116}\)

Even for those women who, just by chance, had the opportunity to follow their whaling or captain husbands to sea, death and tragedy were not absent or uncommon. Moreover memories of trauma were not gender specific. David Cordingly and Marcus Rediker have written effectively on the lives of female “tars,” especially female pirates Anne Bonny and Mary Read, and have presented their recollections in terms of how they

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\(^\text{114}\) Norling, *Captain Ahab had a Wife*, 192 and see also, Henry C. Kittredge, *Shipmasters of Cape Cod* (Hyannis, Massachusetts: Parnassus Imprints, 1963).


\(^\text{116}\) Norling, *Captain Ahab had a Wife*, 192 and “Perils of the Sea,” *Sailor’s Magazine* 10, no. 11 (July 1838).
crafted a space for themselves in a predominantly understood “man’s world.” Megan Shockley, writing on the life and times of Hannah Rebecca Burgess, described how Hannah followed her husband to sea and stayed at sea for several years only, in the end to watch her husband contract dysentery and perish, leaving her not a widow on land in her home of Sandwich, Massachusetts, but a “captain’s widow” now with the role, in her husband’s absence, of guiding the vessel home. Hannah Rebecca Burgess, only in her twenties when her husband William died, never remarried and remained “true” to his memory as a ship captain and her own identification with a proud maritime era. Each year, Hannah would write in her journal memories of William on the anniversary of his death at sea. She did so in order to pay tribute to her long lost husband and construct a working image of him and herself for future readers of her maritime, and daily, journals. Although proclaiming herself to be a “Victorian woman,” Hannah Rebecca Burgess used her husband’s death, her self-proclaimed saving of the Challenger, and rituals of public and private mourning in order to construct and reinforce her new identity. She also used her journals to begin creating a narrative about what happened to William in his last days, setting a dramatic scene in which she figured as a prominent actor and the object of Williams’s undying love.

Sailors were not the only ones who could use thoughts of death or disturbing memories to tell their stories; wives of sailors lost crafted their own narrative history through their own written recollection of tragedy in order to construct a clear and calculated autographical identity. Although Hannah Rebecca Burgess’ writings and life fall outside the domain of this dissertation’s focus, her use of tragedy, and assumptions of true

117 Shockley, The Captain’s Widow of Sandwich, 114.

118 Shockley, The Captain’s Widow of Sandwich, 112.
“Victorian Womanhood,” as well as maritime ideology provide a glimpse into how maritime death figures prominently in all facets of public life and public consumption.

In the end, if we look at Hannah Rebecca Burgess’ journal and examine it for examples of “grief,” then what she did, or attempted to do, may add to this analysis. “Rebecca continued,” as historian Shockley wrote, “to write in the last journal that contained William’s notation, and she persistently recoded feelings of grief and despair, most often in association with the date of William’s death.” Following a pattern of “anniversary remembrance” and rehearsal, Hannah Rebecca Burgess used the painful memory of her lost sailor husband, whom she lost at a young age, to keep him alive both in print and memory by continuously writing, reading, and talking about him and his death on an annual basis. Her memory was considered through methods that evoke painful recollections in an effort to enhance her remembrances of her lost captain husband. Using her journals to cope with grief Hannah ceased to be the person she was before her husband died. With his death a part of who she was died as well.

Psychologist Paul Rosenblatt, who examined many nineteenth century diaries, found that the “strong sense of grief continued years after the loss of a loved one.”119 He records that “many journal writers focus on a point of specific loss – Rebecca tended to focus on the days surrounding William’s death” and found that “as the years pass, the recording of grief may be more sporadic but the intensity does not diminish.”120 As did men who experienced traumatic ordeals, Burgess, in Rosenblatt’s academic opinion, fell in line with others who had feelings of grief and who recorded those emotions on

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119 Shockley, *The Captain’s Widow of Sandwich*, 112.

“anniversaries.” Horace Holden, John Jewitt, and as we have seen James M’Lean, and our quintessential mariner sufferer Barnabas Downs – all experienced such grief and wrote of, or talked about this grief in situations of “anniversary” importance.

**William Lay, George Comstock, and Mutiny aboard the Globe**

“The foam-crusted reefs,” Ernest Dodge wrote, like the ones that struck and destroyed Holden’s vessel the *Mentor*, “were the most dangerous menace. Many a whale ship left her bones on the coral, and many a New England sailor died on the reefs or found uncertain shelter with the unpredictable South Sea islanders.”¹²¹ Still, as can be learned from narratives written by William Lay, as well as William Comstock who wrote on behalf of his brother, George, death amongst the reefs may have proved a providential way to perish. It may have been easier for some sailors to have died suddenly, rather than bearing witness to shipwrecks, captivity, and bloody massacres by brethren and friends, which occurred during the mutiny on the ship *Globe*. Among the story of the 28 April 1789 mutiny on the *Bounty*, the *Globe* mutiny has proved to rival the epic story of Captain William Bligh and has continued to captivate many and disturb others. In 1828, only four years after the bloody mutiny that enthralled the nation, and world, William Lay, a survivor and loyal seaman, penned a narrative that pieced together the events of the mutiny and placed them in a larger perspective. As historian Gregory Gibson has written in respect to the mutiny, “the story of the mutiny on the Whaleship *Globe* has been told and retold so many times in the past 175 years that the murders have assumed

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the stilted, grand, dramatic aspect of men in their extremity, grotesque and removed. Each of the oft-repeated gestures and utterances are the rituals of slaughter."122

It is not as important why the mutiny occurred as its consequence: the terrible memory that the savagery left in those who witnessed it. William Lay penned a detailed narrative, which began with descriptions of the first year of the *Globe*’s whaling cruise and its inability to locate and kill a great number of whales. As Gregory Gibson has written, the thought of mutiny or revolt on the high seas was the “course least often chosen by unhappy crewmen.”123 The penalties for mutiny were terribly severe, hanging being the most likely. If successful, the mutineer was labeled a rebel and “could count on being hunted for the rest of his life or on removing himself from civilization altogether,” which was clearly done with Fletcher Christian and the mutineers of the *Bounty*.124 Did these sailors aim to become beachcombers? Did these mutineers seek to undo the pain and brutality of shipboard life and discipline? Or was the crew itself, which “shipped out at Woahoo” just a “rough set of cruel beings,” as George Comstock, a teenage seamen and younger brother of lead mutineer Samuel Comstock wrote in his own dictated narrative. William Lay called these men “abandoned wretches,” and if it was Captain Thomas Worth who chose this crew, he ostensibly did a terrible job and sealed his own


123 Gibson, *Demon of the Waters*, 112.

fate. Just as Fletcher Christian was to Bligh’s *Bounty*, Samuel Comstock proved to be the *Globe*’s best man to lead in its bloody and treacherous mutiny.

George Comstock argued that Samuel Comstock was mentally changed by the abuse suffered by the crew’s replacements. Joseph Thomas, one replacement who was poor at his job, was thrashed with a whip for refusing to comply with company order, and he fought back against his punishment and even found himself in a scuffle with Captain Worth, which the entire crew was present to witness. As William Comstock wrote in reference to his brother’s recollection after this incident, “One of the boatsteerers came and told us to revenge” the brutality and “he would see us out, but we did not want to do anything to produce a quarrel with the officers.”\(^{125}\) The man seeking revenge was Samuel Comstock. Joseph Thomas could be observed going down to the forecastle with a severely bruised back, which shocked many of the more cruel members of the crew. After looking at Thomas, Silas Payne declared that “the boys must not be afraid to speak out. If the captain flogged any more in that way, they must go up and tell him to stop.”\(^{126}\) As William Lay observed, Samuel Comstock then began the process of “sounding out the crew” and later professed to Lay, “Well, William, there is bad usage in the ship – what had we better do, run away or take the ship?”\(^{127}\) Trouble was brewing onboard the *Globe* and its officers needed to focus, but they were soon distracted when the *Globe* fell in with another whaleship out of New Bedford, the *Lyra*, and the officers let down their guard.

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\(^{125}\) Gibson, *Demon of the Waters*, 119.

\(^{126}\) Gibson, *Demon of the Waters*, 112.

The younger brother of Samuel Comstock, George, who was illiterate, dictated his horrifying memories to paper through his brother William. George was on deck when events transpired and offered a detailed narrative of what had taken place because, unlike William Lay, who was below deck, George watched the mutiny as it ensued. William Lay wrote that “In giving a detail of this chilling transaction, we shall be guided by the description given of it by the younger Comstock, who, as has been observed, was upon the deck at the time, and afterwards learned several particulars from his brother, to whom alone they could have been known.”

During Samuel Comstock’s lookout his younger brother George had the first turn at the wheel…at Midnight, when George’s turn at the wheel was done, he picked up the *rattle*. This was a noisemaker used by the helmsman to summon his relief, since he could not leave the wheel himself. He was just beginning to shake it when his brother appeared out of the darkness and uttered the statement that Melville deemed sufficiently terrifying to quote in *Moby-Dick*.

Samuel Comstock looked at his younger brother and said, “If you make the least damn bit of noise I will send you to hell.” As historian Gregory Gibson has observed, the words had their desired effect both for Samuel Comstock when he uttered them and Herman Melville when he used them in *Moby-Dick*. Of course, George Comstock could not have imagined what his brother was planning or the brutality that would follow, imprinting in him a memory of a traumatic moment and, as he admitted, he heard his brother’s terrible words till the day he died. George Comstock did grasp the idea that the chill of death was in the air and declared “I…was suddenly checked by a brother in flesh but not in heart…little did he think I would ever get home to tell the fateful news.” After this initial


129 Gibson, *Demon of the Waters*, 125.

130 Lay and Hussey, *A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe*, 24-25.
shock, George Comstock attempted to regain control of the wheel and sought out the “rattle” again hoping, for a second time, he would wake someone and warn people of what was going to befall the ship and its officers. Before he could signal anyone, Samuel Comstock reappeared with a “boarding knife, the razor-sharp, sword-like tool used to cut through the wide blanket of blubber as it came off the whale and swung aboard ship…Samuel had appropriated several of them, and was lying this one by, in case of a later emergency.” As George Comstock recollected, “Samuel took his lantern and descended into the cabin of the ship,” knowing something dreadful was about to occur. Lay concluded that “We believe he had not the smallest idea of assisting the villains.”

Comstock entered the cabin “so silently as not to be perceived by the man at the helm, who was first apprised of his having begun the work of death, by the sound of a heavy blow with an axe, which he distinctly heard.” In the cabin, argued Gibson, “Samuel met Silas Payne, lanky and taciturn; the stumpy John Oliver; the black steward William Humphries; and the Virginian, Thomas Lilliston….All the mutineers had to do was move quietly.” As witnesses reflected, Samuel Comstock used an axe as his primary murder weapon and he swung it with one arm. The captain, as William Lay wrote, “was asleep in a hammock, suspended in the cabin, his stateroom being uncomfortably warm; Comstock approaching with an axe, struck him a blow upon the head, which was nearly severed in two by the first stroke.” After repeating the blow, Comstock ran to Payne, “who it seems was stationed with the…boarding knife” and ordered him to enter the “mate’s cabin,” belonging to Mr. Beetle, and attack him in the

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131 Lay and Hussey, A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe, 24.

132 Lay and Hussey, A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe, 24-25.

133 Gibson, Demon of the Waters, 125.
same manner. Payne then burst into the first mate’s room and brandished his knife. Beetle awoke from sleep horrified. He observed his situation as hopeless and begged for his life declaring, “Oh, Payne! Oh, Comstock! Don’t kill me, don’t; have I not always-----.”

According to Lay, Samuel Comstock interrupted Beetle and said, “Yes! You have always been a d—d rascal; you tell lies of me out of the ship, will you? It’s a d—d good time to beg now, but you’re too late;” and then without warning Beetle “sprang and grasped him by the throat. In the scuffle, the light which Comstock held in his hand was knocked out, and the axe fell from his hand.”134 As Beetle fought for his life and George Comstock listened from above deck, Samuel Comstock yelled to Payne to reach around and find his weapon, which he did and then used it to strike first-mate Beetle “a blow upon the head, which fractured his skull.” Beetle fell to the ground where reportedly he “lay groaning, until dispatched by Comstock. The steward held a light at the time, while Oliver put in a blow as often as possible.”135 Gibson speculated, “But for Payne’s chance proximity to the loose hatchet, the struggle might have gone Beetle’s way. But it did not. He lay in the pantry, gurgling in his own blood and brains.”136

Even as Beetle lay dying, “the lamp of life…not entirely…out,” the mutineers moved on to their next target. George Comstock remained on the deck of the Globe in a state of traumatized panic and, as Lay conceded, his “agony of mind we will not attempt to portray.” Eventually Samuel Comstock went back on deck and spoke to his younger brother asking where mate Smith was and avowing that he intended to do harm to him. George, fearing that they would hurt Smith, lied about whether he had seen him. Upon

134 Lay and Hussey, A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe, 25-26.
135 Lay and Hussey, A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe, 26.
136 Gibson, Demon of the Waters, 129.
believing that his younger brother was crying, Samuel Comstock asked, “What are you crying about?” To which George replied, “I am afraid…that they will hurt me!” His older brother looked at him, dead behind the eyes, and said “I will hurt you…if you talk in that manner!” Still, the work of death, Lay reported, was not finished and Comstock quickly took flight into the cabin and made preparation for attacking the second and third mates, Mr. Fisher, and Mr. Lumbard. After loading two muskets, he fired one through the door…and then inquired if either was shot. Fisher replied, ‘Yes, I am shot in the mouth.’ They now opened the door and Comstock, making a pass at Lumbard, missed him, and fell into the stateroom. Mr. Lumbard collared him, but he escaped from his hands. Mr. Fisher had got the gun, and actually presented the bayonet to the monster’s heart.137

Although given the perfect opportunity to end this mutiny with the death of its leader, Fisher stalled and after being assured by Comstock that his life would be spared if he gave up, he “immediately did so.” Then Comstock immediately bayonetted Lumbard through the body several times, appearing to express a sadistic glee. Then, Samuel Comstock turned to Fisher and told him that he did in fact have to die and that there was no hope for him. But, Fisher, being extremely athletic, fought back valiantly and they brutally battled it out to see who would outlast the other and claim the ability to live. In the end, “Comstock then made some violent threats, which Fisher paid no attention to, but which now fell upon his soul with all the horror of reality…he said, ‘If there is no hope, I will at least die like a man! And having by order of Comstock, turned back to, he said in a firm voice, ‘I am, ready!’” At that point, Comstock grabbed the muzzle of the musket and placed it against Fisher’s head, and fired. Fisher was killed instantly.

George Comstock, and at this time William Lay as well, watched in terror as these death sentences were handed out. Even Lumbard, who had survived his brutal assault, but had a mortal wound, asked and then begged for mercy. Comstock, according to Lay,

137 Lay and Hussey, A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe, 28.
turned to look at Lumbard “and said, ‘I am a bloody man! I have a bloody hand and will be revenged!’ and again ran him through the body with a bayonet.” Lumbard, lying on the ground dying, then asked for a little water, to which Comstock looked, again, at Lumbard and said “I’ll give you water” and plunged his bayonet one last time into Lumbard’s belly, who was finally left alone to die. As Lay recalled, it appeared that this Demon murdered, with his own hand, all the officers. Gladly would we wish from “memory’s waste” all the remembrance of that bloody night. The compassionate reader, however, whose heart sickens within him at the perusal, as does ours at the recital of this tale of woe, will not, we hope, disapprove our publishing these melancholy facts to the world. As through the boundless mercy of Providence, we have been restored to the bosom of our families and homes, we deemed it a duty we owe to the world to record our “unvarnished tale.”

Lay watched in the final moments as the bodies of the dead officers were disposed of. Lay was ordered to participate in this process, and remembered the terrible emotions he was overwhelmed with as he did it. Fisher, who was clearly dead, was thrown into the ocean, his body and existence vanishing without a trace. His story was saved by the recollections of those who would eventually retake the ship and sail on to tell their brave story. The body of Captain Worth was disposed of in the same manner, but, as Lay watched, “not before” one of the mutineers “wantonly [pierced] his bowels with a boarding knife…until the point protruded from his throat.” The body of Beetle was also thrown into the ocean, even after they noticed that he was still breathing. The last victim, Lumbard, who had fought bravely against his attacker and begged for his life, was also still breathing when they sought to dispose of his bloody and dying body. As Lay recalled, Lumbard, though mortally wounded, “appealed to Comstock,” hoping that he would spare him a burial at sea, while still alive, “but in vain; for the monster forced him

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from his hold and he fell into the sea."\textsuperscript{139} In a small twist of sad irony, after Lumbard was dropped into the ocean, sailors on board watched as he tried to swim away from the vessel, not caring the direction, keeping some hope that he might survive. Samuel Comstock, fearing that Lumbard might live long enough to make it to the \textit{Lyra}, ordered a long-boat dispatched to send Lumbard to “Davy Jones’ Locker” before he could alert people of the mutiny. This was done and Lumbard’s body disappeared below the waves, becoming another victim of the dark maritime world he chose to sail in.

The \textit{Globe} then sailed for the Mulgrave Islands, where the mutineers had planned to kill all the remaining crew, destroy the ship, and rule the island. But only three weeks into his reign, Samuel Comstock himself would be killed. In an attempt to get the natives to kill the remainder of the ship’s crew, the natives refused and put Comstock in a terrible position. The remaining mutineers, Payne being their new leader, sought to take out the great “villain,” who had killed the officers by his own hand. Payne, John Oliver, Thomas Lilliston, who had refused to take part in the mutiny, and Joseph Thomas, who was a “fringe member of the conspiracy,” loaded their guns and awaited their “former chief.”\textsuperscript{140} Noticing danger and fearing betrayal, Samuel Comstock drew his sword and approached his treasonous mutineers. But when he saw them with muskets and about to fire, he gave up and promised that no one would be harmed. According to Lay, the men, having heard this type of promise before, to Fisher, opened fire. “One bullet struck him in the upper lip and passed through his head; the other entered his right breast and passed out near the back bone. As soon as he had fallen, Payne ran to him with an axe, and buried it in his

\textsuperscript{139} Lay and Hussey, \textit{A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe}, 31.

\textsuperscript{140} Gibson, \textit{Demon of the Waters}, 152.
Days later, and during moments of intense confusion, as historian Gibson observes, six innocent crewmembers, George Comstock and William Lay among them, stole the *Globe* and piloted her “in an epic shorthand voyage, 7,500 miles” to Valparaiso in South America. There they told the story of what had taken place. The American navy, under the lead of the US schooner *Dolphin* directed by Lieutenant Commander John Percival, began the mission to track down the remaining mutineers.

Gregory Gibson, who published the most recent and well-researched work on the *Globe* mutiny, addresses theories about the memory of Samuel Comstock, concluding

> That in this brief interval he had displayed a malevolent savagery unparalleled in the annals of American maritime history. He had also demonstrated leadership, cunning, bravado, and, in his last hours, despair. After 175 years, the desire to understand this strange, twisted character lingers over the story like gun smoke from his final salute.

People would come to see Samuel Comstock in varying lights, as many people saw Fletcher Christian and for much the same reasons. He has been seen as an evil monster, especially by those like Lay and Comstock’s younger brother George who witnessed his savagery. William Comstock, another brother, who helped George Comstock write about what he observed, wrote that the actions of his dead brother were the culmination of a lifelong fantasy and hinted that his brother was stricken with bouts of insanity. Interestingly, when it comes to the life and “mind” of Samuel Comstock, one forensic psychologist, Dr. James McGee, examined Comstock’s “harpooner turned mutineer”

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141 Lay and Hussey, *A Narrative of the mutiny on board the ship Globe*, 29.

142 This voyage is reminiscent of the open boat voyage that propelled William Bligh to fame in the aftermath of the *Bounty* mutiny.

143 Gibson, *Demon of the Waters*, 152-153.

144 For memory of Fletcher Christian after death see Alexander, *The True Story of the Bounty*, 344-345 and Dening, *Mr. Bligh’s Bad Language*. 
background to see what kind of conclusion could be drawn as to his mental state. Providing educated guesses, Dr. McGee, working with author Gregory Gibson, argued that Comstock showed evidence of a personality disorder referred to in psychological circles as “Mixed Personality Disorder,” which “combines features of Narcissistic, Antisocial, and Paranoid disorders.”\(^{145}\) According to Dr. McGee, Samuel Comstock was a nineteenth-century Charles Manson; neither man was legally insane, but both “exhibited signs of personality disorder and hypomania,” and if Comstock had survived, he would “have progressed into full-blown paranoid schizophrenia.”\(^{146}\)

A mixture of historical and psychological theories may possibly afford a completely new and thought-provoking way to understand events that transpire, why they transpired, and especially in this dissertation’s case, how those who suffered utilized those moments of suffering in literary ways. Still historians must be cautious in attributing motives to historical subjects. William Lay and George Comstock suffered; that much is abundantly clear from their own written recollections and spoken interviews. Both men would eventually discuss this incident numerous times throughout the years and, like Horace Holden, they provided their written narratives not to abuse those who could not defend themselves, but as a sign of respect for their dead shipmates and to make the invisible noticeable.

When George Comstock was about to use the “rattle” to signal a member of the crew to relieve him of his duties at the helm, he was startled or emotionally shocked by the image of his brother standing in front of him and relating to him that if he made a


\(^{146}\) Gibson, *Demon of the Waters*, 154-155.
sound, he would be sent to “hell.” In that specific moment Comstock’s life changed and that harrowing memory, which proved consequential, made him reconsider both his past and his future. His narrative serves as a representation of another type of danger that the maritime world offered. Not only did one have to worry about the severe gust of wind or the mighty power of the ocean – the mythical fury of Poseidon – they also had to fear the breakdown of shipboard discipline through mutiny. As historian Matthew Raffety has argued, “Violence was central to forming and maintaining the structure of life at sea,” but through mutiny that structure broke down, sailors were either victim or villain, and the old practices of flogging, executions, and back-breaking work, were sought to be reformed so that these mutinous tragedies would be stopped or reformed.147 Richard Henry Dana Jr., “saw profit in representing seamen’s claims, officers found their ability to enforce control circumscribed by the threat of legal action once the ship returned home.”148 Therefore when the lash was reduced to an insignificant and illegal practice, the mutiny was considered appropriate against those captains who proved no longer willing to adhere to the laws of land at sea. Yet those mutinies, as a result of a breakdown of ship discipline like the Globe mutiny and massacre, which did occur and became detailed through the disturbing memories by Comstock and Lay, proved devastating to those victims that lived to see the event’s conclusion.

Their bodies and minds, after a period of conceivable dissociation, refused to allow those traumatic recollections to disappear, in effect, because, as Daniel Schacter has shown, the brain seeks to protect its “host” from the possibility of future problems by


reminding it of the troubles it had faced in similar circumstances. Therefore each time
*Globe* survivors, or other traumatized sailors, sailed out, they may have been inundated
with moments of remembrance that they could not control. Seemingly experiencing
invasive traumatic memories, which must have been dangerously crippling and served as
a constant reminder of the dreadful possibilities that lay upon the waves they sought to
sail. But many would sail and suffer, and through survivor’s tales historians gain a grasp
on the reality of maritime peril.

Sailors’ narratives served as their way to find closure, remember the dead, and
warn future travelers of the hazards of the sea and the devastating events that young men
might experience and remember if they were to sign on board a whaler out of places like
New Bedford, Massachusetts. These narratives served not solely as warnings to the
general public, and even to the maritime community that read them with admiration, but
also served as the inspiration for writers like Melville and Poe, whose own maritime
careers helped fuel their “sea eye.” They inspired Melville and other men of letters to use
those calamitous stories recalled by survivors to craft literary masterpieces that enjoyed
popularity, if not always immediately, in bookish markets. In the end these famous men
pushed those very narratives that served as the origin of their fictional sailing stories into
the background and out of public view, although rarely losing sight of the works that had
given birth to their success.

**William Torrey’s Grim Journey**

In the town of Wilbraham, Massachusetts on 4 March 1814 William Torrey was
born “of poor yet respectable parents.”149 His early life was not unlike that of many who

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149 William Torrey, *Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey. Who for the space of 25 months, within the years 1835, ’36, and ’37, was held a captive by the cannibals of the Marquesas.* (a
lived in the areas and he spent his boyhood years playing sports and going to school. But life grew boring, uneventful, and Torrey determined to see what else the world had to offer. He traveled to Connecticut and New York, and most often came back home after not being able successfully to navigate his way in life. He came to see shore-based work as a tyranny and looked at factory labor as oppressive. On the morning of 5 July 1830, at the age of sixteen, Torrey “bade adieu to all I held dear, resolved that never again would I even visit the scene of my childhood.” Torrey was able to put together enough money to go to Hartford, from there obtained passage to Boston, and “thence to New Bedford.” From New Bedford “shipped myself on board a brig bound to the coast of Africa, on a whaling expedition.”

As Ian Campbell has written, William Torrey “was a young American whose youth had been marked by almost constant discontent with his circumstances and frequent attempts to run away from home.” Eventually, Campbell says, Torrey “became a sailor and in due course worked in the Pacific whaling industry” where his life began on the brig *Parthenon*, captained by a Mr. Maxfield. Even for Torrey, sailing away from land proved to be a perplexing experience. He recalled that “I sat on deck and watched the last hill sink away in the dim distance,” perhaps Johnny Cake Hill in New Bedford,

group of islands in the south sea,) among whom he was cast from the wreck of the Brig Doll, Capt. ______, of Otaheite, of which wreck himself, and one shipmate, can alone tell the sad tale. Also, for many years served in the several capacities requisite for seamen, on both English and American merchants’ ships (Boston: Press of AJ Wright, 1848), 2.

150 Torrey, *Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey*, 31-32.

151 Torrey, *Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey*, 32.


153 Campbell, “Gone Native” in Polynesia, 40 and Torrey, *Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey*, 33.
and the breach forever increasing between me and my native land. Then the joys of home, a mother’s kind care, and a sister’s fond love rushed upon my mind and I half regretted the step I had taken. For their sakes I did regret…but…I sprang to my feet determined to share my joys and sorrows with none known to me by kindred or other ties. Striving to forget the past, I went to my duty.\textsuperscript{154}

The choice to go to sea was not always clear or as simple as has often been represented.\textsuperscript{155} Some men chose to go to sea to escape their land-locked lives and the tyranny of their past. Beyond the Atlantic and Pacific Wall, they sought a new life, a new name for themselves, and to find a new place in the world. Torrey was in search of a world he had no knowledge of, because the one he knew proved unfulfilling and tyrannical. Although what Torrey found in the Pacific in searching for his mighty prey became an experience of epic disaster, it proved to make him a “new” man and entrusted him with a lifetime of stories, which he used to reformulate his identity.

Torrey’s whaling adventure began slowly and unsuccessfully in the first couple of years after he chose to sail out of New Bedford. Yet he still was able to see the world, meet new and interesting people, and witness things his young mind initially had no idea existed. One example was his opportunity to see the eruption of “the Volcano of Kilauea” in Hawaii. But in 1835 Torrey’s fate began to change and he and the crew of the \textit{Doll}, one of many ships Torrey served on, sailed on unaware of the disastrous path they were on. At the island of Niphon, Torrey’s ship had successfully taken several whales and its officers even had had time to speak with other whaling vessels in the area.

One day, as Torrey wrote in 1847, while in “company with the ships, we saw a large school of whales at a distance. The boats were immediately lowered and all gave

\textsuperscript{154} Torrey, \textit{Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey}, 33.

chase. We only took one, while some took two or three. One was taken alongside and preparation made for boiling the oil.”\textsuperscript{156} Then all of the sudden, Torrey recalled, “a heavy squall arose from the northeast blowing like a perfect hurricane, threw our ship upon her beam ends, and sent the oil out of the pots, which were full, on the men, severely scalding them.” As Torrey watched, the vessel was being beaten, but not destroyed, and everything that was “moveable” was capsized. “Those below, thinking the vessel was going down, came hurriedly upon deck with horror most visibly depicted on their countenance. For some time all stood still, momentarily expecting the next moment would see us engulfed beneath the billows.”\textsuperscript{157} The ship did not sink because, as Torrey recollected, the sails were all stowed away, which was “customary in the time of boiling the oil, except a close reefed main-top-sail and fore-sail…the violence of the wind abated somewhat, the rain came down in torrents, accompanied by lightning and thunder.”\textsuperscript{158}

As Torrey remembered, the gale continued from the Northeast for about six hours when it changed course and continued with intense ferocity and the vessel creaked “most terribly.” Then the captain, feeling that to lighten the ship he might be able to save her from destruction, ordered the crew to mount the masts to a distance of seventy or eighty feet, when “with every swell of the sea” the ship was carried with great “velocity through a space of eighty or a hundred feet.” During another disastrous instant, Torrey could hear the “screams of those below, as they tried to make themselves heard…like the shrieks of

\textsuperscript{156} Torrey, \textit{Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey}, 33-35.
\textsuperscript{157} Torrey, \textit{Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey}, 99.
\textsuperscript{158} Torrey, \textit{Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey}, 99.
the dying. The mast and yards being let go eased her considerably, though the storm raged with unabated fury.”

Torrey stated that he had never seen the sea act in such an “awful spectacle” and eventually the great storm abated, the ship survived, and the crew finished “trying the oil.” They made sail for the Sandwich Islands, having lost only two crew members to the mighty sea, but more would soon follow. On the Doll, Torrey recalled, they sailed to Hawaii, then Tahiti, and eventually to Pitcairn Island, where he noted “this island is noted as being the residence of Alexander Smith, alias John Adams, one of the Mutineers of the ship Bounty, which was fitted out and sailed from England in 1787.” After retelling the story of the 1789 Bounty mutiny, Torrey wrote that they sailed for the Marquesas’ group, with a crew of “ten Europeans, and six natives of the Society Islands.” He noted that although the island chain had been known for the “murderous cruelty of the inhabitants, still we proposed landing; and then put the boats in readiness.” When they did arrive and attempted to land some boats, the natives met their “visitors” with great opposition and the crew of the Doll was forced to sail away and instead to anchor in Resolution Bay on the island of Tahuata in the Marquesas. There, as Torrey remembered, “it being now near night, the captain thought proper to lay off and on during the night, and go on shore in the morning.”

At eleven that evening the ship was struck by a strong breeze, which arose from the “west-south-west,” and which gained considerable strength with every passing moment, until it “ripened into a perfect gale.” Fearing catastrophe if they were to crash

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159 Torrey, Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey, 100.
160 Torrey, Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey, 100-101.
161 Torrey, Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey, 101.
on the reef and at the mercy of waves and natives, the Captain ordered the *Doll* to sail out of the bay. Seemingly seeking to avoid the same problem that happened to Captain James Magee of the brig *General Arnold*, the captain chose to take on the storm in the open ocean rather than to allow it to tear his ship apart on the rocks. But it was too late. As Torrey watched, the sails “were no sooner spread, than torn from the yards by the wind with a noise like thunder.” Torrey recalled that

> Many a pale face and trembling lip were there. Before us, and under our lee were nothing but high and craggy rocks, to which we were rapidly hastening, with seemingly no chance of escape. The wind rising through the rigging so furiously rendered all attempts to be heard fruitless. The lightning’s incessant flashing, accompanied by loud thunder, rendered our situation most appalling. Each moment brought us nearer the rocks.¹⁶²

Then, like what Horace Holden observed on the *Mentor*, the second mate ordered the larboard boat boarded, with six men, and lowered into the water when “no sooner” did they touch “the water than they found a watery grave. Their shrieks were heard and moved our hearts to pity, but the hands that gladly would have rendered them assistance were palsied. They were beyond reach. We saw the waves sweep over them, as the wind moaned their requiem.”¹⁶³ Although the image of his shipmates suffering and dying at the hand of the mighty ocean would pierce Torrey’s remembrance, the danger for him was not over. As Torrey’s ordeal increased, the anchor began to let go and the vessel was swung around, head to wind, and then thrown against the jagged rocks below. Though against the rocks, the ship was still stable enough to attempt, again, the dispatch of another larboard boat, which the captain ordered done. It was instantly lowered and the remaining crew of eight was ordered in and they sailed to safety. As Torrey recalled, he

¹⁶² Torrey, *Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey*, 104-107.

¹⁶³ Torrey, *Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey*, 107.
looked back at the Doll, just as Holden had done, and watched as it was torn to pieces by
the wind, waves, and rocks. So complete was the wreck, Torrey wrote, “that scarce one
plank was left upon another. We lay in the harbor from two o’clock, A.M. until day,
keeping under the point for shelter from the blast, about a mile from where the vessel
struck.” Torrey and seven other crewmembers had survived this horrific shipwreck, but
their troubles were not over.

In “Gone Native” in Polynesia, Ian Campbell offers an excellent description of
the fate of the crew of the Doll while castaways, and then eventually beachcombers in the
Marquesas. As he described, the survivors of the wreck were eventually allowed to land
by permission of the natives who then divided the

castaways into pairs, and billeted them among different households, which
received them sympathetically….They were under constant surveillance because
of their novelty: free to wander but always followed and reminded constantly
whenever they infringed tapu. Before long, the captain and most of the castaways
preferred to take the risks of sailing their small boat to Tahiti, but Torrey and two
others decided to stay where they were and wait for rescue.

Campbell notes that the natives were “happy” to see such a large number go, but then
saddened when one of the survivors died of sunstroke reducing the number to two,
Torrey and a crewman named Noyce. Both men were eventually kept apart so they would
learn the language, which “depressed the two survivors,” and then were forced to
participate in intertribal wars that occurred while they were there. They were painfully
tattooed, “engaged, reluctantly of course, in cannibalism on the corpses of victims taken
in war.” Escape proved impossible and, as Torrey wrote, “No pen can describe with any
degree of accuracy our feelings at that time, deserted as we were by our fellow men, and

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164 Torrey, Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey, 107.
165 Campbell, “Gone Native” in Polynesia, 40-41.
shut out from the world, perhaps forever! With a determination to acquit ourselves as became our situation, we assumed an air of cheerfulness, and went about our business." Ultimately a missionary group visited the island, but blamed Torrey “for having set the minds of the natives against them,” and Torrey and Noyce were left behind when the ship departed. About a year and a half after the shipwreck, another vessel visited the island and Torrey was able secretly to gain access to it. As Campbell has observed, he conspired with the captain, a man he had previously sailed with, to escape, but he did so alone. Campbell, wary of Torrey’s literary motives, concluded that Torrey “abandoned his companion – with regret, of course, but as Torrey said in justification, love of self is strong, and he was confident that the censorious reader would behave likewise.” Nothing is known of what happened to Noyce.167

Torrey’s life was much the same after his rescue, although he did have difficulty “accustoming himself” again to ship life. But he continued to sail on the ocean and hunt the mighty whale, usually acting as if nothing had happened. This is not surprising since Torrey made a promise to himself that he would never share his joy or sorrow with anyone. Although constantly affected by memories of the shipwreck and moments on the island among the natives, Torrey spent the rest of this life trying to understand what had taken place during his shipwreck and rescue, and lived in a constant sense of displacement, as well as self-survival. The one thing that must be understood about Torrey is that his recollection suffered distortions and when he finally attempted to give his memory language it was riddled with inaccuracies in storytelling. Campbell cites these examples as reasons to look upon Torrey’s narrative with skepticism.

166 Torrey, Torrey’s Narrative: or, the Life and Adventures of William Torrey, 139.

167 Campbell, “Gone Native” in Polynesia, 42.
Torrey was thirty-four years old when he published his narrative in 1848. Although presenting some inaccurate details surrounding basic facts, something Alfred Young has concluded George Robert Twelves Hewes had also done. Names, places, and similar details are less important, as Daniel Schacter has argued, when it comes to the imprinting of “persistent” memories on the brain during the course of a traumatic maritime event. These circumstances are not so much forgotten as seldom properly remembered in the first place, because more important memories were being stored into the subject’s cognitive “bank” of memories. Torrey’s memory of his maritime experience was “consistent with other evidence of beachcomber life at that time” and the oceanic world in general, such that as historians, we may gain insight into his perilous maritime world.

Conclusion

The career of a whaleman was difficult and produced harrowing memories that often lingered for a lifetime, both in print and through stories told at town taverns. During the heyday of American whaling, hundreds of vessels, thousands of sailors, and countless whales met in a war decided by might, ingenuity, and the will to live. It was a war that is not often referred to in such simplistic or military terms, but a battle nonetheless it was. During the course of this clash both men and whales perished. As was evident by the hostile attack by the whale that “stove” the Essex, whalers were left troubled by the deaths of comrades and their own brushes with death. Men who sailed from New Bedford harbor glanced behind them and must have had knowledge of the disturbing memories and tragic incidents that affected those whalermen who had sailed the ocean before them.

168 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 69-71.

169 Campbell, “Gone Native” in Polynesia, 42.
With fading images of Johnny Cake Hill and the constant remembrance of places like Seamen’s Bethel, which served as a reminder of the link between seafaring and death, these whalemens nonetheless moved forward seeking adventure, wealth, and escape.

Reuben Delano, a seaman out of New Bedford, and a native of Nantucket remembered, with pride, the day he sailed out. He recalled that “he felt he was a man” when he sailed upon the waves but after twelve years hunting his prey, as historian Myra Glenn observed, those feelings “gave way to feelings of shame and disgust.”170 Delano became a burden on society and imposed on his family, especially his mother, terrible misery. Myra Glenn, examining Delano for concepts of maritime masculinity, has written that “Delirium tremens destroyed Delano’s health, including his mind.”171 Delano himself conceded that “I had the horrors to such a degree that I could scarcely see, and my wind was in a perfect state of torment.”172 The visions that burdened Delano, originating from traumatic episodes during his whaling days, drove him to alcoholism and led to cognitive troubles, which forced his institutionalization in a Massachusetts insane asylum.

Whether experiencing shipwrecks or watching crewmembers killed, whalemens and traders experienced demoralizing episodes that obsessed them. These seafarers charted their own course in life and came face-to-face with events that were far outside their control. They strode upon whaling’s great historical “stage” acting out as the grunt of the nation’s oceanic force around the globe. They were the face of the maritime profession for their maritime communities and for the indigenous populations that they encountered as they hunted their prey and economic future. These youths, many

170 Reuben Delano, Wanderings and Adventures of Reuben Delano, being a Narrative of twelve years’ life in a whale ship (New York, Boston, and Worcester, 1846), 17 and Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 160.

171 Glenn, Jack Tar’s Story, 161.

172 Delano, Wanderings and Adventures of Reuben Delano, 88.
teenagers, are important because they experienced tragedy and penned works devoted to the dark maritime world they witnessed, thus giving historians a view into that world through their “sea eye.” The historian may be able to see the patterns, both personal and public, but they also can examine and explain the political, social, and cultural forces that influence sailors’ prose and objectives. Many of these traumatized whalemen sought no political capital from their tales. They sought solely to bring remembrance to those sailors whom they had watched die and cope with their own horrific past. To be sure, several of these whalemen did hope to gain a small income or some notoriety from the sales of their story. As can be imagined there was money to be earned, fame to be achieved, and historically significant events to shed light upon.

Horace Holden, John Jewitt, and William Lay – all penned narratives about those images they were burdened by and refused to go away. Some sailors were able to deal with these memories and penned narratives that did not dwell on those horrific moments, but instead sought to reverse the invisibility of maritime death. The reasons behind the construction of these narratives are important, but seeking out, exploring, and uncovering those moments of pain, as they initiated traumatic memories, serves to present another side of these whalermen, privateers, and impressed seafarers. The dangers that awaited whaleman were real and they came in many shapes and forms. The darkness of weather, the murderous rage of mutineers, and a failure to understand the “other,” sometimes brought about nautical doom for the whaleman. Seamen’s Bethel, as argued previously, links the sailor with both life and death. In this New Bedford chapel the sailor was inundated with the names and exploits of the seamen who had found a oceanic grave in the past. They knew of the dangers and, as literate men, read of the horrors that awaited
them, but they sailed off in search of their own future, but found a reality that was all too common. Those who returned home were not the same as when they left and some even alluded of this as a somewhat metaphysical change.

Yet what is this change these sailors spoke of and what does it say about the world they encountered and the one they came back to? They knew of the possibilities, yet they sailed off seemingly as an attack against that historic precedent, but became a victim of maritime danger. After their encounters they added their stories of seafaring adventure and nautical horror to the annals of maritime literature. They watched as the names of their friends and shipmates were added to the “cenotaphs” that lined the sailors’ chapel in their own maritime communities, not solely New Bedford. Their names were forever engraved but lacked both a body and voice. The narratives of oceanic survivors would become a testament to their tragic pasts, their uncertain futures, and those distressing memories that impacted these sailors. These sailors lived their lives in the shadow of unspeakable tragedies.

Assessed in the next chapter are nautical abolitionists who often became maritime sufferers. These sailors not only sought a life on the ocean, but pursued a maritime vocation in the service of a moral endeavor – to end slavery and racial subjugation. Focusing on abolitionists’ Daniel Drayton, Jonathan Walker, and Austin Bearse, I examine in what ways maritime trauma is represented in their narratives and how their oceanic tragedies, in a dark maritime world, left slaves in danger and their memories riddled with terrible images. Yet, at the same time, their narratives of optimism and disappointment served to ignite support for the cause of anti-slavery. For nautical abolitionists, these voyages changed their lives, but in drastically altered ways.
“Though amid all the smoking horror and diabolism of a sea-fight, sharks will be seen longingly gazing up to the ship’s decks, like hungry dogs round a table where red meat is being carved, ready to bolt down every killed man that is tossed to them.”

- Herman Melville in Moby-Dick, Chapter 64 “Stubb’s Super”

On 13 April 1848, after proceeding down the Delaware River and through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal into Chesapeake Bay, “making for the mouth of the Potomac,” Captain Daniel Drayton, on board the schooner Pearl, docked in Washington, D.C. According to Drayton, the city happened to be in a state of great “excitement on the subject of emancipation, liberty and the rights of man. A grand torch-light procession was afoot, in honor of...the establishment of a republic in France.”¹ Drayton described the bonfires being lit, the grand speeches being uttered to enthusiastic crowds, and although, he himself did not hear the speeches, he understood the message being given by southern congressmen and senators. They argued for their own rights, yet at the same time denied liberty to the slaves, who remained in shackles and were sold on auction blocks

¹ Daniel Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton: For Four Years and Four Months a Prisoner (For Charity’s Sake) in Washington Jail. Including a Narrative of the Voyage and Capture of the Schooner Pearl (Boston: B. Marsh; New York: American and Foreign Anti-Slavery Society, 1853), 26.
Drayton remembered that upon seeing these “celebrations,” he thought that the work he was sent to do in Washington D.C. was “not to preach, nor hear preached, emancipation, equality and brotherhood, but to put them into practice.” In Drayton’s mind, he felt that “actions, as everybody knows, speak louder than words” and although he was not an eloquent orator nor could he write professionally, he could act. “The humblest most uneducated man,” Drayton concluded, “can do that.” Drayton had come to Washington D.C. to “act” on his belief in freedom and equality.

Daniel Drayton had come to the District of Columbia with the assignment of rescuing, by nautical seaway, a specific slave family from their bondage and secretly usher them out of the South, on board the Pearl, and towards ground blessed with liberty. Drayton recalled that “though I never saw nor had any direct communication with any of those who were to be my passengers,” he was prepared for the task ahead and followed through with his assignment with the utmost urgency and secrecy. It was arranged, Drayton recollected,

that the passengers should come on board after dark on Saturday evening, and that we should sail about midnight. I had understood that the expedition had principally originated in the desire to help a certain family, consisting of a woman, nine children, and two grandchildren, who were believed to be legally entitled to their liberty.

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Upon his arrival in the capital, word covertly spread throughout the region that Drayton was willing to transport as many runaway slaves as could be crowded into the hull of the *Pearl*, and that they could possibly awaken in the morning to perpetual freedom.

Although Drayton had only intended to rescue one specific slave family area abolitionists had greater plans for him.\(^5\) As Drayton retold the story

> In speaking of this case, the person with whom I communicated at Washington informed me that there were also quite a number of others who wished to avail themselves of this opportunity of escaping, and that the number of passengers was likely to be larger than had been calculated upon. To which I replied, that I did not care about the number; that all who were on board before elven o’clock I shall take – the others would have to remain behind.\(^6\)

Drayton was prepared to help whoever attempted to flee from bondage. At this point Drayton instructed his cook, Chester English, that all he had to do was “come on board, to lift up the hatch and let the slaves pass into the hold, shutting the hatch upon them.”\(^7\) English was asked to do and say nothing else.

> Once the sky became dark over Washington D.C., Drayton walked away from the *Pearl* and, along with Edward Sayres, the co-owner of the *Pearl*, in a different location, acted as guards, allowing for the *Pearl* to remain undisturbed as she allowed new passengers to call her home. Even though Drayton understood the specific slave family he intended to rescue was on their way to “Seventh Street” that night, and he had been warned of the possibility of a greater number seeking passage, what he observed when he

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walked back to the *Pearl* defied all expectations.\(^8\) As Drayton recalled, he had “gone on board the vessel several times in the course of the evening, and learned from English that the hold was fast filling up.”\(^9\) At one point, a moment that caused Drayton some fright, he recalled that

> Shortly after dark the expected passengers began to arrive, coming stealthily across the fields, and gliding silently on board the vessel. I observed a man near a neighboring brick-kiln, who seemed to be watching them. I went towards him, and found him to be black. He told me that he understood what was going on, but that I need have no apprehension of him. Two white men, who walked along the road past the vessel, and who presently returned the same way, occasioned me some alarm; but they seemed to have no suspicions of what was on foot, as I saw no more of them.\(^10\)

It was just before midnight when Drayton went on board for the last time, gazed into the hull of the ship, and found not twelve run-away slaves, but rather seventy-seven slaves aboard anticipating their passage to a land where they controlled their own mind, body, and spirit. Quickly “I directed English to cast off the fastening and to get ready to make sail. Pretty soon Sayres came on board. It was a dead calm, and we were obliged to get the boat out to get the vessel’s head round.”\(^11\)

> For Drayton and the *Pearl*, the hope of a quick getaway was disappointed. Not finding any wind at their back, and “after dropping down a half a mile or so,” the *Pearl* faced “the tide making up the river; and, as there was still no wind, we were obliged to anchor.”\(^12\) As Drayton recalled, there they “lay in a dead calm till about daylight. The

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\(^12\) Drayton. *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton*, 30.
wind then began to breeze up lightly from the northward, when we got up the anchor and made sail.” Feeling more at ease with their condition, Drayton proceeded to check on his new “passengers,” who were “pretty thickly stowed.” Then he distributed bread among them and “knocked down the bulkhead between the hold and the cabin” so they could have room to walk about. Drayton, whose anxiety quickly returned after the Pearl “passed a suspicious steamer,” knew that time was of the utmost importance and they needed to move quicker and get out of the area. But, as “providence” and fortune had it, as they approached the opening of the Potomac,

the wind hauled to the North, and blew with such stiffness as would make it impossible for us to go up by the bay, according to our original plan. Under these circumstances, apprehending a pursuit from Washington, I urged Sayres to go to sea, with the intention of reaching the Delaware by the outside passage. But he objected that the vessel was not fit to go outside (which was true enough).

With “the wind” too strong to allow any great attempt to escape the bay, the Pearl anchored in “Cornfield harbor, just under Point Lookout, a shelter usually sought by bay-craft encountering contrary winds when in that neighborhood.” What at most times proved to be the safety-net for traveling vessels like the schooner Pearl, on this occasion acted as a graveyard, where sailing vessels go to die when being chased by steam vessels that are not at the mercy of wind. Severely exhausted, having been up all the previous night, Drayton ordered the Pearl’s anchors dropped and the crew and passengers turned in for the night. Succumbing to feelings of safety that proved to be fleeting and

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imaginary, they hoped that at sunrise their fortunes might change and that they would sail a heavenly wind towards a life of self-determination for those runaway slaves on board and, for Drayton, a life of respect and meaning. As a new morning dawned in front of them, it ushered in a series of traumatic moments that not only produced harrowing memories, but also helped to solidify and enhance Drayton’s journey down, as Brandt has labeled it, a “pathway to hell” and road to self-destruction.

The next morning Drayton was suddenly and furiously awoken, a moment that proved to create a devastating memory for the captain, by the sounds of “a steamer blowing off steam alongside of us. I knew at once that we were taken.”\(^{18}\) Drayton recalled that “The black men come to the cabin, and asked if they should fight. I told them no; we had no arms, nor was there the least possibility of a successful resistance.” Then suddenly, Drayton could hear “the loud shouts and trampling of many feet overhead,” which proved “that our assailants were numerous. One of them lifted the hatch a little,” which was where Drayton had had the runaway slaves hide,” and “cried out, ‘Niggers, by G-d!’ an exclamation to which the others responded with three cheers, and by banging the butts of their muskets against the deck.”\(^{19}\) Drayton remained quietly in his cabin, fearing his unknown future, but prepared to face whatever “force” decided to knock on his cabin door. Suddenly Drayton, starting with his abrupt awakening, heard as “a lantern was called for,” which was needed to “read the name of the vessel; and it being ascertained to be the *Pearl*, a number of men came to the cabin-door, and called for

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\(^{19}\) Drayton. *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton*, 32.
Captain Drayton.” As part of a lingering disturbing memory, Drayton recalled the traumatic events that occurred after his name was called out. He remembered that

I was in no great hurry to stir; but at length rose from my berth, saying that I considered myself their prisoner, and that I expected to be treated as such. While I was dressing, rather too slowly for the impatience of those outside, a sentinel, who had been stationed at the cabin-door followed every motion of mine with his gun, which he kept pointed at me, in great apprehension, apparently, lest I should suddenly seize some dangerous weapon and make at him.  

As Drayton remembered, “I came out of the cabin-door” when two officers “seized me, took me on board the steamer,” the Salem, “and tied me up.” The Salem had tracked them down like a predator hunting its prey. Both Sayres and English were also forcibly removed from the Pearl and brought aboard the Salem, but, as Drayton remembered, “the black people were left on board the Pearl, which the steamer took in tow and then proceeded up the river.”

Thus, what could have been one of the most successful slave rescues in American history ended with Drayton shackled between Edward Sayres and Chester English, while seventy-seven escaped slaves remained aboard the Pearl. This event proved to be a devastating loss in the battle to destroy American slavery, for both freeman and slave. Both those arrested on the Salem and those in the hull of the Pearl had eagerly participated in this attempt to seek a better life. For Drayton the trauma of waking up and being boarded by an “angry” enemy proved the tip of the iceberg of events that soon followed; yet, as he discovered, the pain and trauma that he endured did not measure up to the recollection of watching as those he had attempted to emancipate were returned

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one by one to those masters who had demanded their return. In his eyes he had lost his one chance of winning acclaim as well as the ability to be taken seriously ever again, and in the process pushed himself further down, what Brandt calls, “a pathway to hell.” What proved a disastrous turn of events cost Drayton his freedom, his vocation, and, in the end, his very life. Drayton’s shocking surprise that morning, occurring as he was awoken to his impending doom, served as one harrowing memory amongst many. For Drayton, traumatic moments came and went. Although Drayton lived only six more years, and had previously experienced many disturbing moments, the rest of his life his soul was tested and his willingness to continue the fight, not for the slave, but for himself slid down a dark and heartbreaking path. As a nautical abolitionist, Drayton proved to be a failure, not the invincible “nautical soldier” that abolitionist leaders like Wendell Phillips, and even William Lloyd Garrison, had assumed he could be. Still, in April of 1848 his fate was far from certain as he was dragged to the District of Columbia in shackles and his ship, the *Pearl*, in tow both literally and figuratively.

**Coastal Commerce and the Sailor’s Path to Nautical Abolitionism**

When one thinks of abolitionists attempting to rescue slaves, one thinks of people like John Brown, Charles T. Torrey, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, but one does not think of common men, sailors, who used their profession to change the course of history. As historian Stanley Harrold has argued, “Abolitionists sometimes contended that helping slaves escape was a properly peaceful and fundamentally legal antislavery tactic.” William Lloyd Garrison wrote in 1844 that efforts advanced in the effort of abolitionism saved people from bondage “not…by any act of violence, but in the spirit of

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good will to the oppressed, and without injury to the oppressor” and that assisting fugitive slaves was not a criminal act, but rather “one that must be pleasing in the sight of God.”

Despite Garrison’s claims to nonviolence, the slave escape frequently involved violence. As Harrold argued, Abolitionist slave rescuers from Charles Torrey, during the early 1840s to Harriet Tubman, during the 1850s, “carried guns and threatened to use them against masters, slavecatchers, and law enforcement officials.”

Violence perpetrated by northern abolitionists against southern slaveholders was “closely associated with underground railroad challenges to slavery.” The *Pearl* venture, Daniel Drayton’s nautical resistance, and the oceanic crusade to stop slavery and rescue slaves served as a viable and violent form of this radical abolitionist action.

This chapter examines sailors Daniel Drayton, Jonathan Walker, and Austin Bearse – all nautical abolitionists – who lived the life of a seafarer and along the way became devoted to a higher calling. They all went to sea, fought the fight against slavery, and each had memories imprinted through both that maritime quest and nautical past. They all wrote of their tragedies in sweeping narratives. Each seaman used those narratives for specific reasons and those works illuminate an even darker side to the fight against slavery along the Atlantic Coast. Considering nautical abolitionists in this way, as has been done with privateers, impressed sailors, and whalemens, in previous chapters, can illuminate a historical past that has previously been unnoticed in terms of what sailors

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28 The term “nautical abolitionist” is one created for this dissertation. These men examined, Drayton, Walker, and Bearse all became abolitionists and brought that ambition to the sea. It is fitting that they be given a title that reflects their oceanic moral ascension.
experienced when they attempted to transport fugitive slaves to freedom and how and why they transmitted those tales in later narratives. Like the privateer or the impressed sailor, but unlike the whaleman, the nautical abolitionist may not have had ulterior motives that underlie the telling of his tale. The political trauma victims, the nautical abolitionists, illustrated their own survival while in the hands of a common enemy. The whaleman had no such enemy, but the nautical abolitionists, privateers, and impressed sailors did. Daniel Drayton, Jonathan Walker, and to lesser extent Austin Bearse would suffer greatly in their nautical quest to free slaves. Through their unique narratives, which illustrate more than memory and history, historians may discern what these sailors went through while their moral effort crumbled in front of them. Yet these slave rescuers did not start out as nautical abolitionists, and like their land-based brethren came to this fight through experience, contact with slaves, and a change of heart.

As historian Robert Albion has written of New England’s maritime history, “it was said that it was useless to contend against a Cape Cod captain, who owned his sloop, and carried codfish and mackerel one way and flour the other; that no” thoroughfare in America could oppose sea passage.29 It was during the 1830s when nautical abolitionists were just starting to take to the seas, that, with the development and success of the railroad, as eminent maritime historian Samuel Elliott Morison observed, America’s domestic “tonnage” engaged in Atlantic coasting, for the first time surpassed the recorded “tonnage” in foreign trade.30 Morison argued that American “tonnage” increased in spite of the growth of the railroads and

29 Albion, et. al., New England and the Sea, 125.
30 Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 297; and Albion, et al., New England and the Sea, 125.
James Collier, of Cohasset, who once won a bet in London for having commanded more vessels and voyages than any shipmaster in port, first won the title of captain at the age of eighteen, by taking the schooner Profit from Boston to Norfolk, returning with a cargo of coal for the Ames plow works. It was landed at Weymouth and carted to North Easton.\textsuperscript{31}

Until the implementation of “steam-towed coal barges, after the Civil War,” as Morison observed, “the freighting of lumber and apples, fish and ice between New England…Norfolk, to return with coal, employed a great fleet of small sloops and schooners.”\textsuperscript{32} In the 1840s this “trade increased as the use of stoves and furnaces became general, as hardwood disappeared from the Maine coast, and as tidewater textile mills were established at Newburyport, Salem, New Bedford, and Fall River.”\textsuperscript{33}

Having already gained distinction from the achievement of whaling, New Bedford sent hundreds of vessels out not only whaling, but also trading. In that respect, New Bedford established important economic acquaintances in the South through the trade of whale oil and timber for tobacco and tar in North Carolina, which by the early to mid-nineteenth century was an unrivaled trade route.\textsuperscript{34} As times changed, so too did the products that were traded most frequently between, what became, inter-reliant sections in the United States. Morison argued that with each passing year the prosperous “Cotton Belt wore out more boots and shoes, purchased more cottons for her slaves, and used more Quincy granite in her public buildings.”\textsuperscript{35}

\textsuperscript{31} Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 297.

\textsuperscript{32} Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 298.

\textsuperscript{33} Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 297-298.

\textsuperscript{34} Grover, The Fugitive's Gibraltar, 68 and Martin, Martyr to Freedom, 9.

\textsuperscript{35} Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 298.
cities of New Bedford, Fall River, and other areas, were crucial in the development of
dependency” between northern and southern port cities. According to the new action taken by Congress, as
maritime historian Albion has noted, “No…merchandise shall be imported, under penalty of forfeiture thereof from one port in the United States to another port…in a vessel belonging wholly or in part to a subject of a foreign power.” Taken as “congressional truth,” the decree established the legal precedent that all American trading ships were to be manned, at all times, and captained by citizens of the United States. To enhance the internal dominance of America over its own interior commerce, the 1817 regulation declared America’s domestic maritime “roads” closed to all outside influences. As Albion argued, “This would be a particular godsend in the ‘Dark Age’ after the Civil War, when foreign flags took most of the exports and imports.” Since 1817 and even through the Age of Sail “this coastal prohibition has subsequently been extended, in ways which the British and others considered unsportsmanlike, to the trade between East Coast and West Coast ports….America’s coastal prohibition continues in full force.”

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36 Morison, The Maritime History of Massachusetts, 298.

37 Martin, Martyr to Freedom, 9-10.

38 Albion, et. al., New England and the Sea, 124.


40 Albion, et. al., New England and the Sea, 125.
trade had ever produced...the everyday comings and goings of these coastal vessels make them a distinctive feature of maritime New England.”

Walker, Drayton, and Bearse started out as average sailors who went to sea in search of something greater than could be found on land. In that regard they sought the ocean as an economic avenue to prosperity. On the ocean they observed a world that they thought they could control, but in the end found out that the perilous maritime world controlled them. Their narratives allude to the dark maritime world they observed and the traumatic memories that followed them home. Captain Drayton, for one, was specifically involved in coastal trade and he, like Walker, engaged in various commodity trades that moved regularly between the harbors of Wiscasset, Maine and New Bedford, Boston, and Salem, Massachusetts. They traveled from these areas and traded with southern ports in Washington D.C., Charleston, South Carolina, and other areas developing valuable connections both in maritime circles, and later among abolitionists groups.

Their profession as seamen, their trade routes to the South, and their visions of slaveholding constantly present, as they traded with those southern ports, all placed these

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41 Albion, et. al., New England and the Sea, 124-125.


seafarers in precarious positions.\textsuperscript{44} It was such positions that forced a change of heart, which shifted them from commercial watermen, to nautical abolitionists, and placed them in positions to experience traumatic events. Even though most nautical abolitionists started in the maritime profession indifferent to the cries of their fellow “black” man, they soon changed. After witnessing slave auctions, whippings, and being told by “free-blacks” on the docks of the true troubles of African Americans in the South, these men changed their minds and hearts. From observing the traumatic images of slavery, nautical abolitionists were able to transform the coastal trade route into a nautical seaway in their developing crusade against slavery.\textsuperscript{45} In the end, Atlantic coastal trade became the nation’s nautical abolitionist seaway and ushered in a new era of maritime trauma.

Sailors like Horace Holden, William Torrey, and William Lay served on American whalers who plied the great oceans of the world hunting the mighty whale that could make them rich beyond all imagination. If they had not found tragedy, they might have found the fortune they dreamed of. William Torrey, even after experiencing several traumatic events, went on to continue to hunt for affluence and the meaning of his existence beyond the shore and on the waves. Men like Torrey, and even Reuben Delano before his mental collapse, brought home to ports like New Bedford, Massachusetts, thousands of barrels of whale oil that were sold to lands both foreign and domestic.\textsuperscript{46} Like the houses that to this day line the hills and its cobblestone streets, New Bedford’s

\textsuperscript{44} Martin, \textit{Martyr to Freedom}, 10.

\textsuperscript{45} Grover, \textit{The Fugitive's Gibraltar}, 267.

\textsuperscript{46} Martin, \textit{Martyr to Freedom}, 10.
reputation was built with money from the sales of these barrels of oil. Yet what must be understood, in its entirety and importance is that seafarers like Daniel Drayton, the captains of the small schooners, were the ones who transported and sold these commodities that these massive whaling ships, like the Globe, Boston, and Lydia, or the most famous Charles W. Morgan, brought home to port. Once the barrels were dropped off on New Bedford’s Merrill’s Wharf, Boston’s Long Wharf, and Salem’s Pickering Wharf, they were then placed in schooners like the Pearl, or other coasting vessels, and sailed south for trade.

So, how is this type of trade important to our understanding of the crusader whom we call the nautical abolitionist? Understanding how coastal trade functioned in its most basic form, and why Northern vessels were docked in the South to begin with, one can understand the images that they must have encountered when they docked and unloaded and then loaded their hulls. At the same time that New Bedford, and even Concord, was gaining a reputation as a sanctuary for runaway slaves, Southerners perceived themselves as dependent on the labor of slaves, especially those, as maritime historian Jeffery Bolster has written, in maritime professions. Historians have argued that the South relied heavily upon both trained and inexperienced African Americans, free and un-free, who filled serious breaches in daily maritime labor, but whose labor was significant to the southern financial system. Through working on the docks, creating nautical

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47 Dolin, Leviathan, 212-216.
connections, and conversing with northern captains, those African American southern maritime laborers advanced greater concepts of equality. Maritime work provided an idiosyncratic individuality for slaves who won “tangible concessions from whites, including considerable amounts of time without white supervision,” freedom of movement, and an independent revenue.

As was important with the voyage of the *Pearl*, dockyard slaves and free-black laborers shared the information they learned with plantation slaves and “acted” as their guide, as well as a maritime link to society outside the plantation gates. These Virgil-like voices spread information about when and where northern ships were going to be docking and, as observed with the *Pearl*, could guide them to these ships and hopefully to a free life in the North. Yet this hope of salvation produced a burden for the captain seeking to help them. When the prize for the oppressed is salvation, the failure to achieve that vision can, and in the case of Drayton and Walker, might make a traumatic moment, as well as possible post-traumatic stress, persistent and debilitating.

Not born recognizing the sin of slavery, rather, Drayton came to see and understand the plight of the slave. With the great number of northern traders anchoring in slaveholding port cities, those slaves on the docks merely needed to select, as Drayton recalled, a ship and hope that a captain of that vessel might perhaps support and transport

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them to free anchorages like Boston and New Bedford, or even ports in Canada.\textsuperscript{54} Drayton recollected that

no sooner indeed does a vessel known to be from the North, anchor in any of the waters – and the slaves are pretty adroit in ascertaining from what state a vessel comes – than she is boarded, if she remains any length of time, and especially overnight, by more or less of them, in hopes of obtaining a passage in her to a land of freedom.\textsuperscript{55}

At the same time that northern skippers became aware of the sorrow of their fellow human beings in the South, places like New Bedford, having already established themselves in business circles, became a sanctuary for fugitive slaves with its immense harbor, its religious background, and its abolitionist persuasion.\textsuperscript{56} Displaying acceptance of Henry David Thoreau’s concept of “Civil Disobedience,” Massachusetts, with maritime centers of influence in Boston and New Bedford, acted out in defiance slavery.\textsuperscript{57} As historian Kathryn Grover has argued, elite members of the New Bedford maritime community had familial ties to southern port cities like Charleston, South Carolina. These communities and those abolitionists from these maritime areas, relied “heavily on networks” of friends and family along the eastern coastline, which enhanced their ability to traffic slaves out of southern bondage.\textsuperscript{58} By the dawn of the nautical


\textsuperscript{56} Grover, \textit{The Fugitive’s Gibraltar}, 29-30, 157-158.


abolitionists’ rise in the 1840s, New Bedford, more than any other location, represented the epicenter of that new profession’s origin.

That is how it came to pass that the Underground Railroad went to sea. The nautical seaway proved a powerful force in the fight against slavery and a route that demonstrated a great possibility for abolitionists who drove this machine. It is a “trail” that is often overlooked, but could have been the most important way to rescue, assist, and smuggle out escaped slaves and shuffle them to Northern freedom. As the years passed and America moved closer to “civil” catastrophe, slaves, more and more, sought to utilize this nautical seaway to freedom and sought out northern skippers, like Captain Daniel Drayton, and those who funded his mission, to help them leave the South for a better life. As we have and will continue to witness, many slaves escaped their southern bondage through the help of these skippers, and yet, as observed with the case of the fugitive slaves on the Pearl, many did not. The failures of nautical abolitionists came with great costs measured not in wealth, but in human lives. Although the whaleman could fail to catch whales, the privateer could fail to capture his prize, they would live on to fight and hunt another day.

The nautical abolitionist had no such “back-up plan.” When they failed, such failures were measured with moral lenses; they put the lives of those human beings hidden away in the hull of the ship in grave danger of being returned to former masters, beaten unmercifully by angry owners, and, worse, killed for their attempt to escape a system white southerners believed was ordained by “God.” Such a failure could emotionally cripple the nautical abolitionists and that was, as we will see, the case with Captain Daniel Drayton. His failure with the Pearl proved to be the continuation of the
long and difficult path down “the pathway to hell.” Yet although he could not have perceived, while shackled on the *Salem*, that he no longer was considered a leading warrior in abolitionist societies and would no longer be trusted to participate in a “large scale” slave rescue, Drayton remained ambitious. He had failed, and failed famously, but he was determined to live through whatever pain his enemies threw at him and continue on his great abolitionist crusade. He had no idea, sitting on board the *Salem*, that he was destined to suffer terrible trauma and be riddled with devastating memories of a tragic past that he could only desire to erase.

Drayton proved to be the quintessential nautical abolitionist, yet he had companions in that struggle, like Jonathan Walker and Austin Bearse, both of whom, like Drayton, failed in that endeavor. They too were overcome with moments of traumatic pain and eventually burdened with memories that acted as reminders that the work of a nautical abolitionist was painful, both physically and emotionally, if not achieved. Their narratives serve to make sense of those memories that remained. But their prose also served to act as “abolitionist” pamphlets that would circulate around the North and Mid-Atlantic States in an attempt to garner greater support for the end of slavery and the reunification of the country under a non-slaveholding ruling commitment. While Drayton, Bearse, and Walker’s narratives function to express their sufferings in behalf of their country and moral convictions, they also sought to inspire a greater appreciation for the abolitionist foot soldiers’, or in their case the nautical abolitionists’ tribulations and unacknowledged bravery.

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Jonathan Walker’s Moral Commitment

After all of the distress he experienced, Cape Cod native and nautical abolitionist, Jonathan Walker believed that

my mind has for a long time been strongly impressed with the conviction that a more than ordinary providence has attended me this far through. The variety of scenes and situations which I have passed through, and many a narrow escape from death, cause me greatly to wonder that I am yet a spared subject upon God’s footstool.  

In August of 1845, Maria Weston Chapman wrote in the preface that

The narrative of Frederick Douglass gives a picture of the condition of a slave in the land that their folly and their fear betrayed. That of Jonathan Walker shows the condition of the freeman whose lot is cast in the same land little more than a century only after the perpetration of that treason to humanity. The most ignominious tortures are now the lot of him who, in the United States of America, determines to be truly a freeman, nor lose his own liberties with the sinking ones of the republic; of him whose liberty it is to choose his part with the enslaved, and not with the slaveholders.

Maria Weston Chapman said that the story of Jonathan Walker was a “painful tale” for any American to read, “but if worthy of the name, he will find comfort in the thought that it is confirming the abolitionists and confuting the slave-holder, showing an example to both of the dutiful obedience to right, which is mighty to save a nation from utter reproach and destruction.” Chapman believed that Walker’s narrative carefully presented the “inevitable consequences of the slave holder system,” as had rarely before been exhibited and that much could be learned from what Walker went through so that as William Lloyd Garrison stated, “Let us not sentimentally shrink from such knowledge; we will know what we have to do, that we may more surely do it. We go forth to take off

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chains; and there is need that our virtue should be robust.” Walker proved to be a proud and determined nautical abolitionist, as had Daniel Drayton.

Born in 1799 on Cape Cod, Massachusetts, Jonathan Walker became known as “The Man with the Branded Hand,” but until he crossed paths with “destiny,” Walker was an unknown coastal tradesman from New England who had moved to the sleepy town of Pensacola, Florida. It was in 1844 that he gained international fame for his work on the oceanic route in abolitionism. Yet Walker’s relocation from the more expensive and harder life of New England to southern Florida gave him the opportunity to see slavery while living in the belly of the beast. In his narrative Walker remembered that “I have long since cast into oblivion all sectional and hostile feelings toward my fellow-men. I have no ill-will to the slave-holders, or the advocate of slavery; but I pity them for their awful depravity in regarding as property those who are, by the rule of right and the laws of God, entitled to the same privileges and benefits as themselves.”

Although he pitied them and disagreed with their cause, Walker eventually sought to help shade from violence those he observed as his equal. It was to be in the fall of 1843, when Walker left his home of Harwich, Massachusetts, and “took passage on board a vessel bound for Mobile,” and it was not until 2 June 1844 that Walker made it to Pensacola.

The maritime suffering that awaited Walker as he scouted, planned, and was engaged by local slaves seeing if he might carry them to freedom was painful and elicited both difficult memories of what occurred as well as thoughts of how he had failed in delivering to freedom “seven souls” that had sought his assistance. From 4 June until 22


June, Walker examined the landscape, sailed around the area, and interviewed persons seeking passage. Walker explained to those “persons” that if they decided they wanted his help, he would bring them to the Bahamas Islands in his small boat, and that he “would share the risk with them.” Once agreed, Walker explained, “preparations were made, and on the evening of the 22nd, seven men came on board the boat, and we left the place, went out of the harbor, and followed in the direction of the coast to the eastward.”

After several days of sailing, Walker stuck a strong head wind, which brought frequent “squalls and rain.” At this point in the voyage Walker was overcome with a terrible illness and was unable to command the boat. For two days, as Walker remembered, he was unwell and believed that it was because he had been “exposed to the violence of the sun, and had been what is called sun-struck, and was now exposed to the sudden changing elements night and day in an open boat.” On 26 June, Walker was well enough to steer the vessel to St. Andrew’s Harbor so that he could obtain provisions. But they did not stay long and at nightfall quickly moved on. But as their long voyage continued, and Walker’s health worsened, the trip became one disaster after the next.  

As of 1 July, Walker had brought the boat to Cedar Keys, which is part of the Florida Keys, as Walker explained, “from the shore of the west and south part of the peninsula of Florida, [where the] shoal ground extends to a considerable distance, on which are numerous small islands [that] denominated [the] Keys, each having its own separate name.” At this point Walker was in a state of “delirium” and was forced to leave the “management of the boat pretty much entirely to those who were with him, for by spells” he was in and out of consciousness. Walker did at one point remember looking

“at the red horizon in the west, soon after sun-down, as I thought for the last time in this world, not expecting to behold that glorious luminary shedding its scorching rays on me more.”  

Fearing that death was taking hold of him, Walker experienced a short burst of fearful negative emotion. He looked upon the world in a dissimilar way and every ray, cloud, and color was brightly and more vividly represented than he could have ever imagined. The legacy of that moment stayed with him, and he intensely remembered that moment for the rest of his life. The fact that Walker, like most of the sailors considered in this study, found communal recognition of this event, allowed him to remember many of the details, and he spoke of this tragic, but consequential, moment often at local Massachusetts engagements promoting the abolitionists’ fight.

As William Hirst and Robert Meksin have argued, in regard to the “social-interactional approach to the retention of collective memories” of traumatic events, what is truly amazing about devastating events is that “they become incorporated into both a community’s collective memory and community members’ individual autobiographies.”  

Groups of related individuals share in these tragic memories, even if they are presented through one individual’s personal memory, and not the memory of a public event. Oceanic traumatic memories are associated with communities, not groups of unrelated individuals, because maritime societies always functioned in recognition of both their maritime traumas and their maritime successes. Sailors were a community of related participants, as were abolitionists, especially nautical abolitionists, who had taken

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part in the construction and defense of these traumatic memories and shared in the best and worst the maritime world offered.

Memories formed by Walker, Drayton, and those who were privateers, impressed sailors, and whalemens, took on a life of their own when recalled and presented to the sailors’ community at large. These audiences understood and gravitated to the harrowing moments that they shared, especially if those heartbreaking events were collectively examined through a cultural, social, or political community. For Walker, whose near-death experience and sincere shock he articulated at the possibility of dying, the memory played a vital role for his autographical memory. It contributed to his identity, while at the same time acting in a collective setting for other nautical abolitionists and land-based freedom fighters, who read them and added those traumatic moments into their own collective identity. While recalling his near-death experience, Walker sought to address his reader of the “state of [his] mind at that time.”70 Recalling the “remaining faculties which I possessed, in aid of the slave’s escape from his master…in prospect of speedy dissolution,” Walker thought deeply about

the subject of slavery; or, more properly, of my anti-slavery feeling. Among other things, my mind was occupied on that subject also, and I calmly and deliberately thought it over; and, as on other occasions, came to the conclusion that slavery was evil and only evil, and that continually; and that any mode or process of emancipation, short of blood-shed or the sacrifice of principle, would not be in violation of right or duty, but the contrary, and therefore calculated to secure the approbation of that great ‘Judge of all the earth, who doeth right,’ and before whose presence I soon expected to appear.71

Believing that he was moments from meeting his end, Walker concluded that slavery, a mortal evil, had helped to bring him to this point, but he made no apologies for that


conclusion. No matter, as Walker argued, he passed through that night and lived, “scarcely” knowing how, and in the morning found that he was much more comfortable and feeling some relief.

Another notion that must be considered is that both Daniel Drayton and Jonathan Walker were going to experience what Judith Herman has called “political terror.”72 Jonathan Walker was captured, punished, and thrown in jail for his “treachery,” as Southern officials deemed it, and Daniel Drayton, once he was unloaded off the Salem and the Pearl was impounded, fell victim to local abuse, terrible treatment as a prisoner, and a trial that was both unjustly argued and sadly indicative of Southern political culture. Although both men had fought, as would John Brown, against a political structure deemed inadequate to solving the ills of slavery, they did not, in a historical sense, become prisoners of war, or captives of foreign entities. Instead they were looked upon as maritime criminals in the South and nautical abolitionists in the North. Both of them were called slave stealers and martyrs in the same sentence, yet their treatment at the hands of a slaveholding dominant political South only allowed them to hear the former analogy. As referred to earlier in this dissertation, officials in Florida, with Walker, and then in Washington D.C., with Drayton, acted as “perpetrators” in a traumatic psychological game.

Both Daniel Drayton and Jonathan Walker were “enslaved” by their captors where “despotic control” over their lives did not satisfy, merely those seeking to destroy their will to live, but an entire society that viewed what Walker and Drayton did as a

72 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 75-80. Political terror refers to “the unlawful use of force or violence against persons in order to coerce or intimidate a government, an individual, or the civilian population in furtherance of political or social objectives.”
direct attack against their way of life. Interestingly, slaveholders were intent upon the total destruction of will in their victim, slave, and political prisoner. The “totalitarian,” as Judith Herman has argued, is present in George Orwell’s novel *1984*, which stated that

> We are not content with negative obedience, nor even with the most abject submission. When finally you surrender to us, it must be of your own free will. We do not destroy the heretic because he resists us; so long as he resists us we never destroy him. We convert him, we capture his inner mind, we reshape him. We burn all evil and all illusion out of him; we bring him over to our side, not in appearance, but genuinely, heart and soul.\(^73\)

This idea is true for Drayton who, after being captured, was questioned and interviewed for days in an attempt to get him to elaborate, to his captors, the names of all those who had sponsored his “great” rescue attempt. They sought to break him of the abolitionists hold and bring him under their wing. When that did not work, they sought to show that he was not a nautical abolitionist, but rather a greedy slave stealer who was determined to take those seventy-seven men, women, and children to Bermuda and sell them for profit.\(^74\) When they could not win him to their side, they tried to destroy his connection to those with ideas he had championed. But, Drayton remained steadfast and refused “their desire for total control” over him.\(^75\) Both Walker and Drayton became well-known and perfect targets for a slaveholding South that sought to dominate them and victimize them and discredit their efforts. The two captains experienced, from that attempt and other events to come, what can be described as a terrible political trauma that possibly caused traumatic anxiety.


\(^75\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 76.
For Jonathan Walker, after a few more days, and with his health declining yet again, the suffering of this long open boat voyage was growing greater. Unlike the maritime tragedies that have so far been depicted, whether the mutiny on the Globe, the suffering on the General Arnold, or M’Lean’s brutal beating at sea, Walker’s open boat flight and difficulty is a harrowing past that packs a significant degree of anguish and unquestionable traumatic exposure. Within a few days of his near-death experience, Walker had become so ill that, as he remembered,

I took [medicine], made free use of cayenne pepper and bitters, which appeared to have a good effect, and in a few days my face was nearly covered with sores, and my whole system, which had been so much oppressed that I could with difficulty respire, felt much relived. But my strength and flesh were nearly gone, and the system so much reduced, that it is a wonder to me how, after undergoing so much privation, exposure, and the treatment… I was enabled to recover at all.  

As Walker continued along the coast, seeking to get his “human” cargo to the Bahamas, but moving at a snail’s pace, intending to get a supply of water at Cape Florida before crossing the gulf, on 8 July they encountered “within a short distance” two sloops that were soon dispatched to intercept them.

In a moment of intense anxiety, Walker remembered how the tiny open boat, which Walker was in command of, was stopped and he was questioned. Arguing that his apprehension proved to be at a maximum level and this incident proved “unfortunate,” Walker recalled, they hailed him and inquired, “Where are you from, and where are you bound?” Walker answered that they were “from St. Joseph’s, bound to Cape Florida.” Although this was a “falsehood,” he explained that they had just anchored there and wanted to be as truthful as possible without giving away their true origin or destination.

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76 Walker, Trial and Imprisonment of Jonathan Walker, at Pensacola, Florida, 12.

To his surprise, the captain from one of the sloops said that he was going in the same direction and was willing to give them a tow and then “ran alongside of the boat and made a rope fast to it, and invited us on board the sloop.” The unknown crew was about to board the boat when Walker became nervous and fearful of their detection and “advised them to stay on their vessel.” Four of the men had “stepped on board, but one immediately returned. The others were not allowed to.”

As can be imagined, the captain of the sloop, becoming wary of Walker’s true intended destination in such a rickety and small open boat, proceeded to “reverse” her course, with Walker’s boat in tow, and run back to where she had come from. He then proceeded to anchor. At this point extremely sick and experiencing dismay over their apparent betrayal, Walker pleaded with the captain to allow the “men to return in the boat,” but the captain ignored his request and then sought assistance from the other sloop. Walker was then ordered to come on board the vessel. Believing that their intentions had been detected, he did so, but with the idea that he would not see the open boat again and that he would soon be escorted back to Florida and into custody. Although suffering from the violent heat of the sun, Walker was treated with “civility” while on board the schooner. But his apprehensions soon proved correct when they set sail back to the shore of Florida. As Walker explained, “We were then forty or fifty miles from Cape Florida, and if we had not been detained, could have got there before night, and been ready to cross the gulf the next morning. But our voyage was up, and we had other prospects before us.”

Like Drayton, who would feel this same sense of suffering and defeat only four years later, Walker the nautical abolitionist had failed in his secret plot to free slaves.

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from their oppressive captivity. Walker and his cargo had been at sea for fourteen days and had sailed, as well as rowed, more than “seven hundred miles,” but the terrible luck of their final eight days proved to seal their fate. The weather had proved “uniform and mild, and the winds favorable but light,” and if Walker had not been taken down with a debilitating illness, it is probable, he wrote in hindsight, that they “should not have been more than ten or twelve days to this place, and saved much distance by running more direct courses. If we had been one hour sooner or later in passing this place, we should not have come into contact with those vessels.”

**Walker’s Political Trauma**

Sickness, harassment by swarms of mosquitoes, and an eventual contact with fate destroyed their flight to freedom, yet these traumatic experiences were nothing compared to the terrible events that would initiate further memories of greater emotional harm. Towards Key West they were towed and their future as uncertain as their present, especially for Walker, whose punishment as an abolitionist was to be an example for those who dared to adopt the same cause. Yet while his abuse was severe and his emotional state subjected to embarrassment and terrible lifelong memories of those traumatic events, his failure did not impede the future of the nautical abolitionist movement. Instead he proved that such a feat, as well as his maritime route in abolitionism, could be utilized successfully if planned and sanctioned appropriately. Daniel Drayton turned out to be his protégé, although the two never met. But Drayton’s failure, even after great planning and preparations were accomplished, proved to be a greater failure than Walker. In the aftermath of both personal and political defeat, Drayton was burdened by his weakened emotional state and never fully healed. At the

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time one of the first and most famous of nautical abolitionists, Walker had to endure the searing pain resulting from his decision and he had to go through it alone. Even so, Walker had the North, especially New Bedford, fighting to save him from punishments that eventually made him famous in abolitionists’ circles. But he remained impaired in a more personal world that has only begun to be understood.

The full might of the South’s fury against Walker came quickly as he was brought back to Pensacola, charged, tried, and convicted by a jury of his “peers” of aiding the escape of fugitive slaves.81 This jury viewed Walker as a villain, a man seeking only his own profit. They casted Walker, not as the martyred nautical abolitionist but rather a slave stealer seeking to transport these seven men to the Bahamas, where he intended to sell them and gain money that should have belonged to the masters of the slaves he had “stolen.” Northern abolitionists hailed Walker as a hero and an inspiring figure who had imperiled his liberty and life to help slaves escape. His name was in the newspapers and poems were eventually written about him. But he was convicted in a “hostile” court. Even those northerners who proved less dedicated to the “abolitionists struggle” observed Walkers story as extraordinary for the penalty and brutality he “stoically” suffered.82 A Florida judge sentenced Walker “to be placed in the pillory for one hour; then brought into court, and branded on the right hand with the letters SS; then remanded to prison for fifteen days, and to remain there until the fine (one hundred and fifty dollars) and the costs of the prosecution should be paid.”83


82 Oickle, The Man with the Branded Hand, 98.

Serving the beginning of his sentence, Walker was placed in a pillory, a frame erected on a post with holes for securing the head and hands of a prisoner. Used for punishment, physical abuse, and “public humiliation,” the pillory served its purpose for Jonathan Walker. Walker was in the pillory for “about half an hour,” when, as he recalled,

George Wallis...stepped from the crowd of spectators, who were standing by, quietly beholding the inhuman administration of the laws of Florida,) and snatched from my head a handkerchief, which had been placed there by the deputy marshal, to screen me from the sun; saying, that he had offered a dollar to any person that would do it, but, as no one else would, he would do it himself.\(^84\)

At that moment Wallis, Walker remembered, peered into the crowd and, looking sneaky, “took from his coat pocked two rotten eggs, and hurled them very spitefully at my head, which took effect, and excited a burst of indignation from the bystanders.”\(^85\) Walker recalled that while this traumatic humiliation occurred, Wallis was heard to offer “boys a great price for rotten eggs; but he could find none vile enough to accommodate him.”

Walker was eventually released from the pillory, permitted to wash, and then placed in the prisoner’s box awaiting his branding punishment. Walker remembered painfully that while sitting in the box, the marshal, a man named Ebenezer Dor, formerly from Maine, proceeded to tie his hand to a part of the railing in front of him. Walker “remarked that there was no need of tying it, for I would hold still.”\(^86\) Set to be inflicted with a permanent physical reminder of his deed, Walker registered his surroundings and this moment as though he knew it was to be one of the defining moments of his life. Sights, sounds, smells, and feelings were all provided in Walker’s retelling of this humiliating


and unjust moment. Although not a surprising event, the pain felt and anxiety heightened allowed this moment to become a consequential memory for Walker, and he considered it often as he discussed the instant when pain was felt as the “branding-iron” struck skin and the initial’s “S.S.” were forever seared into his skin.

Although wishing not to have his hand tied to the railing, the official felt that it was for the best. Walker remembered that

he then took from the fire the branding-iron, of a slight red heat, and applied it to the ball of my hand, and pressed it on firmly, for fifteen or twenty seconds. It made a spattering noise, like a handful of salt in the fire, as the skin seared and gave way to the hot iron. The pain was severe while the iron was on, and for some time afterwards. There appeared to be but a few that wished to witness the scene; but my friend, George Willis, placed himself where he could have a fair view, and feasted his eyes upon it, apparently with great delight.\(^87\)

And after twenty seconds the punishment was over. Although Walker spent the next fifteen days in a Florida jail, he was eventually released and traveled north, selling his narrative and using this traumatic moment to promote the abolitionist cause. He was a famous man, and his branding, which was an attempt by Florida officials to mark him forever as a “slave stealer” in their eyes, was intended not only as punishment for Walker, but a warning to anyone else that followed his example. They wanted other nautical abolitionists not to act on their dogmatic principles. But abolitionists’ convictions could not be silenced.

Walker had survived terrible sickness and a voyage of hundreds of miles in an open boat, and had lived to tell the tale of his treatment by the South as a nautical abolitionist. But he was burdened by these painful memories and was determined to use a written autobiography to declare that slavery was a detestable institution and that he had gone to the South to bring salvation to those denied such hope. Walker looked back upon

his punishment as “cruel and unusual” and a violation of the US Constitution, but he refused to use those traumatic moments to promote the injustices imposed against him. Rather he considered that traumatic event to show how these injustices served as a consistent reminder of how African Americans were treated daily if nothing was done to “unchain” them from their servitude. He declared that the laws of the United States were not to be opposed by any law of a territorial or a state government and those “violators” sentenced to serve under such statutes to be doing so in violation of the “supreme and valid United States law,” and therefore the convictions are “void.”

Walker eventually settled in his hometown of Harwich, Massachusetts, allowing people to shake his branded hand and take photos of and with it. He spoke in the North when asked to say a “small word” and sell his narrative. Even abolitionist Henry Ingersoll Bowditch commissioned Boston daguerreotypists Albert Sands Southworth and Josiah Johnson Hawes “to photograph [Walker’s] branded hand” for the cover of his narrative. By the fall of 1847, and living in poverty, Walker was dourly convinced that “among the Cape people and masters of vessels there…with very few exceptions, there is no interest manifested in behalf of the enslaved millions of this country.” During his lecture tour through upstate New York, with John S. Jacobs, a former slave who escaped in 1831 and was the brother of Harriet Jacobs, whose fame was achieved in 1861 through the publication of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl, Walker was celebrated and proved to rally New Englanders and many more Northerners alike to the abolitionist’s side.

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89 Grover, The Fugitive’s Gibraltar, 184.
Walker and Jacobs, who the *National Anti-Slavery Standard* termed a superior orator “scarcely excelled by any of his predecessors,” implored a “silent” people not to build their hopes of the decline of the anti-slavery cause upon my failing to accomplish my undertaking, in aiding a few individuals to obtain some of their rights, for I doubt not but it will eventually be the cause of awakening many sleepers to look upon the hideous monster, slavery, in its natural and true form; and may God grant that this nation may soon have right views and right feelings in regard to this corroding system.91

As nautical abolitionist Walker concluded his autobiography, he spoke directly to those dissenters who saw no merit in his ambition, sacrifice, and traumatic memories. He contended that

It seems to have been a matter of wonder to many here at the north, to know what I expected to gain by aiding those slaves to escape from their masters….In Pensacola, and in the South generally, I believe there is but one opinion in regard to my motive – that it was to aid the slaves in obtaining their freedom, because I considered it their right.92

In this end, Walker sought to consider what John Paul Eakin would call autobiographical identity work, which was “a view suggesting that the memory work involved when we look back on our pasts is driven not only by our present circumstances,” as was postulated about Joshua Davis, Horace Holden, and others, “but also by our plans for the future.”93

Thus the story of Jonathan Walker comes to a close. A nautical abolitionist, one of the first, following Austin Bearse, he failed to bring freedom to those, he argued, had been unjustly denied it. He suffered greatly at the hands of a “perpetrator” who sought to destroy not only his abolitionist resolve, but the path that inevitably might have allowed

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more nautical abolitionists to follow. The South, his “perpetrator,” sought to make an example out of Walker, as it would do to Drayton too. Even so, such an effort only “martyred” Walker and made him an emblem of the abolitionist’s cause, which men like Garrison and Frederick Douglass were, at this time, championing with great success. Exposed to severe traumatic events, Walker used their memories in both print and in person to expose the brutality of the South and their unacceptable use of federal law for despicable means.

Jonathan Walker advanced these traumatic moments further as a call to arms against slavery. Through a close examination of his words, the historian can appreciate and observe those terrible memories that he suffered from. He spoke of his own sufferings and his own visions of these moments, and while he consigned those experiences to the backdrop of his story in an effort to brighten the power of the “cause,” they are nevertheless the driving force of his narrative, even if he may have wished they were not. It is for that reason that Walker’s memories must not be considered a perfect representation of that brutal past, but as reflections upon it. He sought not to cope with the tragedies of his past, but to reflect upon the misfortunes of his fellow man. He accepted the punishment he received and wrote of it in an attempt to bring greater awareness to the plight of slaves, even if that meant digging deep into his memory to bring up disturbing images that he may rather have wished put to rest. Walker, like Andrew Sherburne the “glory seeking” privateer, he wanted people to recognize his abolitionist intent and his patriotic courage, which he used in the crafting of his narrative. He did not want people to dwell on his emotional pain but to recognize his physical pain, as long as it displayed political outrage. He wanted to show how he stoically faced that
moment, and even while living through it, had fought for anti-slavery. In this way he
could contribute to the cause even as a failed, abused, and distressed nautical abolitionist.

**Daniel Drayton’s Legacy of Oceanic Trauma**

The irony of the nautical abolitionists in this chapter is that they all suffered,
fought the good fight, but failed and eventually used their failure in publishing narratives
to help lead the fight against slavery. Although Walker, it appears, was able to live with
his failure and maintain his composure in his later life despite constantly recalling these
events, it seems Daniel Drayton did not have such ability. For Captain Daniel Drayton it
appears that even before he devoted himself to abolitionism, he had already been
characterized as a “failed” and flawed merchantman and professional sailor. Maybe the
difference between the two men was not in how painful these nautical events proved to
be, but how different their nautical lives had been. Walker had never really had a difficult
life. Thus when he did experience nautical tragedy, he decided to turn the event upside
down by using his folly as an actual testament to his survival and the treachery of
slaveholders and their unjust laws. By contrast Drayton lived a hard life, plagued by
misfortune and a terrible stress that powered his walk down the “pathway to hell.”

By 1848, and the unleashing of the *Pearl* tragedy, Drayton was arguably
emotionally impaired to begin with. After this event Drayton was forced down an even
darker path and the eventual brutality that was inflicted upon him further weakened his
ability to cope with his stressful surroundings and traumatic past. This does not mean that
Drayton became a “model” political prisoner in the South; actually he was the opposite.
He fought back and fought back strong. Like Walker, he used his catastrophes as a way to
promote the abolitionists cause. But this career proved compromising and unstable.
Drayton had had the raw material to triumph in life, but although once the ambitious fighter, he gave up and sank deep into depression with the loss of moral importance. By the end of his life, Daniel Drayton had suffered from numerous traumatic episodes and lived a life that could be considered a disappointment. Yet his oceanic ambition proved uncompromising. So what do we make of the memories of traumatic events that Captain Daniel Drayton was deeply affected by and wrote of in his memoir? He attempted one of the greatest slave rescues in American history, yet his name is overlooked. He was overcome by his own obsessive motivation, but was crippled by a turbulent world that he could not understand. Drayton was a dedicated man, whose life and work as a nautical abolitionist proved inspiring, tragic, and, in the end, an example of a distressed sailor burdened by subsequent memories and a victim of nautical and political trauma.

The nautical abolitionist Captain Daniel Drayton was born in 1802, in Cumberland County, New Jersey, close to the mouth of Delaware Bay. Living close to the opening of the Delaware Bay, Drayton constantly witnessed the countless vessels arriving and leaving the local harbor. “Just previous to, or during the war with Great Britain, Drayton remembered,

The sight of the vessels passing up and down inspired me with a desire to follow the life of waterman; but it was some years before I was able to gratify this wish. I well remember the alarm created in our neighborhood by the incursions of the British vessels up the bay during the war, and that, at these times, the women of the neighborhood used to collect at our house, as if looking up to my mother for counsel and guidance.94

The War of 1812 gave Drayton the idea that he could somehow make a difference through maritime work, but his dream of sailing the Atlantic was a mere musing in the mind of an ambitious youth.

94 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 5.
Drayton was the son of resident farmer Edmund Drayton, but the person who had the greatest influence over Drayton during his early life was his mother, Eleanor L. Sheppard. A devoted Methodist, she tried to teach him and his siblings the ways of virtue and civility. On 20 May 1813 Drayton’s mother died, which proved to be a traumatic event for twelve-year old Drayton. Even so, it also hastened his need to seek out his dream of oceanic exploration. “Although I had the misfortune to lose her at an early age,” Drayton recalled, her directives made a “deep impression on my youthful mind,” and her outlook on life influenced his future endeavors. He claimed, “I have seldom closed my eyes to sleep without some thought or image of her.”

Soon Drayton’s father remarried and with less room available to house a family of “two adults and sixteen children,” Drayton and a younger brother were forced to leave. Drayton recalled that after leaving home “I was greatly in need; for there were no public schools…and my father had too many children to feed and clothe” and therefore received no attention and had no family “to celebrate my developing years.” These familial failings, similar to those Crapsey experienced, and an appalling sense of self-worth drove Drayton into frequent stages of melancholy. With his life spiraling out of control, at the age of nineteen, Drayton married and was forced to proper employment. Suffering from bouts of dejection and emotional lapses that would only get worse with time, tragic disasters and traumatic events, Drayton moved forward and prepared to unlock oceanic possibilities.

95 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 5.
96 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 5.
97 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 5.
98 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 5.
In 1823, Drayton gained access to the maritime world and participated in the lucrative timber trade as a captain of his own vessel.\textsuperscript{99} According to Drayton, he was “so successful in my new enterprise that besides supporting my family, I was able to become half owner of the sloop \textit{Superior}, at an expense over a thousand dollars, most of which I paid down.”\textsuperscript{100} Although Drayton had experienced early achievement, this triumph proved to be momentary. On the \textit{Superior}, in 1827, Drayton was returning from Baltimore and sailing through the Chesapeake canal, with a ship filled of valuable freight, when he met with his first nautical disaster.

The \textit{Superior} was sailing when suddenly she collided with a “sunken tree, which split the hull wide open.” Drayton recalled that water flowed fast into the cabin and it was in vain that I attempted to run her ashore. She sank in five minutes. The men saved themselves in the boat, which was on deck, and which floated as she went down. I stood on the rudder till the last, and stepped off into the boat, loath enough to leave my vessel, on which there was no insurance. By this unfortunate accident I lost everything except the clothes I had on, and was obliged to commence anew.\textsuperscript{101}

Drayton did not let this traumatic oceanic experience stop him, but it would prove to be the first in a long line of oceanic misfortunes that would plague Drayton’s memories and seafaring existence. In 1829 he took sole command of another coasting vessel, the sloop \textit{Sarah Henry}. Captain Daniel Drayton sailed the \textit{Sarah Henry}, “of seventy tons burden,” for several years seeing periods of abundant success. For Drayton, achievement was rare and the ill-luck that had begun with the destruction of the \textit{Superior} continued with the \textit{Sarah Henry}, again producing a traumatic past that would haunt his future. It was in

\textsuperscript{99} Martin, \textit{Martyr to Freedom}, 15.

\textsuperscript{100} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 10.

\textsuperscript{101} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 10-11.
1833, while sailing the *Sarah Henry* from Charleston, South Carolina, to Savannah, Georgia, that Drayton was overcome by “yellow fever.” It was a terrible disease and Drayton recalled that he went in and out of consciousness as the disease ran its course.\(^{102}\) Drayton reflected on this troubling nautical ailment, as well as the anxiety it caused, with great clarity. Drayton remembered that

> I lay for a week quite unconscious for anything that was going on about me…the religious instructions of my mother had from time to time recurred to my mind, and had occasioned me some anxiety. I was now greatly alarmed at the idea of dying in my sins, from which I seemed to have escaped so narrowly. My mind was possessed with this fear; and, to relieve myself from it, I determined, if it were a possible thing, to get religion at any rate.\(^{103}\)

To Joseph Bates, Barnabas Downs, and some of our traumatized whalemen, religion had been deemed the appropriate form of healing when it came to maritime tragedy and possibly helped these same sailors to make sense of their tragic pasts.

Through horrible circumstances many traumatized victims seek something outside themselves to make sense of what has occurred and gravitate towards Christian teachings, which they had trouble aliening with their harsh seafaring ways. Mardi Horowitz describes “traumatic life events as those that cannot be assimilated with the victim’s ‘inner schemata’ of self in relation to the world.”\(^{104}\) Judith Herman states further that “Traumatic events destroy the victim’s fundamental assumptions about the safety of the


\(^{103}\) Drayton, *Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton*, 11.

\(^{104}\) See Mardi Horowitz, *Stress Response Syndromes* (Northvale, New Jersey: Jason Aronson, 1986) and Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 51.
world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation.” Through this traumatic episode, Drayton reflected back on the teachings of his mother and in a way anticipated the pattern recently advanced by Herman that

Through this traumatic episode, Drayton reflected back on the teachings of his mother and in a way anticipated the pattern recently advanced by Herman that the sense of safety in the world, or basic trust, is acquired in earliest life relationships with the first caretaker...this sense of trust sustains a person throughout the lifecycle. The original experience of care makes it possible for human beings to envisage a world in which they belong...In situations of terror, people spontaneously seek their first source of comfort and protection.  

The harrowing events that Drayton encountered proved to be blanketed with traumatic recollections that remained as invasive memories helping him to avoid similar disasters in the future, as Daniel Schacter has argued “persistent” memories tend to do.  

Keep in mind that Angelo Crapsey, when he was in pain, cried out for his mother, as do many emotionally and physically wounded soldiers. In this case Drayton did precisely the same thing. For Drayton, as for Crapsey, the pain of his illness lingered for the rest of his life and while distressing moments continued to assault his life and mind, little by little, Drayton’s emotional energy unraveled. Like Angelo Crapsey, he came to feel absolutely abandoned by society, his dead mother, and the religion to which he had faithfully devoted himself. From this point forward, although Drayton tried hard to maintain optimism, he experienced as Judith Herman puts it, that “a sense of alienation, of disconnection, pervades every relationship, from the most intimate familial bonds to


106 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 51-52.

107 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 161-178.

108 Brandt, Pathway to Hell; Shay, Odysseus in America; Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory.
the most abstract affiliations of community and religion.”

When he lost his trust in the safety of the world and everything he held precious, Drayton began to feel that he belonged more to the dead than to the living.

As Psychologist Jonathan Shay wrote, the concept of character must carry with it “love, the capacity to command, and feeling for freedom,” and it must have energy, be passionate, and “it must connect with other people and have an active commitment to right and wrong in the world, however right and wrong are locally constructed.” This attachment to people and ourselves, or, as Aristotle refers to it, the philoi, which he argued is “another myself,” influences mood and emotion and touch[es] our sense of our own value. When a philos does something magnificent, we feel pride when he does something vicious, we feel shame...threat to the philos arouses fear and rage, and the death or injury of a philos hurts and grieves us. The loving recognition and attachment by a philos sustains and nourishes.

In the case of Drayton, he lost touch with the philoi and therefore broke his connection to his “other self.” For Drayton this break was years away, but when this disruption arose, it fit in perfectly, with what we know of cognitive definitions of personal “disconnection” after trauma and a broken trust with self and the world. Shay has argued that “when the injury invades character, and the captivity for social trust is destroyed, all possibility of flourishing human life is lost.” He continued that “When social trust is destroyed, it is not replaced by a vacuum, but rather by a perpetual mobilization to fend off attack,

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109 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 52.
110 Shay, Odysseus in America, 158.
111 Shay, Odysseus in America, 158.
112 Shay, Odysseus in America, 151.
humiliation, or exploitation, and,” as we will see in regard to his broken trust with human beings, “to figure out other people’s trickery.””\textsuperscript{113}

Once again Drayton had taken to the sea on the \textit{Sarah Henry}, seemingly placing into an amnesiac, or dissociative, state his “damaged self.” In 1837, Drayton once again tested his fate along the Atlantic coast of North America. During his return voyage at the helm of the \textit{Sarah Henry}, Drayton experienced another traumatic event and recalled that

> We encountered a heavy gale, which split the sails, swept the decks, and drove us off our course. I took a pilot, intending to repair damages, but owing to the strength of the current…she swung round broadside to the sea which immediately began to break over her in a fearful manner. She filled immediately. – Everything on board was swept away; and, as our only chance of safety, we took to the main-rigging.\textsuperscript{114}

Drayton remembered that

> This was about seven o’clock in the evening. Towards morning, by reason of the continual thumping the mainmast began to work through the vessel, and to settle in the sand, so that it became necessary for us to make our way to the fore-rigging; which we did, not without danger, as one of the men was twice washed off.\textsuperscript{115}

The next morning, as they “remained clinging with difficulty to the rigging,” Drayton noticed five boats anchored off a “small, low island,” which quickly “came down to our assistance; but the surf was so high that they did not venture to approach us.”\textsuperscript{116} Drayton remained, as he recalled, clinging to the rigging until half-past one, “when the schooner went to pieces.” Continuing this traumatic moment, Drayton wrote that

> The mast to which we were clinging fell, and we were precipitated into the raging surf, which swept us onward towards the island... The men there, anticipating

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\textsuperscript{113} Shay, \textit{Odysseus in America}, 151.
\textsuperscript{114} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 17.
\textsuperscript{115} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 16.
\textsuperscript{116} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 17.
\end{flushleft}
what had happened, had prepared for its occurrence and the best swimmers, with ropes tied round their waists, the other end of which was held by those on shore, plunged to our assistance. One of our unfortunate crew was drowned.117

Suffering from another traumatic event, Drayton added to the persistent visions that caused him concern. Putting his troubles behind him, Drayton sailed on but his maritime difficulties continued and he suffered four more shipwrecks, all testing his resolve. After a shipwreck in 1841, which proved to be an emotional burden for Drayton, and feeling ill, Drayton forcefully declared that he was finished with the perilous maritime world.118

Stepping away from a troubled maritime past filled with devastating memories and physical traumas, Drayton set up a land-based retail shop in Philadelphia.119 A change of profession seemed obvious, but it proved a disaster as Drayton sank into depression and acted detached from those he loved. This land-based profession proved to be a mental distraction from his real problems, and after his health took an unexpected turn for the worst, a doctor advised Drayton that his bodily and mental condition might improve if he, once again, took to the sea.120 After lingering on “shore for three weeks” Drayton heeded his advice.

Drayton again sailed out in late winter of 1845 to see what could be achieved and unsurprisingly met with great misfortune and endured another traumatic event. On a return voyage, at the end of one of his trading seasons, Drayton encountered a severe snowstorm, not unlike the storm that had traumatized Barnabas Downs. Drayton explained that

117 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 17.
119 Martin, Martyr to Freedom, 23.
In attempting to make a harbor, the vessel struck the ground and knocked her off her rudder; and, in order to get her off, we were obliged to throw over the deck-load. We drifted about all day and at night let go both anchors. So we lay for a night and a day; but having neither boat, rudder nor provisions, I was obliged to slip the anchors and run her ashore…I sold my half of her for ninety dollars, which was all that remained to me of my investment and summer work.\textsuperscript{121}

Captain Drayton’s string of pitfalls and traumatic moments that had plagued his maritime past proved, in the end, too much for him. Drayton by this time “was pretty well sick of the water” and, for the last time, gave up on his past oceanic life.

Drayton’s maritime life had proved to be one disastrous traumatic event after the next. Even though Drayton retired for coastal trading, having no “means to purchase a boat,” and his “health also continuing quite infirm,” his trips trading down the coast set him up to take part in the nobler, but ever costly world of nautical abolitionism.\textsuperscript{122}

Drayton conceded that

According to an idea common enough, I had regarded the Negroes as only fit to be slaves, and had not been inclined to pay much attention to pitiful tales, which they told of ill-treatment by their masters and mistresses. But my views upon this subject had undergone a gradual change.\textsuperscript{123}

The exchange Drayton had with slaves in the South, as we have observed, allowed Drayton to take part in the \textit{Pearl} venture.\textsuperscript{124} During the aftermath of the \textit{Pearl} undertaking, Drayton added to his traumatic past and those harrowing memories that proved too powerful to deal with.

\textsuperscript{121} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 19-20.

\textsuperscript{122} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 20.

\textsuperscript{123} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 35.

\textsuperscript{124} Martin, \textit{Martyr to Freedom}, 24.
Daniel Drayton, the *Pearl*, and Political Terror

Chained together, Captain Daniel Drayton, Edward Sayres, and the cook Chester English remained onboard the *Salem*, with the *Pearl* in tow, and were systematically abused by the vigilantes who had tracked them down. Drayton remembered this traumatic event and recalled how shocked he was by

the manner and aspect of the thirty-five armed persons by whom we had been thus seized and bound, without the slightest shadow of alarm. We had been lying quietly at anchor in a harbor off Maryland; and, although the owners of the slaves might have had a legal right to pursue and take them back, what warrant or authority had they for seizing us and our vessel?¹²⁵

According to Drayton, as they traveled nearer to the District of Columbia, some of the men showed a good deal of “excitement, and evinced a disposition to proceed to lynch us at once,” but not before asking Drayton questions about the mission. Drayton recalled telling his perpetrators that he “considered himself their prisoner and did not wish to answer any questions.” At this point, as Drayton recalled in regards to this traumatic moment,

Bystanders, flourishing a dirk in my face, exclaimed, ‘If I was in his place, I’d put this through you!’ At Piney Point, one of the company proposed to hang me up to the yard-arm, and make me confess; but the more influential of those on board were not ready for any such violence, though all were exceedingly anxious to get out of me the history of the expedition, and who my employers were.¹²⁶

It was the hopes of those on board the *Salem* that they could make a long trial very short if they could get Drayton to confess and persuade him, through terrorization, to disclose who had sponsored and paid him to take on this endeavor.¹²⁷ Although adding to

Drayton’s anxiety, the vigilantes failed at forcing Drayton to sign a confession of wrongdoing, which probably kept him alive.

Although he was not lynched on the Salem, Drayton had greater fears. He told a man named Ormer, one of the vigilantes and a police-officer of Georgetown, that he had great terrors of what might happen to him when the Salem arrived at the Washington D.C. wharf.  

Drayton wrote that he was unsure of what the particular provisions were, in the District of Columbia, as to helping slaves to escape, I did not know, but I had heard that, in some of the slave-states, they were very severe; in fact, I was assured by William H. Craig that I had committed the highest crime, next to murder, known in their laws. Under these circumstances, I made up my mind that the least penalty I should be apt to escape with was confinement in the penitentiary for life.

Assured that he had cause to worry and that his arrival in the District of Columbia would be met by an angry mob out to kill him, Drayton concluded that the vindictive fury with which the idea of enabling the enslaved to regain their liberty, was, I knew, generally regarded at the South; I apprehended more sudden and summary proceedings; and what happened afterwards at Washington proved that these apprehensions were not wholly unfounded.

Fearing the haunting possibility of mob violence, Drayton shared with one of his captors, a man named William H. Craig, the inner turmoil he felt. Drayton recalled telling Craig during this traumatic event that it was his “preference was to be taken on deck of the steamer and shot at once, rather than be given up to a mob to be beaten and murdered.”

Being torn to fragments “by a furious mob was exceedingly disagreeable,” Drayton wrote, and when “arriving at Fort Washington, the steamer” Salem anchored for

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128 Martin, Martyr to Freedom, 41.
129 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 36-37.
130 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 37.
the evening, “as the captors preferred to make their triumphant entry into the city by daylight.”\textsuperscript{132} The next day, the 18\textsuperscript{th} of February, Drayton met his feared future. As they entered the harbor, Drayton, Sayres, and English were ordered on deck. In a moment of public humiliation and trauma that rivaled the event that had emotionally struck Jonathan Walker down, Drayton dreadfully watched as the mob that had collected on the wharf cheered for their arrival. Once the Salem landed at the “steamboat-wharf” in Washington D.C., they were all marched off the vessel and Drayton was shoved towards the front of the convoy. He was guarded by a man on either side of him. All of the sudden, Drayton recalled that “as we went along, the mob began to increase; and, as we passed Gannon’s slave-pen, that slave-trader, armed with a knife, rushed out, and, with horrid imprecations, made a pass at me, which was very near finding its way through my body.”\textsuperscript{133} In the blink of an eye, Drayton had almost been murdered by a slave trader named James Gannon who, upon noticing Drayton within reach, took the opportunity to see to it that Drayton would not live to tell his story.

As Drayton remembered, Gannon was not arrested, but instead officers instructed Gannon that “I was in the hands of the law, to which he replied, ‘D-n the law! – I have three Negroes, and I will give them all for one thrust at this d-d scoundrel!’”\textsuperscript{134} Gannon continued to follow them, Drayton remembered, “waiting for the opportunity to repeat the blow,” but then disappeared into the growing crowd that was trailing the prisoners. Drayton, even after his eventual freedom was restored, through a presidential pardon four years later, remembered the horrific words being directed towards him. He recalled his

\textsuperscript{132} Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 39.

\textsuperscript{133} Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 39-40.

\textsuperscript{134} Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 40.
feelings of “confusion” and the terribly loud noises the crowd made and his haunting fear that lynching was more a possibility than anything else, and recalled the mob yelling, “Lynch them! Lynch them! The d-n villains!’ and other such cries resounded on all sides.”

Captain Daniel Drayton eventually survived every attack of the mob, but an angry southern judiciary made sure that he, like Jonathan Walker, was made an example for anyone else that chose to follow him down his “nautically” paved path of human justice. Eventually Drayton was charged with a seventy-four article indictment, of which he was defended by famous lawyer and educator Horace Mann, and whose funds were paid for by wealthy and well-known northerners like William Lloyd Garrison and even Frederick Douglass. Drayton was ultimately found guilty and ordered to spend the next twenty-years in prison. Yet for Drayton the sentence was eventually thrown out because a local judge did not agree with the Washington D.C. District Attorney, Philip Barton Key, ironically the son of Francois Scott Key the author of the Star Spangled Banner, who argued that Drayton had attempted to steal those slaves for his own personal financial betterment. Under the same logic that Walker had been convicted on, Drayton escaped the severe punishment of an angry South. But he was forced to pay fines, which he could not afford, so he remained in prison for four years, seemingly a debtor in a term of lifelong servitude with an inability to pay for his freedom. For four years Drayton remained a prisoner and suffered unthinkable trauma. Drayton had been a captain of his

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135 Drayton, Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton, 40.

136 Ricks, Escape on the Pearl, 258; Grover, Fugitive’s Gibraltar, 193, 233; Pacheco, The Pearl, 8; and Martin, Martyr to Freedom, 54.
own vessel and a nautical abolitionist, even though stricken by consequential memories of a traumatic past, which as he recalled, crept up on him at unexpected moments.\textsuperscript{137}

Persuaded by the work of Massachusetts Senator Charles Sumner, President Millard Fillmore, who had lost his bid for a second party nomination for president, agreed to hear proposals on Drayton’s fate and finally approved Drayton’s release, using English “common law” as justification.\textsuperscript{138} Yet after his release he was secretly ushered to the North and to freedom because District Attorney Philip Barton Key was determined to relinquish him to Virginia, where he could be tried for the slaves he had “assisted” from there and, if found guilty, might have been given the death penalty. That proved fruitless, with help from local abolitionists Drayton obtained passage to Philadelphia. “That night,” Drayton remembered, “proved one of the darkest and stormiest which it had ever been my fate to encounter, - and I have seen some bad weather in my time. The rain fell in torrents, and the load was only now and then visible by the flashes of the lightning.”\textsuperscript{139} When Drayton arrived in Philadelphia and crossed over from Maryland into Pennsylvania, “It was like escaping out of Algiers into a free Christian country. I shall leave it to the reader to imagine the meeting between myself and my family.”\textsuperscript{140} It was an emotion, as well as a powerful memory, to which Drayton tried to assign meaning, but could not assign words. To be free from prison, reunited with family, and seemingly at the end of a long traumatic ordeal, was too potent a recollection to reproduce through language.


\textsuperscript{139} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 121.

\textsuperscript{140} Drayton, \textit{Personal Memoir of Daniel Drayton}, 121.
**Drayton’s Martyrdom and Possible PTSD**

The story of Captain Daniel Drayton ends pretty much where it began. Drayton was a man with no sense of self, no money, no family, and alone in a changing society on the brink of war. Upon his release from prison Drayton traveled throughout the North selling his memoir. Yet by 1854 it had become apparent that Drayton was a sick man, both physically and emotionally. Although suffering from a lingering illness and a traumatic past riddled with terrible memories sparking what many witnesses called “madness,” and we might consider post-traumatic stress, Drayton attempted to move forward and face these new obstacles as he had faced his old ones. It was in this context that Drayton, the ambitious and dedicated nautical abolitionist, visited popular northern cities and shared the tragic story of his life. Although collecting as much money as he could from speaking engagements and the sales of his memoir to support his family whom he was rarely with, Drayton was living out a sad paradox. As an ill man he could not sail the Atlantic coast any longer and as a well-known nautical abolitionist, he was no longer a feasible candidate for any secret missions to the South to assist in the flight of fugitive slaves.  

By 1854, Drayton watched as his illness had continued its damage and he continued to become exceedingly troubled and slowly fell into emotional disarray. Seemingly out of touch with reality, Drayton assumed he had brighter abolitionists days ahead. Yet, even if he did not know it or refused to accept it, Drayton’s days of leading the nautical abolitionist charge were behind him. Holding onto an unachievable hope kept Drayton from descending further down the “pathway to hell” and kept him at arm’s length from his grave. At the same time he held onto this ambitious hope, Drayton used

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this desire, seemingly a mark of self, to defend against the fierce onslaught of persistence painful memories that seemed too strong to keep back forever. But for men in Drayton’s position all that is needed is one rejection, one instance of broken trust, and the barrier built around him defending him from disaster is destroyed. For Drayton that final wall came down in 1855.

In the summer of 1855 and believing that he had regained his physical and emotional health, Daniel Drayton wrote to the Boston Vigilance Committee pleading with them to support him and provide him with advice regarding a planned slave rescue. Francis Jackson, a member of the Boston Vigilance Committee and a man Drayton had stayed with several times while he journeyed through Boston, was the individual who responded to Drayton’s request. Kathryn Grover, examining this incident, concluded that “Jackson was clearly alarmed, wrote back right away, and mailed a confidential copy of his reply to Wendell Phillips.”142 Jackson wrote to Phillips looking for “suggestions that occur to you – probably I shall hear from him again – his sanguine temperament will not give up a favorite scheme in a hurry.” Jackson’s detailed letter to Drayton stipulated that while Drayton’s plan was given “careful consideration” by Phillips and himself, they believed that his project will require time to mature the proper means, & also a trusty agent in Norfolk & Portsmouth, who has a general acquaintance with the colored people, so that he can be safe in making known to them the plan of their deliverance, as traitors among them, is not at all uncommon, & one such would be sufficient to destroy success. It is much more difficult of accomplishment than your voyage in the Pearl, and that failed, by causes much more likely to occur in this attempt, than in that- Then you had the slaves’ ready waiting for you, whom you knew, & who knew your object, & yet you were betrayed by a colored hack man. Now you & your object will be all unknown, & without some ally there you will be much more likely to be betrayed than before-Your feeble state of health is strongly

against it. I am therefore not in favor of the attempt, and would, if you will allow me, advise you to abandon it.  

It was the emotional shock that sealed Drayton’s fate, broke any social trust that he had with the outside world, and caved in the cognitive defenses that were seemingly keeping his post-traumatic memories from entirely taking him over. Adding to his inner turmoil was the fact that on 14 September 1856 Drayton visited Sailors’ Snug Harbor, a residence for retired seamen on Staten Island, New York, and told another sailor that he was a widower with six children living in Philadelphia. For reasons unknown, Drayton’s wife had passed away only a year after his letter had been rejected. Less than a year after his wife’s passing Drayton traveled to Massachusetts and on 26 June 1857 Drayton completed his journey down the path to self-destruction.

In the early summer of 1857 Captain Daniel Drayton arrived in New Bedford prepared to open the gates leading down the “pathway to hell,” just like Angelo Crapsey did as well. Possibly finding in that city some measure of comfort, Drayton arrived with an inner turmoil that historians and psychologists have just begun to understand. He eventually met with his friend William Bush, a prominent black resident, whom he told about his proposed plan, but Bush had taken his remarks on possible death as a mere jest. Maybe in an effort to find someone to talk him down, or persuade him otherwise, Drayton found only laughter and greater despair, which led him to see the path he was on had only one ending. Possibly bombarded by harrowing memories and sleepless nights,

143 Francis Jackson, Boston 24 August 1855, to Wendell Phillips, Phillips Papers.

144 Shay, Odysseus in America, 151-152.


146 “Death of a Martyr,” Republican Standard 2 July 1857.
Drayton entered New Bedford’s Mansion House, a prominent hotel in the city, and asked not to be bothered.

Nearly twenty-four hours since Drayton had last been seen and fearing some terrible misfortune had befallen the good captain, a worried group went to his room to check on him.147 After repeated thumps on his door and hearing nothing from within, the door was ordered taken down, as their curiosity transformed into panic and anxiety. In an ironic twist of fate, Drayton’s death may have produced an upsetting memory for all those who were there that afternoon and relayed their story to the local papers, The New Bedford Daily Mercury and Republican Standard. With the door taken off its hinges, the gathering crowd gazed into the room and saw the dead body of Captain Daniel Drayton on the floor. Spread out in a pool of blood, with an “empty laudanum vial” on the table next to him, Drayton had severed the main arteries in his legs, placing wash bins next to him to catch as much blood as possible, in order to curtail the force of the tremors that he had anticipated might occur from the consumed narcotic.148 Some newspapers, like the The New Bedford Daily Mercury, that reported Drayton’s demise called him “partially deranged” as well as “lost.” Other newspapers, like the Republican Standard, commented, “In consequence of low spirits, induced by broken health, Capt. Drayton has probably for some time meditated self-destruction.”149 After a lifetime of trauma and disturbing memories, included in his memoir, Drayton took his own life and, like Angelo Crapsey, might have found comfort in that end.

147 Martin, Martyr to Freedom, 1.


149 “Death of a Martyr,” Republican Standard 2 July 1857.
Dr. Thomas P. Lowry, MD, examining the historic psychological well-being of Angelo Crapsey for Dennis Brandt, wrote that

Psychohistory, the art of analyzing the thoughts of men and women long dead, is a dubious field, fraught with the possibility of error and, of necessity, shot through with speculation and theorizing. Yet to have no opinion on important matters in the past would be abdication of the brains with which we are blessed, a descent into mental laziness and cerebral sloth.\(^{150}\)

Daniel Drayton, like Crapsey, was burdened by a traumatic past that he could not run away from and could not be buried under new positive emotions, which sadly never came. Judith Herman argues that threats of impending doom define the traumatic moments that pursue the survivor long after the danger has passed and in the “traumatic neurosis, signs of ‘daemonic’” forces are clearly “at work.”\(^{151}\) Drayton, observed by local residents of New Bedford as having “self-meditating” suicidal thoughts and tendencies, had been overwhelmed by a traumatic past that he had proved unable to defend against. His four-year isolation from family, friends, and those he trusted proved to impart to Drayton how fragile human connection was and how important it was for him to make sure that no slave families were ever torn apart again. Yet selling his narrative forced him away, again, from his family and his wife’s untimely death, possibly proved too much for him to bear and could have pushed him further into an emotional broken relationship between society.\(^{152}\) Finding his family bonds destroyed, his ambition rejected, and his sense of self-worth shattered, Daniel Drayton found no solace in his memories, only darkness and pain. Therefore he slid further down a one-way road to suicide.

Drayton experienced numerous tragedies, and as Edward Tick has argued,

\(^{150}\) Brandt, *Pathway to Hell*, 187.

\(^{151}\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 50.

\(^{152}\) Herman, *Trauma and Recovery*, 61.
the response to tragedy is not just sorrow but deep grief; it is a profound condition of the soul. Tragedy depicts what is most noble in us as we struggle against our own dark fate. It demonstrates, as Shakespeare says in *Julius Caesar*, that “the fault…is not in the stars but in ourselves.” Embracing tragedy – crying over our grievous but inevitable losses – keeps our hearts alive.  

In the end, it appears Drayton could not “embrace” his past tragedies. As Emile Durkheim in his classic study argued, “Suicide is [an]…annihilation of the ego. It is a pain inflicted on the ego, which, in being a compensation for guilt or a relief from anxiety, may be the only form of release, the utmost in going ‘beyond the pleasure principle.’” Drayton had suffered for quite some time and his suffering was evident to all those he knew. Yet they failed to understand just how troubled, he was. His suicide was not the result of one immediate situation, but as Durkheim argued, suicide relates “back to the life-history of the individual.”  

As Durkheim wrote,

> Feelings of melancholia, depression, or other states…are not those of the moment of suicide; they have a long history in the individual, and although he may be stimulated to suicide by what looks like an immediate cause not such stimulus would have resulted in the self-murder unless the underlying patterns of behavior had already been set.

For Drayton, as it appeared, suicide potentially served as an outlet to get rid of the frustrations and haunting memories that apparently caused him emotional stress.

Daniel Schacter, in *The Seven Sins of Memory*, talked about the “sin” of “persistence,” one that has clearly affected many of our mariners and one that has proved to be the most dangerous and most illuminating in terms of a traumatic past fraught with harrowing memories. In terms of “negative memories” and eventual suicide, Schacter argued that when a person is in a “dark mood,” he or she can more easily be susceptible

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to what he terms a “negative self-schema,” which can easily lead to depression and possibly suicide.\textsuperscript{156} Schacter observes that “people with a ‘ruminative’ style, who focus obsessively on their current negative moods and past negative events, are at special risk for becoming trapped in such destructive self-perpetuating cycles.”\textsuperscript{157} An individual with a “ruminative style,” as Schacter believed, typically suffers lengthier periods of melancholy than individuals who do little “ruminating.”

Even while he penned his memoir in prison, Drayton reflected constantly on the negative periods and did so in letters that he wrote to friends and family, both before, during, and after the \textit{Pearl} incident. His life had been battered by negative traumatic events. Those vexing memories acted as reminders of his failures, and he pondered those events regularly. Drayton’s obsessive tendencies, clearly observed in his professional and personal life, both in narrative and letter form, illustrate Schacter’s conclusions that those who suffer from “rumination” were involved in “obsessive cycles” of memories about “one’s current mood or situation,” which in turn will “produce an even worse outcome.”\textsuperscript{158}

Drayton’s use of the narrative form falls in line with the behavior of an individual trying to bring his obsessive tendencies into line, his traumatic exposure to some sense of closure, and his stressful memories a sense of release. Psychologist James Pennebaker from the University of Texas has argued that disclosing troubling and traumatic experiences by writing or talking about them can sometimes produce profoundly positive

\textsuperscript{156} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 168-169.

\textsuperscript{157} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 170.

\textsuperscript{158} Schacter, \textit{Seven Sins of Memory}, 171.
effects. But this did not seem to work for Drayton, as it may have worked for some of the other sailors we have considered. It appears that his narrative did not allow for him to bypass his obsessive mood about his traumatic past, but instead, his infinite “ruminating” attitude brought on severe “suicidal depression.” This depression was unwilling to settle into a position of reflection, not obsession, which resulted in bringing Drayton to the same place where Angelo Crapsey and others often found themselves. “Regret, failure, sadness, and trauma,” Schacter has argued, “illuminate the primary territory of persistence,” and “experiences that we remember intrusively, despite wanting to banish them from our minds, are closely linked to, and sometimes, threaten, our perceptions of who we are and who we would like to be.”

For a brief time, as Hester Blum has convincingly argued, sailors’ autobiographies and narratives served to relate the maritime world through a lens of realism. They depicted traumatic oceanic events for audiences who read them and shuttered at the thought that these types of things transpired frequently on the high seas. These were actual men, many just young boys, serving in a profession that defined them and their communities. But they found terrible pain on the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, agony that proved real to them and those they lost to a dark maritime world. Many sailors who never returned vanished without a trace and were only given some semblance of identity through the written recollection that our sailor witnesses provided in the aftermath of their seemingly unthinkable tragedies. For privateer Barnabas Downs, the pain defined

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159 J.W. Pennebaker, “Writing about Emotional Experiences as a Therapeutic Process, Psychological Science, 8, 162-166.

160 Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory, 162.

161 Blum, The View from the Masthead, 72-73.
him, brought him towards religion, and beat him down with memories of that tragic December in 1778. In the end he lived on, although crippled, and fought back against those persistent distressing memories. For Drayton, serving to conclude our maritime victims in the worst possible way, it was not one specific incident that destroyed him. Rather, for Drayton, it was a lifetime of loss, failure, and tragedy that when combined with a lingering illness, broken trust in society, political brutality, and the loss of his wife, drove him to New Bedford, where he took his own life. The importance is not in how he died or even why, but in what proved to be his psychological condition and how, when placed in the context of current memory and maritime research, historians can see Captain Daniel Drayton in various contexts. His narrative serves as a window into his anxieties, past tragedies, and political ambitions, and it sheds light on the dilemmas that came to pass for the nautical abolitionist. Therefore, as Eakin argued, “lurking somewhere in the telling of any life story is a facing down of mortality, the will to say that one’s life has left a trace, that any self and life have value.”\(^{162}\) Although considered a “disappointed” individual and failed nautical abolitionist, Drayton was left with no second chances and wrote his life story as a “second chance” to express who he was and how he had lived.

Both Eric Dean and Dennis Brandt have tackled the issue of post-traumatic stress, depression, and suicide in the American Civil War soldier. But as can be observed, the infantryman involved in war is not the only type of nineteenth century “warrior” who can be described in such terms. Jonathan Walker and Daniel Drayton suffered unthinkable tragedy, but only Drayton, whose obsessive reflection on his traumatic past proved dire, possibly sought comfort in death, as Angelo Crapsey may have. As our last class of

\(^{162}\) Eakin, *Living Autobiographically*, 129.
mariners considered in this study, nautical abolitionists serve to bring the Age of Sail to a close and with it the sailor’s heyday of importance, reflection, and admiration. They serve to bookend a long journey started by privateers like Barnabas Downs, whose young lives began on the waves and who faced unthinkable tragedy that would, in many varying ways, affect the rest of their lives and force them to write about those traumatic moments for an audience who seemed willing to observe the sea through their “sea eye.” For the nautical abolitionists their audience proved willing to read of their pain. Through the language of their trauma more Americans came to see the injustice and inequality at play in the American South and therefore prove willing to donate time, money, and resources to the destruction of the institution of slavery. Therefore their narratives, not unlike works like *Common Sense* by Thomas Paine, proved pieces of revolutionary thought and inspired a determined public to fight for liberty and adhere to the principle affirmed in the Declaration of Independence that “all men are created equal.”

**Austin Bease’s Reflection and Tragic Recollection**

Unlike the privateer, the impressed sailor, and the whaleman, the nautical abolitionist placed his profession aside and fought against the laws of the land seeking to topple injustice through maritime subversion. Drayton and Walker were not alone in their nautical quest, but they became the most famous. One more individual, although physically did not experience the type of trauma that both Walker and Drayton had, witnessed an event that proved to be consequential. In his narrative, which served as a reflection on abolitionism in Massachusetts, Austin Bease considered his memory in an attempt to reflect on those moments that served as life-altering instants. Although Walker was one of the most famous nautical abolitionists, Bease served as the silent warrior,
and, like George Robert Twelves Hewes reflecting on his role in the Boston Tea Party years later, Bearse wrote about his invasive memory considering those men who had followed him and observed similar tragic images. It is only fitting that the man who sailed first in this nautical endeavor be presented last. His short narrative, and his brief consideration here, had been shadowed by Walker and Drayton’s greater accomplishments. But, while they proved to fail in larger, more public ways, Bearse, reflecting years later, placed them first in his honoring of abolitionists who went to sea.

In his short narrative, *Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Days in Boston*, Austin Bearse wrote in dedication to both Daniel Drayton and Jonathan Walker, who he described as “heroes” and to others like Rev. Charles T. Torrey, a land-based abolitionist who died for the cause of freedom in a Baltimore jail. He dedicated his narrative, as well, to “The Committee of Vigilance,” proclaiming that

> this lover of his fellowmen seek to keep green the memory of the faithful service done to humanity in Boston harbor and streets, in which hunted fugitive slaves were snatched from kidnappers, sheltered, housed and fed, and forwarded with all speed and secrecy to Canada; their rescuers defended in the courts of persecution, and when Sims and Burns fell victims, their cause pleas with unexampled eloquence, till Freedom’s fame found winds on every wind.”

Austin Bearse was a native of Barnstable, Massachusetts and may have grown up with the knowledge of the trauma suffered by Barnabas Downs. But during his life Bearse was “from time to time mate on board of different vessels engaged in the coasting trade on the coast of South Carolina.” As he wrote, it was “well known for New England vessels are in a habit of spending their winters on the Southern coast, in pursuit of this business – for vessels used to run up the rivers for the rough rice and cotton of the plantains, which

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we took to Charleston.”¹⁶⁵ In his brief reflection, Bearse described the dreadful sights he observed when he traded with the South and those images he could not forget and wrote about so everyone could understand the cruelty of the slaveholding South.

Between the years 1818 and 1830 Bearse sailed the oceans and rivers that connected the North and South in economic dependency. Like Drayton and Walker, he observed the cruelty and brutality that he had been too young and irresponsible to understand. As he acknowledged, there was a time when

I carried gangs of slaves to the plantations as they had been ordered. These slaves were generally collected by slave-traders in Charleston, brought there by various causes….some were sent as punishment for insubordination, or because the domestic establishment was too large; or because persons moving to the North and West preferred selling their slaves to the trouble of carrying them. We had on board our vessels, from time to time, numbers of these slaves – sometimes two or three, and sometimes as high as seventy or eighty.¹⁶⁶

Bearse remembered how these slaves had to be separated from their “families and connections with as little concern as calves and pigs are selected out of a lot of domestic animals.” Bearse remembered how, at times, he allowed the slaves to be reunited with family and friends, as their vessel lay in a bay called Poor Man’s Hole, not a great distance from the border of the city. Bearse recalled how

We used to allow the relatives and friends of the slaves to come on board and stay all night with their friends, before the vessel sailed. In the morning it used to be my business to pull the hatches and warn them that it was time to separate and the shrieks and cries at these times were enough to make anybody’s heart ache.¹⁶⁷

¹⁶⁵ Bearse, Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Days in Boston, 8.
¹⁶⁶ Bearse, Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Days in Boston, 8-9.
¹⁶⁷ Bearse, Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Days in Boston, 9.
In one instance in 1828, while on the brig *Milton*, out of Boston, Bearse recalled that “the following incident occurred” and is one “which I shall *never* forget.” In a moment of intense illuminating shock and impacting him in a truly negative way, Bearse described the image that stayed with him for the rest of his life and might be one of the reasons that he wrote his short narrative about what he saw and the great work the city of Boston did during slave days. On this specific day, Bearse recalled watching as an Old negro woman, more than eighty years of age, came screaming after them, “My son! Oh, my son!” She seemed almost frantic, and when we had got more than mile out in the harbor, we heard her screaming yet. When we were in the Gulf Stream, I came to the men and took off their handcuffs. They were resolute fellows, and they told me they would never live to be slaves in New Orleans.

Tragically, as Bearse reflected, all of the men, after they were transported to New Orleans, were dead within forty-eight hours after they were landed. Bearse never forgot their faces or their words on that day and his narrative is a testament to his mind’s persistent inability to forget. As Bearse wrote, he later found out that all of the men had killed themselves and “one of them I know was bought for a fireman on the steamer *Post Boy*,” which traveled down towards Belize, but that slave jumped overboard and drowned.

Bearse recalled that he had observed slavery all over the world and had watched young men and women sold at auction numerous times. Yet he argued that American slavery, as he had viewed it in the internal slave trade, and in his long established opinion that was formed through personal observations,

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was full as bad as any slavery in the world - heathen or Christian. People, who go for visits or pleasure through the Southern States, cannot possibly know those things which can be seen of slavery by shipmasters who run up into the back plantations or countries, and who transport the slaves and produce to the plantations. ¹⁷¹

Bearse acknowledged his own responsibility in helping to produce this functioning slave trade and those plantations that utilized scores of bonded laborers to produce goods that were traded and sold in the North. As he concluded his recollection on his time as a coastal trader, he recalled that “In my past days, the system of slavery was not much discussed. I saw these things as others did, without interference. I no longer think it right to see these things in silence, I trade no more south of Mason and Dixon’s line.”¹⁷²

Austin Bearse eventually lent his support to the abolitionists’ cause and attempted, after so many years of turning a deaf ear to the cries of his fellow man, to help a few fugitive slaves escape to the North as a nautical abolitionist, but achieving only moderate success. He established great success in selling a narrative discussing the great deeds the State of Massachusetts, especially Boston, accomplished in its effort to rid the country of slavery and opposing the federal fugitive slave laws. Like Walker and Drayton, men who actually followed Bearse, Bearse’s work was not published until those “martyrs” had made their own waves and gave him a greater opportunity to use what he had observed to tell the “true story” of southern slavery and northern compliance through ignorance. His narrative served as a mea culpa, his attempt to set things right after avoiding, and in some cases furthering, the issue of slavery and the separation of families. He could not change the memory of the screams and cries of that slave mother who called and begged for the return of her children, and his own recollection of the incident sends

¹⁷¹ Bearse, Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Days in Boston, 10.
¹⁷² Bearse, Reminiscences of Fugitive-Slave Days in Boston, 10.
chills down the reader’s spine. According to Bearse, he never forgot that moment, but hoped, in some way, that his narrative could help to ease those memories and their destructive power.

Bearse serves as the most silent of the nautical abolitionist who have been depicted in this chapter, for his past was too troubling for him to have devoted greater attention to himself as the slaves’ champion, but his *mea culpa* proved effective. His narrative continued the saga of the nautical warrior and allowed for Walker and Drayton’s names to continue to remain in the headlines preceding the Civil War and prior to John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry. Brown’s success in sparking the Civil War overshadowed the memory of Drayton and Walker, whose ambitions proved a failure in practice but helped, through their narratives, to bring greater awareness to the horrors of slavery. In the end, these men suffered and their narratives about those moments provide a new look at the world of pre-Civil War America. While these nautical abolitionists wrote of events, as well as memories, that haunted them, their legacies faltered and history paid less and less attention to them as the years passed and other men succeeded where they failed.

**Conclusion**

Daniel Drayton, Jonathan Walker, and Austin Bearse – all had recollections that can be understood to be distressing and lived through events that proved to be tragic. Each man experienced sporadic periods of nautical trauma imprinted with brutal memories that, even once the trauma had ended, continued to act as invasive and persistent memories, which, in the end, helped fuel part of their written narratives. Bearse seemingly lived with those troubling images with relative ease, but “never forgot.”
Walker, on the other hand, had severe emotional and physical pain inflicted on him during his traumatic event, but he did not despair once he was freed. Instead Walker used his past traumas, especially those regarding the branding of his hand, to build up his character and spread the message of slavery’s evils. Daniel Drayton serves as the most tragic reminder of the power of the traumatic memory and how a life inundated with failures and the inability to protect one’s fellow man from social injustice can push one down the “pathway to hell.” Drayton was observed by a community that admired him as “deranged,” “lost,” and as “contemplating self-destruction.” He, like Crapsey, can be argued to have suffered from symptoms of post-traumatic stress based on the recollections of those who communicated with him and his narrative, which served to unlock his inner intrusive memories and cognitive turmoil.

These troubling events that affected Drayton, Walker, and Bearse, as they did our other mariners, emotionally, were not purely physical. Psychologist Robyn Fivush has argued that “memories of real world emotional events” range across different groups, but it is clear that negative events are recalled more accurate than mundane or, possibly, positive events….Narratives of negative events are also longer and more detailed than narratives of mundane or positive events….negative events are more coherent and focus more on causes and explanations than do narratives of positive or mundane events.173

Psychologists studying the importance of diverse types of traumatic memories have argued that “highly emotional events are better recalled than mundane events, suggesting that emotion enhances memory….given the impact of emotional arousal on recall, one central component of emotional events must be the emotion itself.” In considering emotion one must understand that distressing memories are likely to be more emotional

than ordinary memories and “memory of one’s emotional reaction to the important events in one’s life is part of the fabric of weaving together autobiographical memory into a coherent life narrative,” which Drayton and all our seafarers attempted to do. While we cannot take what they wrote to be raw experience, knowing the political and moral motivation that was woven into their subsequent narratives, one can acknowledge what these sailors considered to be their lived past and tragic realities. They wrote sweeping narratives based on the broken pieces of information they had left regarding those traumatic moments.

Drayton and Walker clearly wrote with a political intent and to support the cause of anti-slavery through their prose. Their traumatic memories served as perfect motivators in swaying public opinion behind the abolitionist movement. Inevitably the flaws in their cognition would require them to fill in the details of those preceding events. Even so, they wrote to make sense of the details they could remember and convey it to a larger audience in as complete a picture as they could provide. The seamen considered in this dissertation certainly suffered and their narratives reflect that misery as they understood it to have occurred. But we must read their words also as a reflection of their political and social goals. Therefore one must appreciate the political emotions that were created as a result of these same tragedies and their desire to reproduce that suffering in narrative form.174

As we will see, the sailors’ “sea eye,” although popular for a brief moment in time, was utilized and seemingly erased by the collective memory of a growing industrial society that chose not to read their stories per se, but to read the fictional stories written

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by literary greats. As soon as these “masters” of the pen lay claim to these sailor’s stories and crafted a fictional maritime world, our traumatized sailors virtually ceased to exist in collective memory. This, as will be observed in the next chapter, does not necessarily indicate an antagonistic relationship between the two forms of writing, but rather informs us of a rather sad truth in the production of these great works. What is that truth? The fact is that writings by sailors like Barnabas Downs, Horace Holden, and many more, are the originators of those works and therefore both the inspiration for and the culmination of those impressive works. Once Melville, Cooper, and others produced their own works they became the new narrators of the maritime world, both its splendor and its cruelty. Even though they illuminated the sailor’s world to an extent greater than the sailors themselves could achieve, their works did overshadow their predecessor and, like a child that outpaces its parent, became the staple of maritime literature both in fiction and fact. As privateers, impressed seafarers, whaleman, and nautical abolitionists experienced horrific events and sought, for diverse reasons, to discuss these moments in print, they unwittingly became the product of their own creation. They proved to be what their narratives constructed them as and what later readers would judge them to be. In a sense, Jack Tar’s traumatic memory proved tragic to the sailor himself and therefore the pain was his alone to endure, both in his life and in the legacy of those moments.

Today more books, movies, and plays have been written, produced, and watched that depict the maritime world not from the sailors’ “sea eye,” but from the collective imagination of those who used the true sailor’s story in an effort to create an “entertaining” piece of art whether literary, or Broadway, or Hollywood. In the end, as our next chapter will examine, people may well know the story of Melville’s masterpiece
*Moby-Dick*, but they fail to appreciate and understand the story of the *Essex*, as well as Owen Chase’s written narrative of that event, the “real story” the novel is based upon. Viewers watch movies about pirates, privateers, and conflict on the high seas, but may fail to appreciate the hazards sailors experienced and the disturbing recollections they suffered from. Elusive is the idea of a seemingly dark maritime world that destroyed the imaginings of young sailors and those seafarer’s narratives that argued of its existence. The sea has become, not a place of wonderment or even darkness, but instead a created imaginative idea. When we think of tragedy on the sea, we think of Melville, not Owen Chase. Although these literary stories are important and help to define the character of the United States, today’s society’s collective memory has been shaped, formed, and established based on this imaginative model.
Chapter SIX

Jack Tar’s Vanishing Legacy:
Daniel Collins and the Collective Memory of Maritime Trauma

“Give not thyself up, then, to fire, lest it invert thee, deaden thee; as for the time it did me. There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness.”

- Herman Melville in Moby-Dick, Chapter 96 “The Try-Works”

On 28 November 1824, Daniel Collins, a native of Maine, sailed from Wiscasset, Maine for Matanzas, on the island of Cuba, aboard the brig Betsey. Despite carrying officers and a crew of seven, the Betsey ran into trouble roughly a month into the voyage. The recollection of this impending catastrophe proved to be a moment of great change for Collins, a man who lived to tell the tale of shipwreck and savagery. Through devastating memories wrapped inside an overarching narrative of devastating events, Collins sought some understanding of what had taken place when he penned his tale for a general as well as a maritime readership. When he did eventually make it back to Maine in April of 1825, Collins remembered that “by the advice and aid of my friends, I have published to the world, the simple story of my sufferings, as an appeal to my country, from an humble sailor, who has been honored by fighting her battles, to avenge one of the most unnatural
murders that ever darkened the pages of her history.”¹ Collins lived through a shipwreck and the massacre of five of his crew members by vicious “Pirates” who, as he recalled, preyed on them like “wolves in sheep’s clothing.” Yet for Collins the story of his survival begins fittingly, as we have observed with many other sailors’ narratives, with a shipwreck and the harrowing memory that assisted him in retelling his tragic tale of piracy, murder, and salvation.

At sunset, in late December of 1824, an eerie night was observed approaching and Collins suggested to Captain Ellis Hilton that the “priority” be that of “shortening sail, to which he would not assent, presuming we might get into Matanzas the next day.”² That night, Collins described a night like none other, a night “so dark that we could not discover objects distinctly beyond the length of the vessel.” It was an hour and a half later when Collins, who had left his post for a respite in the “quarter,” experienced a terrible shock.³ He recalled that he felt a “tremendous tremor,” which covered me with muskets that were over my head, boxes, barrels and other cabin articles; the water pouring into my birth through the quarter. I cleared myself by a violent effort, ran for the companion way – it was gone – turned – leaped through the sky light, and was on deck in an instant. We were in the hollow of a sea, and I could just discern over our main peak the dark top of the rock, which we had struck, stem on, then going at the rate of nine knots.⁴ The rock that had caused this dire situation was concealed from the helmsman who drove straight on into it. With two crew members at the pumps, Collins proceeded to clear the anchors in hopes of preventing the vessel from “ranging ahead on another rock” which he

¹ Daniel Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, and murder of five of her crew, by pirates, - on the coast of Cuba, Dec. 1824 (Printed by John Dorr, 1824), 27.
² Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 4.
³ Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 4.
⁴ Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 4-5.
could observe amidst the surf and crashing of the waves. But, as he explained, the greater part of the bow had been destroyed “and with it the anchors.” As Collins recalled, “the water was already groaning under the deck – she arose for the last time on the crest of another sea nearly to the top of the rock, quivering like a bird under its death-wound.”

The Captain and crew of the Betsey, once they observed that the effort to save the ship was lost, huddled around the long-boats and cut the ropes and the “leashings” that tied them to the side of the brig and attempted to “right” her. Collins proceeded to secure a compass, awe, several oars, and a bucket in order to load them onto the long-boat before it was too late. Then suddenly, as Collins remembered,

> The next sea we descended she struck; opened fore and aft, the lasts and spars, with all sails standing, thundering against the rock, and the lumber from below deck cracking and crashing in every direction. We were all launched overboard on the lumber that adhered together, clinging hold of the long-boat as the seamen’s last ark of refuge.\(^5\)

Thrown into the mighty ocean that raged around them, Collins and the other crew members of the Betsey swam to whatever safety they could find. They were able to thrust themselves into a nearby long-boat, “clinging hold of the long-boat as the seaman’s last ark of refuge, and endeavoring to right her, which we did in a few moments but not” before they were stuck with greater misfortune as the boat split a “plank in her bottom” and they were forced to fasten the bottom as their only form of salvation.\(^6\) They were able to “patch” the damage to their long-boat and, as the ocean struck them from every angle, they picked up as many “articles” of need that flowed around them from their destroyed brig as possible. In a moment of horror, Collins was able to identify and find some comfort, even if it was cryptic. He brought forward, in his narrative, a comment on how

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\(^6\) Collins, *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine*, 5.
he watched as the Captain’s dog leaped “which a few moments before had been from plank to plank” of the sinking Betsey “after a cat with as determined an enmity as though the pursuit had been through a farmyard, followed us; a companion by no means unwelcome to those who, without provision or water, might have been compelled to depend on this faithful animal for the perseverance of their lives.”

The difficulty facing the crew of Betsey did not end with their ascension into the long-boat after they were thrown overboard but rather grew even greater. With their long-boat continuing to leak, Collins recalled that

so fast that three hands, two with hats and one with the bucket, were unable to free her; but with the aid of the only knife we had saved, and the fragments of the leashings, I filled some of the seams, which helped to free her; but not so effectually as to relieve a single hand from bailing.

Still, the crew rowed on in search of land and safety. With few provisions and “about a league from the rock we hung on our oars, watching the sea that ran mountains high, until day-light” when the crew “pulled up under its lee, but could discover neither fresh water nor a particle of provisions, excepts a few pieces of floating bread that we dared not eat.”

The crew did use a sail, which they preserved from the floating fragments, as a large blanket, but “compelled by the violence of the sea, we put her away before the wind, steering S. half E. – a course that must have carried us far East of our intended track, had it not been for the strong westerly current in St. Nicholas Channel.” As night approached, their danger increased for the crew was “fatigued – some of us much bruised, by the disasters of the proceeding night; and our toils during the day, as may well

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7 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 5.
8 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 5.
9 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 5.
10 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 5.
be conceived, were not much relieved by incessant rowing and bailing, without a particle of food to assuage our hunger or one drop of fresh water to cool our parched tongues.”

With a heightened level of anxiety and their spirits clouded “like the heavens over them,” Collins remembered that he watched as Captain Hilton could no longer “smother” the feelings that he was “struggling” with within his mind and heart. Observing a “quivering lip, the dim eye, the pallid check,” told Collins “as plainly as human expression could tell” that hope had begun to fade and their future appeared doomed.

At this point, Collins recalled that he adhered to his duty as second mate and attempted to encourage the Captain and crew to carry on. He ventured that if they did not find land that day or night, then they would discover it eventually. Again, possibly reflecting a bias, not “backed” up any other crew members, this narrative reflection can be looked at with skepticism, because Collins painted himself in a dubious bright light in this time of tragedy. His recall of this courage reflected more his later assumptions, as well as his literary goal to portray himself as a spiritual and brave leader in time of tragedy. This is the deception used by many sailors who wrote narratives about their tragedies when there was no one or only a few to support what they confessed had occurred. This is an indication that these narratives must not be taken as wholly factual, but rather examined for both their representation of maritime danger and historical significance for what oceanic tragedy was like and how these sailors observed the world around them.

As Collins’ disturbing recollection from that painful time continued, he remembered that it was around midnight when Captain Hilton’s oar struck something hard below them. The crew’s hopes that this object might be land ended when the mass

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11 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 6.
turned out to be a shark, which had been stalking them for hours. According to Collins
Captain Hilton gave “full vent to his feelings” by observing that “even if we were to
escape these dangerous shoals, our distance from the Island was great, that we could
never endure hunger, thirst and the fatigue of bailing long enough to reach it.”
Collins recalled that he tried hard to convince the captain to keep his spirits up and that they must
reach an island, but “the disheartened crew soon caught the contagious and fatal despair
which the captain had incautiously diffused among them.”
Suddenly, as Collins
implored the captain to continue, the captain interrupted him, causing Collins serious
anxiety, and broke down and fell to his knees in the middle of the long-boat bursting into
tears for his crew to witness. In this shocking and fragile state, Hilton implored divine
providence to intervene and protect them from certain doom. Collins argued that “it is
true our hold on life was a frail one.” Collins remembered that they were

in an open boat, that from leaking and the violence of the sea we could scarcely
keep above water – without food, drink, or clothing sufficient to defend us from
the cold and rain of a December Norther [sic]…without a chart to guide us. In a
state of mind bordering on insanity which is sometimes caused by hunger, thirst
and despair united, we passed a most perilous night.

Whether divine guidance or maritime luck, or maybe even, as Collins hinted, to his own
ability to steer both the vessel and emotional state of the crew to better and brighter days,
the crew of the Betsey, now in their long-boat searching for safety, observed on the
horizon “a small dark speck on the ocean…about 5 leagues distant!” As Collins recalled,

The joyful sound of land ran through our nerves like an electric shock, and gave
new life to the oars. The wind being fair, the aid of our sail, which was equal to
two additional oars, gave us such head way, that as the rays of the rising sun

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sported over the tops of the waves and fell on the small spot of land, we found
ourselves nearing one of the Cuba Keys.

With land spotted, the crew of the long-since sunken brig *Betsey* thought that they had
observed the worst of their journey and might actually live through this horrific ordeal.
Yet as Collins’ short narrative explained, the crew had lived through one horrible event
so that they could, as had Barnabas Downs, suffer even greater trauma. That experience
was, at least for Collins, barricaded under the weight of devastating imagery that served
to inscribe a relentless memory of brutality, murder, and survival. All but two of the men
who had survived the horrific wreck of the brig *Betsey*, Daniel Collins himself and a
cook, never returned to the beauty of Wiscasset, Maine, and it was there that the tale of
their sufferings came to light through Collins’ recollections, which evoked the difficult
occupation of the sailor and the possibility of post-traumatic stress that followed home
those who witnessed such tragedy.

**The Fading Fate of Jack Tar’s Traumatic Experiences**

The story of Daniel Collins is a suitable place to start when thinking about both
the collective memory of maritime trauma and the vanishing legacy of the traumatized
Jack Tar. A sailor who experienced terrible trauma has rarely been the sole concern of
historians and literary scholars. But his memories proved to be haunting while he lived
and his prose, although not critically acclaimed, found a home among the maritime
narratives that graced this era and proved to be historically significant. Hester Blum’s
work on the literary and narrative skills of sailors has enhanced our understanding of their
memories and those traumatic events that they later considered consequential and a
source that can be used to gain greater knowledge of the perils of the sea.

Daniel Collins’ ordeal can be captivating. As Marita Sturken has argued,
Memory forms the fabric of human life, affecting everything from the ability to perform simple, everyday tasks to the recognition of the self. Memory establishes life’s continuity; it gives meaning to the present, as each moment is constituted by the past. As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core of identity.\textsuperscript{15}

Collins’ memories, like those of all the traumatized sailor witnesses who have been discussed in this dissertation, prove to be revealing as personal disturbing memories, but also crucial as elements of collective cultural memories as well. Jack Tar’s traumatic memories are thus undiscerning for the sailor himself who regularly suffered from those brutal recollections, which might recur at uncontrolled moments. While invasive and persistent to the sailors, their memories proved to vanish in terms of the collective remembrance of their society that recognized and charted their traumatic stories. Sailors’ stories inspired writers like Herman Melville, Edgar Allen Poe, and others. In the end, all writers’ stories collectively overshadowed the sailor’s own accounts, and memories, of oceanic disaster from the communal imagination of society.

This chapter considers how sailors’ narratives of catastrophic and devastating events proved to be fodder for many literary works that came to dominate the arena of maritime literature. Fictional literary usage of sailors’ narratives, it must be understood, affected the collective, and communal understanding of sea trauma not only in years directly after the traumatic events were related in sailors’ narratives, but also in the collective imagination of human societies, especially American, to the recent. In the end, both fact and fiction act in dialogue with one another. These sailors’ traumatic experiences were discussed in chapels, taverns, and on the docks, they were immortalized in various maritime memorials and inspire and move us today.

\textsuperscript{15} Marita Sturken, \textit{Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering} (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 1.
In the introduction of Jerry Bentley’s book, *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchange*, Karen Wigen has written that “To judge from movie marquees, tourist brochures, or bestseller lists, seascapes loom large in the public imagination.”\(^{16}\) Marita Sturken, whose work on the AIDS epidemic and the Vietnam War has proven to be important, has influenced the study of how events are culturally remembered and understood. Sturken writes that “collective remembering of a specific culture can often appear similar to the memory of an individual – it provides cultural identity and gives a sense of the importance of the past. Yet the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings.”\(^{17}\) In a sense cultures use the past for their own present purposes and form a common identity based on those created and collectively imagined ideas. The traumatic memories of maritime men were used, collectively, to understand and then build upon those shared, horrific maritime tragedies. Cultural memory, as defined by Sturken, is that type of memory that is “shared outside the avenues of formal historical discourse yet is entangled with cultural products and imbued with cultural meanings.”\(^{18}\) Although this work has examined personal memories as they have remained, for the most part, individual and not collective, it is important in this chapter to look beyond that established format to assess these sailors’ memories’ impact on cultural and collective cognizance. Yet personal memories serve as an impressive and important link to our maritime past. Although, as Paul Connerton has

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\(^{16}\) Jerry Bentley, ed., *Seascapes: Maritime Histories, Littoral Cultures, and Transoceanic Exchanges* (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 2009). *The International Journal of Maritime History* wrote that “This volume proves that maritime socio-cultural history forces scholars to rethink their concepts of time, space and knowledge. It not only will help us to understand the past in general but also will clarify how globalization came about.”

\(^{17}\) Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 1.

\(^{18}\) Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 3.
written, “Personal memories, as distinct from cognitive memories, entail a class of personal memory claims which refer to those acts of remembering that take as their object one’s own life history,” cultural, as well as collective, memory is “produced through representation.”

These mariners’ stories were a literary representation of seafarers’ personal lives. Much later informing movies, plays, and photographs, maritime novels established a collective understanding of the maritime world. This process may have been a reflection of a world acknowledged through the writings of men like Downs, Durand, Holden, and Collins, but their tragic experiences were forgotten as readers sought out fiction rather than fact. As Sturken wrote, “Memory is often embodied in objects – memorials, texts, talismans, images.” Sailors’ traumatic writings became one element in shaping that collective memory, but soon their stories and their tragedies were glossed over by fictional portrayals, as well as the construction of burial and honorary memorials. Finally, their memories faded as time went on and people paid less attention to their trauma and more attention to the epic stories crafted after their disastrous experience. Memory, as psychologists Qi Wang and Cagla Aydin have argued, is functional if it is traumatic memory, “event memory, or semantic memory of the world (e.g., knowledge of history), and the function of memory lies in the significance of special recollections in sustaining individuals’ current goals, self-theories and beliefs.”

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cultural identities are created and constructed in part through traumatic memories. When essentially the same types of memories find popularity through fictional means and sites of remembrance, instead of in the written works themselves, they form outlets and creative impasses constructed not by the owner of the traumatic memory, but rather by a culturally linked society that has followed a “collective” path towards their accepting of the traumatic maritime world.

Like the maritime men who have been considered throughout these pages, Daniel Collins experienced severe personal pain that left him with remarkable survival stories. It is no surprise that writers seeking their own enduring fame read the sailors’ written recollections, combined them with experiences from their own maritime careers, and crafted amazing fictional stories that helped to shape the nation’s literary understandings over the next two centuries. The sea offered an almost unending pool of material to craft sweeping novels and significant poetry. Beyond the eastern shore line anything was possible and maritime tragedy, and trauma, was a perfect muse for the manufacturing and construction of literary drama. When we think of maritime tragedy, we do not consider Daniel Collins, Barnabas Downs, or even Horace Holden. Instead, we think of Captain Ahab in *Moby-Dick*, the Mariner in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, and stowaway Arthur Gordon Pym in *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*. Why is it that, today, when we imagine the distressing world of maritime tragedy, we do not think of the names etched into the black marble “cenotaphs” in New Bedford, Massachusetts’ Seamen’s Bethel. Instead we consider the fate of Ishmael, or the psychopathic and revenge dominant mentality of Captain Ahab and his ship’s destruction by the infamous
white whale, Moby Dick. As Paul Lyons argued, in regards to Owen Chase’s account of the *Essex* disaster,

> His account of the limits of human endurance does not have to be imagined and embellished because it has been lived through. What can today seem a formulaic rhetoric of extreme highs and lows…punctuated by expressions of ejaculatory piety, are generic features of shipwreck narrative that no one writing after Dafoe’s *Robinson Crusoe* seemed able to avoid.\(^{23}\)

As Lyons commented, Chase’s account of suffering and moments when “flesh had become tainted, and had turned of a greenish colour” will remind readers of passages from Edgar Allen Poe’s *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, which, as Lyons argued, “plunders many such details directly from Chase’s narrative.”\(^{24}\) Poe, Melville, and others read these horrific oceanic tales and used the sailors’ experiences to craft their literary pieces. In their stories are many incidents, sentences, and words that were first created by traumatized sailors and made briefly famous in fictional stories.

> The names of the sailors in this dissertation who met a terrible fate and forever lived with the emotional burden of painful events that were out of their control faded into the forgotten realm of lost muses. We reconsider their tales of danger as a representation of that dark oceanic world and as an example of the reality that inspired the great works of maritime literature. Moreover, as historians reestablish the literary intent of these sailor’s works, we gain access into how traumatic memory functions. Yet we also gain a greater awareness of how these traumatized sailors serve as characters in a tragic maritime performance that now gains historical significance through their written legacy.

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These sailors' traumatic reminiscences served an important cultural and collective purpose when they were first written in narrative form. But when the sailors’ narrative’s purpose and importance had “run its course,” and sailors’ words, deeds, and traumatic visions lapsed, society turned away from the sea narrative and focused on industrialization and civil war. This occurred despite the fact that the terrible memories that these sailors lived with never fully darkened. It should come as no surprise that these stories had a “shelf-life,” but what proved troubling was how sailors’ traumatic memories did not produce a lasting imaginative effect on American society as a whole, at least in terms of understanding the maritime world around them. Although years after the wreck of the brig *General Arnold*, residents of Barnstable, Massachusetts, and other New England towns regularly spoke of and paid homage to the terrible event, the memorials erected in its honor and recollection of that moment faded as the survivors died and other events of greater horror, or of great happiness, took its place. After some time, the importance of remembering the wreck was lost, the ship itself left to decay and disappear under the waves and sand, the memorial in its honor left to crack and fade, and still even further the maritime world moved forward observing new and younger sailors seeking their own immortality.

Even as maritime communities moved onward monuments like the one in Plymouth for the crew of the brig *General Arnold* “served as powerful physical reminders of what the ‘best’ American men had sacrificed for their country,” and in this case served to celebrate the life of American martyrs.\(^{25}\) Oceanic monuments “sought to mark the heroism” of great captains, common sailors, and mighty ships that showed

\(^{25}\) Purcell, *Sealed with Blood*, 103.
courage and determination in the face of nautical peril. As historian Sarah Purcell has written, “The message of heroic veneration and emulation reached far beyond the pages of biography and poetry. Several communities constructed monuments…as physical signs of their public gratitude to military,” as well as naval, “heroes and as permanent reminders of their virtues.” As observed in chapter five, Daniel Drayton had a monument established in his honor, the sole individual in this dissertation whose death was immortalized by a grieving and admiring public. At his funeral Drayton was considered in the same breathe as the great Joseph Warren, the martyr to Bunker Hill, and George Washington, and therefore they honored that legacy by erecting a memorial where people could visit and pay their respects to this “martyr” for the cause of human freedom. The monument erected for the brig General Arnold fulfilled the same goal and James Magee and Barnabas Downs visited the memorial often and both, in death, choose to be buried amongst their comrades who had perished many years before. These memorials served not only as a place to grieve and remember, they also served as reminders of the tragic reality of that perilous maritime world.

In Gloucester, Massachusetts, there stands a bronze sailor at the wheel of a ship battling a storm. Erected in 1925 this statue commemorates the Gloucester fishermen that have been lost at sea since 1623. Gloucester, which argues that it is America’s oldest seaport, built the memorial to honor “They That Go Down to the Sea In Ships,” and circling the cenotaph are impressive plaques with the names of 500 men who have been lost at sea from 1716 through 2001. While 500 names are on the memorial, which is in Stacy Esplande overlooking Gloucester Harbor, there are 5,000 names of lost seafarers on

26 Purcell, Sealed with Blood, 103.
27 Purcell, Sealed with Blood, 103.
a mural in City Hall, a shocking statistic for a historically tragic vocation. In New Bedford, even though there are several memorials erected to sailors, not the least important is Seamen’s Bethel itself, there is one standing in Tonnessen Park, which was erected in 1962 and called the “Memorial to the Whalemen and Fishermen,” which stands to honor “those seamen whose only grave is the ocean floor.” The top of the statue displays a mythical sea god holding a cod in his left hand and a sturgeon in his right. The statue attempts to construct a body to fight back against the invisibility of maritime death, just as many of the narratives did. The memory of oceanic misfortune is personified within these monuments. Yet even as memorials were constructed as both forms of remembering and warnings, sailors sailed off in search of their nautical destiny.

With each generation, new sailors sailed off, many of them experiencing traumas like those of the men who had sailed out before them. And, yet again, more narratives were written, more stories shared, more disastrous events brought forth for a reading public that seemed in awe of the horrors that awaited the brave young New England sailor. But tragedy and the memory of tragedy is fleeting, purely in a social and cultural form, and as time goes by, people do not so much forget past tragedy as choose to ignore it. They know of the danger, the “tall tales,” and the “myths” that have seemingly been created about what lies beyond the Atlantic wall, but adventure, profit, and glory are too promising and bright to pass up. Although the stories of Downs, even the mutiny on the Globe, or Horace Holden’s shipwreck and captivity, were well known, the maritime community was spread out. Even though well crafted, their stories just were another example of what Jewitt went in search of – a maritime story.

28 See Schacter, Seven Sins of Memory; Herman, Trauma and Recovery, Coleman, Flashback, and Shay, Odysseus of America.
In a collective sense, these traumatized sailors spoke out about what they went through, what they observed, and, in terms of their memories, what many times sprung up in their minds invasively. Many alluded to the disturbing stress that filled their days and nights upon their return. Some shifted down paths to personal misery, while others sailed on, seemingly out of touch with the reality of their present turmoil and unwilling to paint their past in any upsetting light, but still unable fully to escape the power of that past. They sought to make sense of those terrible events through language that would eventually inspire bronze statues and sculptures of their tragic deeds.

Melville, Poe, and Cooper – all wrote in the hopes that they too could capture the essence of what it meant to be overcome by maritime tragedy. Melville has proven to be the best at this task. Although while Melville was alive the promise of great success was lost on him, as his work *Moby-Dick* proved to destroy his literary career, it was not until after his death, that he, or his work, gained the recognition that was so deserved.  

As historians and literary scholars argue, in 1851, the year *Moby-Dick* was published for the first time, the public’s appetite for the maritime novel, as well as narratives was waning. Instead, with the discovery of gold in California, Americans focused west rather than east beyond the Atlantic wall on the mighty ocean. The maritime world had lost its literary and historic appeal and Melville, who believed *Moby-Dick* to be his greatest achievement, unleashed this oceanic story while America’s whaling prominence declined and the Civil War was less than a decade away. Melville’s doomed *Pequod*, which served

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as an allegory of the United States, masterly represented the growing nation’s path to
destruction through capitalism, slavery, and misjudged pride.\textsuperscript{30}

*Moby-Dick* was published at a time when people no longer found enjoyment in
tales of oceanic adventure and instead wanted to forget their maritime heritage and that
those horrific episodes, like Melville’s inspiration the tragedy of the *Essex*, had ever
occurred. It has been said that in Nantucket, Massachusetts, the home port of the *Essex*
that residents refused to acknowledge the horrific episode and moved through the years in
silent agreement that no word of the event would be uttered in public.\textsuperscript{31} Melville and his
masterpiece *Moby-Dick*, for now, must wait to be examined further as they relate to the
real story of the event it is based on. Although the imaginative power of *Moby-Dick*
cracked, theoretically, the public memory of the *Essex*, that ship has proved to be the
central example of what the traumatic maritime world was, at least to a society unwilling
to seek reality over fiction. This does not mean that Melville’s *Moby-Dick* and the true
story of the *Essex* sat in opposition to one another, but rather that *Moby-Dick* served as
the product of that tragedy and the by-product of a society no longer willing to gaze upon
maritime stories with any great interest. *Moby-Dick* must, and should, be read, but the
quest to understand the perilous maritime world must not stop with Melville.

As the decades swiftly came and went, so too did the waning interest in maritime
fictional tragedies. After the Civil War ended and was still fresh in the memory of
American citizens, it was American author, Carl Van Doren, in 1917, who first began to
speak out about Melville’s literary value. *The American Novel*, published by Van Doren
in 1921, called *Moby-Dick* a pinnacle of American Romanticism. As society moved

\textsuperscript{30} Delbanco, *Melville*, 295.

\textsuperscript{31} Delbanco, *Melville*, 295.
further and further away from that dangerous “Age of Sail” that privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and other sea-based men wrote about, their deeds and experiences were buried under the weight of time and literary substance. The fictional products of their lives and tragedies were the only accessible evidence left over after the maritime literary craze had faded under the weight of westward expansion.

As this chapter unfolds so will the story of how sailors’ memories have vanished in favor of fictional comfort that helps avoid the realization that misery can be real. With fictional stories the reader has no preconceived fear that what he or she is reading did, could, or might occur in the real world. It was fiction, but true “autobiographical” stories written by Downs, Davis, Delano, and Collins were understood to be factual and therefore terrifying.32 These sailors’ works were intended to be read as truth, and they related them to their reading audience with the understanding that what they wrote had occurred and was the best representation of that event. Writers creating works of fiction had no need to relate such experiences, and thus what they produced made people feel calm in the sense that what they were reading was pure fiction and not a product of diverse sailors’ traumatic memories. Even if one of good fiction’s hallmarks is the creation of a believable and immersive, if even a disturbing, world, readers understand that what they read was seemingly the result of a literary master’s mind. Sailors’ traumatic ordeals caused physical and cognitive pain, as observed through their narratives that haunted sailors, but whose pain proved unable to be remedied.

**Daniel Collin’s Tragic Story**

Only days after surviving a harrowing shipwreck, watching the mental breakdown of his captain and crew, and subsequently being riddled with the pains of hunger and

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thirst, Maine native Collins, a sailor from the ship Betsey, confronted an even greater
danger and encountered a traumatic experience that eventually dominated his dreams.

Having found salvation on an island in the Cuban Keys, second mate Collins, his captain,
Ellis Hilton, first mate Joshua Merry and sailors Charles Manuel, Joshua Merry, Seth
Russell, Benjamin Bridge, and Detrey Jeome, the cook – all had found some help in the
form of five Spanish fishermen. They had been sailing in the area and helped them find
two concealed “clinker-built boats,” which were perfect for rowing and would assist in
helping them leave Cuba and sail back towards America. Although warned by the
Spanish fishermen that the boats belonged to an “anonymous crew” who would return in
five days’ time, Captain Hilton paid the fisherman forty-dollars for the “long-boats.”

That same night, Collins recalled that he had serious apprehension about the
purchase of these boats and feared that danger was on the horizon.33 Suddenly, as Collins
recalled, “an old dog belonging to the fishermen, commenced a most hideous
howling….Supposing some boat might be approaching, I went out, but could discover no
living being in motion.”34 Although Collins had been startled into thinking that danger
was coming upon them, it proved to be nothing and Collins remembered that “it was a
star light-night, the wind blowing fresh with a few flying scuds. When I returned…I set
down between two barrels of bread, against one of which I leaned my head, prepared to
give an early warning of any foul play.”35 Collins survived that peaceful night, but such
nights proved far and few between and quickly Collins and the rest of the surviving crew
of the destroyed Betsey found themselves in an unpredictable and deadly situation.

33 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 9.
34 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 9.
35 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 9.
The next morning the crew walked down to a nearby cove with the intent to bathe, but discovered a horrific site. Collins recalled that after they had cleaned and clothed themselves they found

at the high-water mark, a number of human skeletons – (except the skulls) – bleached and partly decayed. The bones of the fingers, hands, and ribs were entire. To me this was no very pleasant discovery, and I observed to Mr. Merry that “we might all be murdered in such a place without the possibility of its being known.”

But the rest of the crew thought nothing of it and assumed that the dead were from a possible nearby shipwreck that would have crashed on the reef and claimed these seamen for a watery grave, a fate similar to what Horace Holden had witnessed in the Pacific.

Soon, as Collins recalled, the actions by the Spanish fishermen gave him cause for alarm and he told Captain Hilton that he should prepare the “long boats” and that they must depart the area immediately. Of course, Collins, writing a couple years after these horrific events took place, looked back on this event and in hindsight. At that time, he might have felt anxious and feared events that might occur, but at that time, lacking hindsight, he could not have imagined such tragic events were on the horizon.

In the end, Collins remembered that he grew weary of their newfound companions, and his feelings of impending doom, and sought to alleviate these feelings by seeking his captain’s agreement that they needed to leave. Collins recalled that “as we had made arrangements to depart the next morning, all hands were preparing to turn in at an early hour when the master fisherman, observing that it was too hot to sleep in the house, drew his blanket over his shoulders and went out.”

As Collins later remembered, “it is a little singular that such a circumstance should not have produced on the minds of


my shipmates the same effect it did on mine, as the weather was then uncomfortably cool to me within the hut.” But, Collins wished to make it clear that, by this time he looked at himself as having what he called “sailor’s superstition” and that it was not his shipmates’ fault for not noticing these strange occurrences. Rather he had visions that “banished sleep from my eyes,” and this had occurred once before in his life, the night before the shipwreck of the Betsey.38

The master fisherman went missing, as Collins had suspected he would, and he informed First Mate Merry of what had happened. The crew was then ordered to continue preparations for their departure. The next morning the master fisherman returned, but as Collins noticed, it looked as if he had “been wading for several miles” since his trousers were wet to his hips. After breakfast, the master fisherman was then observed with his companions laughing and pointing in a far off direction towards Eastward. Looking in the direction, Collins was alarmed to notice that they were being watched by an anonymous ship and crew who were spying on them through their “spy glass.” Collins was told that the ship he observed was actually a “Spanish Cutter in search of Pirates,” but Collins recalled that he had “too often seen the grin of a Spaniard accompanied with the stab of his stiletto, to pass the circumstance unnoticed.”39 But for the meantime Collins and the rest of the crew took the fishermen’s word as truth. Suspicious of both the ship, which was about seven miles away, and the thoughts and actions of his Spanish companions, Collins met with Captain Hilton and first mate Merry, both of whom ordered the boat ready to leave. But then a shocking sound and sight hit the entire crew. In a single flash, the ship in the distance opened fire on the Betsey survivors. Collins remembered that

38 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 10.
39 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 11.
As I stood on the forecastle watching her, I saw one of her people forward, pointing at us what I supposed a spy glass; but in an instant the report of a musket and whistle of a bullet by my ears convinced me of my mistake. This was followed by the discharge of, at least, twenty-blunderbusses and muskets, from which the balls flew like hail-stones, lodging in various parts of our schooner; one of which pierced my trowsers and another Mr. Merry’s jacket, without any essential injury.⁴⁰

It would be one of many recollections inscribed in Daniel Collins memory, but its severity would not be fully understood for several years.

Collins recounted, to the best of his ability, what happened in those few moments as gun fire was rained down on them. Collins suffered no physical injury, but emotionally he might have begun to break down, like Downs had before him and Drayton after. Shocked by what had transpired around him, Collins recalled that “I remained on the forecastle watching” as the ship, which had fired upon them, sounded another barrage of fire and the “whistling of six or seven bullets by my ears, warned me of my danger.”⁴¹ Collins was forced to his knees in panic, “still anxious to ascertain the cause of this unprovoked outrage, until they approached within two or three hundred feet of us, when I prostrated myself on the deck.”⁴² The ship sailed closer and closer to them and as it drew nearer, the crew grew terrified and concerned with what would take place when the attackers were upon the Betsey crew.

As Collins watched, the master fisherman who had run off the night prior, came out from hiding below deck of the schooner and waved his hat to the other ship, which was followed by a cease fire from the anonymous firing vessel. At this point, Collins, and

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⁴⁰ Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 11.
⁴¹ Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 11.
⁴² Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 11.
probably the rest of the crew, knew they had been betrayed and cornered by greed and treachery. Collins remembered that

About forty or fifty feet abreast of us, she dropped anchor and gave orders for the canoe at our stern to come alongside, which one of our fishermen obeyed, and brought on board of us their Captain and three men. The supposed cutter was an open boat of about thirty-feet keel, painted red inside and black without, except a streak of white about two inches wide; calculated for rowing or sailing…She was manned by TEN SPAINAIRDS[sic], each armed with a blunderbuss, or musket, a machete, long knife, and pair of pistols. They were all dressed with neat jackets and trowsers, and wore pail-leaf hats. Their beards were very long, and appeared as though they had not been shaved for eight or nine months.43

One of those who came on board was a man who had, at least to Collins, an “extremely savage appearance.” With a scar on his face “extending some distance beyond the angles of the mouth and missing his front teeth, which was probably caused by a blow to the face from a cutlass,” this man also only had two fingers on his left hand, was very tall, and had some “authority over” the other men. Their captain, a stout man and of about “260 pounds,” reminded Collins of a “Guinea Captain” he had formerly seen. As Collins considered, “He was shaved after the manner of the Turks; the beard of his upper lip being very long – was richly dressed – armed with a machete and knife on one side, and a pair of pistols on the other; besides which, he wore a dirk within his vest.”44 Shortly after their arrival, the “savage” looking man met with Captain Hilton, examined his paperwork, which he had salvaged before the Betsey sank, and then listened to the harrowing story of their “shipwreck, sufferings, and providential escape to the Island.” As they recited the story of their survival to the Captain of the anonymous vessel that had opened fire on them, Collins noticed, and later remembered with intense drama, he “had

43 Collins, _Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine_, 11-12.

44 Collins, _Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine_, 11-12.
a savage jeer in his look…that would have robbed misery of her ordinary claims to compassion, and denies the unhappy sufferer even a solitary expression of sympathy.”45

In 1814 Lord Byron published *The Corsair*. Enormously popular and significant in its day, records show that it sold “ten thousand copies on its first day of sale.”46 The poem narrates the story of the pirate “Conrad” and how he was cast aside from a disapproving culture because of his crusade against humanity. Daniel Collins, whose anxiety and fear must have been rising to significant degree after, thought back on his observation of the leading figure of the boarding party and used a verse from Byron’s *The Corsair* to make sense out of that moment. The narcissist eye in front of him must have brought him to compare such a scene with that of the famous poem. Collins recited from Byron, “There was a laughing Devil in his sneer, [which] raised emotions both of rage and fear; and where his frown of hatred darkly fell, Hope withering fled – and Mercy signed farewell!”47 Finding in this poem some sense of personal clarity, Collins might have used it to help him cope with the emotional as well as physical condition of that tragic moment, or possibly his editor thought it might add dramatic effect. Collins recalled that after the invading party had entered the vessel he could see them passing to each other a long white jug, which, after they had all drank, they shook at us…When they had apparently consulted among themselves about an hour, they sent two men, with the jug, on board of us, from which we all drank sparingly, in order to avoid offense, and they returned to their own vessel, took in two more men and proceeded to the huts, which they entered and went


around several times, then came down to our long-boat and examiner her carefully.\textsuperscript{48}

After the invading party left the \textit{Betsey}, with the two canoes, Collins watched as one man went to the “armed boat and brought on board of us, all but the Captain and two of his men.” As Collins concluded, “Our little crew had thus far been the anxious spectators of these mysterious maneuvers.”\textsuperscript{49}

In a fleeting sense of safety, Collins recalled these “were circumstances which at one time encouraged the belief that we were in the hands of friends,” but soon Collins realized that these “pretended friends were calmly preparing for a foul and most unnatural murder.”\textsuperscript{50} Slowly, but surely, the Spaniards made it known that they could not be trusted. Even so, Captain Hilton had been “unwilling yet to yield his confidence in the treacherous Spaniard, who, I did not doubt, had already received the price of our blood. In this state of painful suspense, vibrating between hope and fear, we remained.”\textsuperscript{51}

Hilton’s worst fears were not realized until “the master fisherman threw on the deck a ball of cord, made of tough strong bark, about the size of a man’s thumb, from which they cut seven pieces of about nine feet each.”\textsuperscript{52} Knowing that they were tied together with this rope, Collins watched as they went to Captain Hilton and “attempted to take off his overcoat, but were prevented from a signal from their captain.” They then proceeded to bind the captain’s arms behind him, above his elbows, and drew them so tight “that he

\textsuperscript{48} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 12.

\textsuperscript{49} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 12.

\textsuperscript{50} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 12-13.


\textsuperscript{52} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 12-13.
groaned out in all the bitterness of his anguish.” 53 As Collins remembered, “my fears…were now confirmed;” they had been taken over by “PIRATES.”

**Collective Memory and Pirates**

Today when we think of “pirates,” we tend to think of what we have seen on the big screen, or read about in books, mostly in fictional imagery. In Walt Disney’s cinematic *Pirates of the Caribbean* franchise, pirates have become, yet again, a popular form of entertainment. They have glorious sword fights and sing songs that act as nostalgia bringing us back to a simpler, yet more vulgar and dirty time in maritime controversy. The interesting thing about movies such as these is their attempt, at times, to bring actual historical characters and events into the motion picture in order to lay claim to some semblance of reality. Whether depicting the East India Company, the infamous pirate Captain Blackbeard, or bringing in the use of privateers to hunt down and track pirates, these movies combine those people and events with maritime legends like Davy Jones’s locker, the mythical kraken, and the fountain of youth. These movies are theatrical fun and illustrate a maritime world that is savvy, dangerous, but of course fictional. Yet when one thinks of pirates today, one’s mind is quickly, if even subconsciously, filled with images from those films, even if you have not seen them, but only observed images online or stories from friends and family. The imagination of the maritime world is created, crafted, and established from those fictional and cinematic images. Although real pirates existed, and sailed the ocean for several decades, plundering, murdering, and brutalizing those they met, our images of those “real” pirates are difficult to master and define. Instead, we revert to what we have seen, even if those

are fictional depictions. These movies have, themselves, taken the stories of actual pirates and transformed them for fictional purposes.

The dreaded Welsh pirate Bartholomew Roberts, who raided ships off the American and West Africa coast between 1719-1722, was depicted in the comedic drama from the 1980s *The Princess Bride*, the film adaptation of William Goldman’s 1973 fantasy novel, in the form of farm boy Westley seeking his lost love and turning out to be only one who had taken on the name Dread Pirate Robert to strike fear in his opponents. From 1908 until 2012 no fewer than one hundred and fifty films have depicted and fictionalized the life and times of pirates of the “Golden Age of Piracy,” which lasted from 1650-1730 and extended beyond into the early 1800s. Those pirates who were active in the early 1800s were predominantly Spanish plundering off the coast of Cuba, which intersects with Daniel Collins’ tragic experience and subsequent narrative. Marcus Rediker, a historian of the maritime world, as well as of piracy, wrote that

The pirates of the 1710s and 1720s were among the greatest ever in the long history of robbery at sea. They stood at the very pinnacle of what is called the golden age of piracy, which spanned roughly 1650 to 1730. This era featured three distinct generations of pirates; the buccaneers of 1650-80, the mostly Protestant sea dogs of England, northern France, and the Netherlands, exemplified by the Jamaica raider Henry Morgan, who hunted wild game on deserted islands and attacked ships of Catholic Spain; the pirates of the 1690s, the generation of Henry Avery and William Kidd…and…the pirates of the years 1716-1726, who were the most numerous and successful of the three. They were epitomized by Edward Teach and Bartholomew Roberts, who attacked ships of all nations and created a crisis in the lucrative Atlantic system of trade.

“They also generated most of the images,” Rediker observes,

of pirates that live on in modern popular culture, from the swashbuckling figures such as Blackbeard, to the unnamed, unlimbed pirate who was the likely model


for Robert Louis Stevenson’s Long John Silver in *Treasure Island*, to the dreaded black flag with skull and bones, the Jolly Roger.\textsuperscript{56}

In this age, the story of the pirate has been transformed from that of brutality to that of cinematic enjoyment. Although the reality of maritime trauma at the hands of pirates can been seen and understood through these fictional representations, it is, in the end, fiction finding a muse in fact.

One may ask what the point of all this is and why is it important to understand the maritime world historically, not as Hollywood entertainment. The main reason is that when most people watch movies like *Pirates of the Caribbean*, that is how they get their understanding of that maritime world and the types of things that took place in it. Of course, people should not go to the movies, especially these types, to get a history lesson. But it is important to note that many people’s minds are influenced by the images they observe and when they do seek to know more, it is movie images that might stay with them, collectively and culturally. These cinematic representations of piracy shape their imagination even after they consider the true stories that they eventually uncover. Marita Sturken has argued that the historical image is constructed in “the realm of cinematic and television narrative, as both drama and docudrama. The Hollywood docudrama is a central element in the construction of national meaning.”\textsuperscript{57} It is possible that films about the early American maritime world “retain a powerful currency; they provide popular narratives of that interesting oceanic realm,” which “overshadows documentary images and written texts” and according to Sturken, history is being written “through Hollywood

\textsuperscript{56} Rediker, *Villains of all Nations*, 8.

\textsuperscript{57} Sturken, *Tangled Memories*, 23.
narrative films produced for popular audiences.” As Sturken concludes, “films are ascribed historical accuracy by the media and reenact famous documentary images,” which represent the history of the maritime world to a “generation too young to have seen it represented” in another way. Watching as Walt Disney’s *Pirates of the Caribbean* star Johnny Depp portrays Captain Jack Sparrow, who fights and drinks his way across the high seas, leaves one with a whitewashed image of the maritime world as one of sociability and luxury, even if seemingly dangerous, for unknown or unappreciated reasons. They fail to recognize the brutality of the pirate, the type that Daniel Collins went head-to-head and toe-to-toe with. Rediker sees not so much negativity in the world of pirates, but instead a cultural group with common fears and wants, utilized in an attack against capitalism and a world where they view themselves as nationless and “villains of all nations.”

Even so, in her chapter titled “Nascent Socialists or Resourceful Criminals: A Reconsideration of Transatlantic Piracy, 1690-1726” Crystal Williams takes aim at Rediker’s analysis and seeks to show that pirates were nothing more than greedy, brutal, and murderous thieves who thought only about themselves. They killed unmercifully. As Williams argues, for years scholars have often accepted and used “Rediker’s analysis as near fact” and his “work on pirates is a model of comprehensive and insightful


60 Rediker, *Villains of all Nations*, 73, 84-90.

research, yet is still an interpretation that should not go unquestioned.” In her examination she writes that Rediker has long since argued that “pirates formed a social order characterized by egalitarianism, with power in the hands of the crew. Rediker contends that men became pirates in order to rebel against the social and economic oppression they experienced in the hierarchical, capitalist world and that in certain periods the continuation of their collective lifestyle became more important than the pursuit of prizes.” From this position, Williams disagrees and argues that “Rediker obscures the truth by insisting on finding noble motivations…while pirate crews may have exhibited some collective tendencies they were not organized on a basis of egalitarianism, nor were they anti-capitalist. In fact, they simply used whatever means necessary, including crime, to further their individual interests.” In a thorough and expansive examination of many different pirates, Bellamy, Roberts, Fly, and others, figures from their heyday, Williams concludes that

Pirates were the ultimate opportunists, taking advantage of the crossroads of a multitude of economic and political events at precisely the right moment…in a barren new land where money meant everything, there was no legal or social apparatus to coerce men into abiding by the laws and rules of civilization. The fact that unhappy men chose to take advantage of this situation does not necessarily imply that they were somehow unhappy with this new world of capital. Rather, they saw an opportunity: they were attempting to take a part in capitalist enterprise through the easiest method they saw as available to them – crime. They chose to become criminals – pirates – not because they were anti-capitalist, but precisely because they wanted to take advantage of capitalism.

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64 Williams, “Nascent Socialists or Resourceful Criminals,” in Pirates, Jack Tar and Memory, in Pirates, Jack Tar and Memory, ed. Gilje, 32.

65 Williams, “Nascent Socialists or Resourceful Criminals,” in Pirates, Jack Tar and Memory, in Pirates, Jack Tar and Memory, ed. Gilje, 44.
In academic and scholarly circles, disagreement persists over what drove men to become pirates and how, in the course of pursuing that profession, they behaved.

Therefore, it is not surprising that playwrights, screenwriters, and novelists have painted various and conflicting views of men who came to be known as pirates. Disney’s depiction with *Pirates of the Caribbean*, which interestingly enough was based on one of their rides at their theme park in Orlando, Florida, is just another example of cultural cooption of historical reality. It takes some sense of reality, the existence of pirates, and transforms it into a dramatic and thrilling tale of danger, gold, and triumph. They transform reality to fit into a form of entertainment and, in so doing, craft an imaginary depiction of the maritime world of trauma and fear. Even so, that traumatic world can never be fully understood because the “traumatic” reality of the maritime world cannot be copied into blockbuster films nor can it be emulated in literature. People watch, but they know what they observe to be fiction, even if it does craft their imagery of the maritime past, so they can never truly be unnerved, anxious, or fearful at what they have watched or read. They can watch as Jack Sparrow, Dread Pirate Roberts, and others battle it out with everyone and anyone, but the audience cannot truly fear the pirate’s demise as they could if they were reading the tale of Daniel Collins.

Yes, it is true that the narrative of Daniel Collins, like those of Horace Holden, William Torrey, or even to a degree Barnabas Downs, can serve the same purpose as a film like *Master and Commander* or *Pirates of the Caribbean*. In some instances, as this dissertation has argued, sailors have added hindsight into the fabric of their story, as well as political, religious, and cultural messages that seek to explain their traumatic past through the current mood of society. But these moments of inclusion are separate from
their consideration of their troubling memories. Many of these sailors utilized learned
atitudes both to avoid their traumatic past and to shape how they understood that past to
have occurred. They are only human and such failings can be understood through a
subconscious effort to explain themselves and what they went through.

**The Tragedy of Daniel Collins Continues**

Although sailors’ narratives share similarities with past literature and current
movies, their traumatic exposure set them apart from fictional representations of these
same types of maritime events. When combined together, their memory and the traumatic
stress of that event, these sailors’ narratives and legacy move far past the fictional dramas
that have thus far gained greater notoriety and fame. Movies today provide audiences
with images of the maritime past that they will take with them and, on their own, create
their own imaginary idea of what that traumatic world looked like based on those
fictional images. This is not unlike what took place when Herman Melville and Edgar
Allen Poe, as well as James Fenimore Cooper and Richard Dana Jr. crafted their own
stories of the maritime world and the traumatic events that took place in it. Although their
stories eventually overshadowed the works of sailors like Collins and Downs, they did
have the power to create a close interpretation of what the maritime world was like
because, for the most part, they all had spent time in the maritime profession and could
speak from experience. But for an audience not seeking to recognize or come face-to-face
with factual tragedy or stressful memories, they gravitated towards fiction and crafted an
image of the maritime world that worked well with their level of comfort, prior
knowledge, and, lastly, their desire for adventure and literary brilliance not misadventure
or the writings of traumatized sailors.
“Without temptation or provocation,” the Spanish pirates, whom Collins then encountered, began the process of

cruelly torturing one whom shipwreck had thrown among them, a penniless sailor, reduced to sickness to an almost helpless condition, and entreating with all the tenderness of a penitent that they would not cut him off in the blossom of his sins, and before he had reached the meridian of life – reminding them of the wife and parents left behind.⁶⁶

Collins recalled that this anxiety was too much and “I burst into tears and arose,” darting towards his enemy, “involuntarily as if to sell my life at the dearest rate,” but was denied and “shoved back by one of the Pirates who gave me a severe blow on the breast with the muzzle of his cocked blunderbuss.”⁶⁷ In a seemingly short burst of negative and anxious emotion, Collins attempted to both rebel against and submit to his suffering. A scene “of wo [sic] ensued” that Collins argued “would have tried the stoutest heart, and it appeared to me that even they endeavored to divert their minds from it, by constant signing and laughing,” which was so loud it drowned out “the sound of our lamentations.”⁶⁸ Even at this point in his captivity, Collins oscillated, like many victims of captivity, between “periods of submission and more active resistance” and while he begged for his life to the pirates, he soon engaged in a process of emotional and physical surrender.⁶⁹

Collins, Hilton, and the rest of the Betsey crew were soon told that they would be brought to Matanzas as prisoners of war, but as the Pirates began to tie each of the Betsey sailors up, they found themselves completely in the pirates’ control, and their future was anything but certain. “They rolled us,” as Collins explained, with terrible indifference and
looked upon their “prizes” as though they had no human quality and were incapable of sensitivity. The sailors were then thrown into one of the canoes alongside the vessel, and as Collins remembered, “they threw me with such force,” into the boat “that I struck the back of my neck against the seat of the canoe and broke it.”70 The seven surviving crew members of the Betsey were, after this physical handling, sitting in two separate canoes when they were given a dire order. They were informed by one of the pirates that they were not going to be brought to Matanzas after all, but instead they all were to have their throats cut, “which information was accompanied with the most appalling signs, by drawing their knives across their throats, imitating stabbing and various other tortures.”71 Just when he thought that they might at least live to see Matanzas and therefore might be able to secure his freedom, he was struck with reality and brought to a heightened state of anxiety, which Collins had suffered from regularly during this traumatic event exposure. Collins would suffer even more soon after, but in the years to come he would also continue to suffer from this traumatic exposure, as well as the other harrowing memories that had been formed and would continue to be created.

In the power of the Spanish corsairs Collins and his companions were carried alongside the “piratical schooner” in their two separate canoes, when fire arms were passed down from the schooner to the pirates on board the boat. The “arms chest,” which sat, covered by canvas in the stern of the small boat, once opened, showed a fantastic sight. In it were several long knives and machetes, which when taken out were examined with “the greatest scrutiny” and passed to each pirate stationed in both of the canoes. As Collins remembered, this was for the “expressed purpose of murdering us all.” According

70 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 13.
71 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 13.
to Collins, the pirates rowed or walked alongside the canoes for several miles away from their vessel. They maintained a depth of about three feet and with the pirates hauling them along, “one to each of our crew, torturing us all the way by drawing their knives across our throats, grasping the same, and pushing us back under the water which had been taken in by rocking the canoes.”\textsuperscript{72} In what must have felt like hours, Collins and the rest of his shipmates were inflicted with humiliating treatment and traumatic exposure, all of which drove them to utter despair. They pleaded with their perpetrators, “some of us were in the most humiliating manner beseeching of them to spare our lives, and others with uplifted eyes, were again supplicating that Devine mercy which had preserved them from the fury of the elements.”\textsuperscript{73} As Collins and the crew remained in this state of panic and fear, the pirates sang, laughed, and told them that “Americans were very good beef for their knives.” But soon they were brought to the entrance of a cove, the same area where they had previously observed the human bones. There the canoes were hauled “abreast of each other, from twelve to twenty feet apart, preparatory to our execution.”

As death drew near, the crew of the \textit{Betsey} felt as if the

\begin{quote}
stillness of death was now around us – for the very flood-gates of feeling had been burst asunder and exhausted grief at its fountain. It was a beautiful morning – not a cloud to obscure the rays of the sun – and the clear blue sky presented a scene too pure for deeds of darkness. But the lonely sheet of water, on which, side by side, we lay, presented that hopeless prospect which is more ably described by another. “No friend, no refuge near; All, all is false and treacherous around; All that they touch, or taste, or breathe, is Death.”\textsuperscript{74}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{72} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 14.

\textsuperscript{73} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 14.

\textsuperscript{74} Collins, \textit{Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine}, 14.
For Collins this atmosphere, this clear blue sky, provided “for a scene too pure for deeds of darkness” and their hopeless prospect, as well as death, commenced without them able pass a parting glance on one another.

In mere seconds Collins appallingly watched as these pirates seized Captain Hilton by his hair and,

bent his head and shoulders over the gun-wale, and I could distinctly hear them chopping the bone of the neck. They wrung his neck, separated the head from the body, by a slight draw of the sword, and let it drop into the water; - there was a dying shriek – a convulsive struggle – and all I could discern was the arms dangling over the side of the canoe, and the ragged stump pouring out the blood like a torrent.75

This heartbreaking moment produced a disturbing memory, in both sight and sound, which assisted Collins in remembering the horror of what happened to his captain.

Collins then watched as first mate Merry was struck down. Collins recalled that

There was an imploring look in the innocent and youthful face of Mr. Merry that would have appealed to the heart of any one but a Pirate. As he rose on his knees, in the posture of a penitent, supplicating for mercy even on the verge of eternity, he was prostrated with a blow of the cutlass, his bowels gushing out of the wound. They then pierced him through the breast in several places with a long pointed knife, and cut his throat from ear to ear.76

One can only imagine the intensity of emotion that overwhelmed Collins as he knew that his turn to meet the “executioner” was soon approaching. In his narrative Collins remembered that he watched as Captain Hilton’s dog, which had attempted on several occasions to rescue his “master,” but was repulsed by “blood hounds in human form,” whined beside Hilton’s lifeless body. Collins used this upsetting moment to elaborate further one of the main themes of his narrative, which was the complete cold-heartedness of pirates and “that even brutal cruelty would be glutted with the blood of two innocent,

75 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 14.

76 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 14-15.
unoffending victims.” As blood flowed into the cove, Collins watched as two other crewmen, Bridge and the cook, were “pierced through the breast, as they had Merry, in several places with their knives, and then split their heads open with their cutlasses.” As Collins recollected, “Their dying groans had scarcely ceased, and I was improving the moment of life that yet remained,” when

I heard the blow behind me – the blood and brains that flew all over my head and shoulders, warned me that poor old Russel had shared the fate of the others; and as I turned my head to catch the eye of my executioner, I saw the head of Russel severed in two nearly its whole length, with a single blow of the cutlass, and even without the decency of removing his cap.

In seemingly several shocking moments during one long and terrible traumatic event, Collins remained still and silent, watching as his crew members were slaughtered around him. Then, allowing some hope to come into this tragic series of events, Collins observed Manuel leap overboard and attempt to swim to safety. In a moment that resembled Joseph Bates’ flight from British impressment or the escape of Lumbard on board the *Globe* after he had been stabbed numerous times and thrown overboard alive, Manuel had loosened the ties around his wrists and leaped for salvation. At about the same time that Collins noticed Manuel abscond, he recalled that “My eyes were fixed on my supposed executioner, watching the signal of my death.” Collins watched as his “executioner” moved towards him and as he drew near, then standing on “my right side and partly behind me – my head, which was covered with a firm tarpaulin hat, was turned

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in the directions that brought my shoulders fore and aft the canoe.”

Collins waited for the motion that would initiate his death. Collins recalled that the blow came – it divided the top of my hat, struck my head so severely as to stun me, and glanced off my left shoulder, taking skin and some flesh in its way, and divided my pinion cord on that arm. I was so severely stunned that I did not leap from the canoe.

Having survived the colossal blow from the cutlass at the hands of “death,” Collins, though stunned, shocked, and in a condition of confusion, “pitched over the left side” of the canoe “and was just arising from the water, not yet my length from her, as a Pirate threw his knife which struck me, but did not retard my flight an instant; and I leaped forward through the water, expecting a blow from behind at every step,” one that would end his nightmare for good.

Collins recalled that although “the shrieks of the dying had ceased – the scene of horrid butchery in the canoes was now over – Manuel and I were in the water about knee deep – two Pirates after me, and all the rest, with the fisherman, except one Pirate, after Manuel.” Collins and Manuel fled as fast and as far as they could, at one point running in semi-circular patterns to keep their predator at a far enough distance and continuing to attempt to make it to the bush. Eventually, Collins, who ran towards the mouth of the cove, lost sight of Manuel as he made it to the woods, but had one pirate within ten feet of him who continued to attempt to strike him down, endeavoring to reach him and “yelling in the most savage manner.” Collins reflected that he could easily have been recaptured, but the trees and bushes were so thick that the pirates’ swords continuously

got tangled and they would have to stop to free themselves from the grasp of nature. Collins, then barefoot, used these moments to gain distance from them and although badly injured from their swords and the natural environment around him, he was able to get far enough away to pause for a moment to take in what had just occurred. His head was painfully swollen, his legs cut from oyster shells, and a shoulder “smarted severely.”

Collins composed himself, but could hear the “cracking of bushes, and the Pirates hallooing to each other, which increased my apprehensions, supposing they might discover my track.”

Collins was not discovered and he continued forward refusing to stop until struck down by a pirate cutlass. If that moment had not come, he would not stop. He ran for what, as he described, felt like an eternity and finally decided as the sun set to pass the night “leaning against a bunch of mangroves, with the water up to my hips.”

Unknown to Collins at that time he had seen the last of those specific pirates and, although not safe from their power, he was on his way toward salvation. Yet as he wrote, his mind could not be treated and although he knew his physical wounds would heal, he feared for his emotional state and his future if he was to survive. “Such had been my fatigue and mental excitement,” Collins remembered that even in this unpleasant situation, I slept soundly, until I was disturbed by a vision of the horrible scene in the canoes – the images of Capt. Hilton and Mr. Merry, mangled as when I last saw them, came before my eyes; and in my fancied attempt to rescue them, I awoke, but could not convince myself it was a dream, until I grasped my own flesh.

As it had been three days since Collins had eaten or drank anything of significance, he continued to march forward hoping that the worst of his troubles were over. But he knew

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83 Collins, *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine*, 16.

84 Collins, *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine*, 16.

85 Collins, *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine*, 16-17.
in hindsight that more troubles lay ahead, even if they would not be as traumatic as those he had lived through. Although Collins had experienced the last of a series of violent events, he would suffer terrible hunger and thirst that drove him to the brink of “insanity” and added to this long traumatic ordeal. But he would eventually survive and his written recollection would be a testament to maritime tragedy. His work would possibly fuel the collective imagination of a world in which pirates were real and their inhumanity unmatched in the annals of maritime history, at least in the recollections of those who suffered and experienced the steel of the cutlass.

**Traumatic Stress and Oceanic Memories**

In a moment that resembled what Jewitt and Lay experienced, Collins was faced with profound dreadfulness that only ended with bloodshed and a distressing memory reminiscent of those shared by other sailors. The sailors that have been presented throughout this dissertation all shared a traumatic thread in their maritime lives. They all sought something beyond themselves on the brigs and ships they sailed, but often found only heartache and maritime tragedy. They were not the only sailors who experienced such sufferings, but these seamen separated themselves from their contemporaries when they transcribed their miseries into narratives and chose to give their harrowing memories a physical vernacular. Some experienced shipwrecks, others cruel captivities, while even more watched as friends and shipmates were massacred in front of them by warring enemies, native island inhabitants, or pirates. Those traumatic events inscribed “pictures” in their memory that eventually compelled them to write about their ordeals.

Historians like Dennis Brandt and Eric Dean, as noted, have considered issues of trauma and post-traumatic stress in support of their own theories. They have argued that
men like Angelo Crapsey, Civil War soldiers, and victims of post-traumatic stress generally, were inflicted with emotional pain that imposed on them considerable psychological limitations and a stressful postwar life that led them to withdraw from society and, sometimes to suicide, insanity, or criminal actions. What Collins witnessed and wrote about, like other sailor witnesses in this study, indicates a severe emotional break from reality, enough apparently to cause him to suffer from what he witnessed for the rest of his life. Collins watched men butchered and then their body parts thrown around like prizes of conquest. The image of such brutality caused a terrible recollection of that event to be imprinted on Collins’ mind, as such horrors had with others.

Daniel Collins experienced a series of traumatic episodes and their haunting images and strove long after to make sense of those tragedies through his narrative. His memory must be assessed for both the persistence and consequentiality of these memories to the author and his reasoning for retelling these misfortunes and seeking their subsequent publication. Daniel Schacter has written that

Persistence…thrives in an emotional climate of disappointment, sadness, and regret…the likelihood of getting stuck in the past depends in part on how a person responds in the immediate aftermath of the trauma…long-term psychological trouble can also result from attempting to avoid thinking about a traumatic event in its immediate aftermath…though the prospect of forgetting may seem soothing after a disappointment or trauma, such attempts are likely to backfire.\(^{86}\)

Although many of these sailors probably attempted to suppress, or were overcome by dissociation in the days and weeks after their trauma, sooner or later those past tragic images forcefully pushed themselves into the foreground. Men like Daniel Collins had no choice but to reconsider those disturbing experiences and in so doing to paint a violent picture of the early American maritime world.

\(^{86}\) Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 174-176.
Attempts to avoid memories of visions of shipmates killed or drowning, or images of their ship, their home away from home, getting bombarded by wind, rain, and waves, and sinking, “prevent” a normal “process of habituation,” which occurs when trauma victims attempt to consider and re-experience those emotions in a safe environment.\(^{87}\) As Schacter has concluded, suppressed emotions retain “an extra charge” that enhances and protects “persistence.” Still, as Judith Herman has argued, people who have been “taken hostage” show long-lasting effects from “a single traumatic event.”\(^{88}\) In a Dutch study, which Herman uses to support her theories about captivity trauma, she argues that “On long-term follow-up six to nine years after the event, almost half the survivors (46 percent) still reported constrictive symptoms, and one-third (32 percent) still had intrusive symptoms. While general anxiety symptoms tended to diminish over time, psychosomatic symptoms actually got worse.”\(^{89}\) As Herman, seemingly in agreement with Schacter, argued, “only the repeated reliving of the moment of horror temporarily breaks through the sense of numbing and disconnection.”\(^{90}\) Even years later “traumatized people feel that a part of themselves has died.”\(^{91}\) As we have observed with Daniel Drayton and several others, they came to feel, at certain times, that they should have died or committed suicide.

\(^{87}\) Schacter, *Seven Sins of Memory*, 177.


Daniel Collins suffered from a severe negative traumatic moment that, as he admitted, plagued him for the rest of this life. As Herman observes, “Trauma inevitably brings loss. Even those who are lucky enough to escape physically unscathed still lose internal psychological structures of a self securely attached to others.” Those who are harmed, physically, as Herman concluded, “lose in addition their sense of bodily integrity.” Like our other sailors, by writing his narrative Collins may have illustrated the observations of Schacter, Herman, and other psychologists, who argue that re-exposure to trauma through recall, instead of trying to forget can actually help to understand the painful recollections that traumatized them since the event took place. By facing their past horrors head on they may have sought some sort of release and comfort. But it was a temporary solution, helped by dissociation, which apparently could never permanently put to rest fully their harrowing memories of past maritime disaster. The retelling of past trauma may “plunge” the victims of horror into “profound grief,” and therefore recovery and consolation prove unattainable and distant. Even as the victim resists remembering past trauma, both out of pride and fear, refusing to remember and grieve in a sense to deny the victim’s enemy, or perpetrator any sense of victory over him, these terrible memories proved irrepressible. These men, who experienced both sporadic, negative, and dogged memories and lived through a difficult ordeal of suffering

92 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 17.

93 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 188.

94 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 188.

95 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 188. See also, B. Raphael, The Anatomy of Bereavement (New York: Basic Books, 184; and C.M. Parkes, Bereavement: Studies of Grief in Adult Life (London: Tavistock, 1986).
in captivity and brutality, lived in a unique condition where they could attempt neither to forget nor remember their dreadful maritime past.

**The End of Daniel Collins’ Traumatic Event**

Daniel Collins’ traumatic experience was terribly severe and those recollections remained with him for the rest of his life. Although he had survived the pirate’s “cutlass,” he endured extreme suffering as he underwent starvation and ran, as well as swam, through terrible pain. The entire time Collins’ teetered on the edge of death. Even as he made his escape along miles of shoreline, Collins reflected on the death of his companions as well as his own painful physical and emotional injuries. He worried that he would be unable to continue his trek towards unknown safety. At times so weak that he could barely walk and ignorant of the area or where he was going, Collins recalled that

> I traveled through mud and water, and the hunger and thirst I had endured, having tasted neither food nor drink…and to add to my sufferings, my almost naked body was covered with moschetoes [sic], attracted by the blood and sores produced by my escape from Cruz del Padre.96

As he traveled, unbeknownst to him on what proved to be mainland Cuba, Collins made it to a yawl, which provided him with a sense of safety of sorts. He wrote that

> The thought struck my mind that this boat, like our own, might have preserved some unfortunate crew from the fury of the storm, in order to offer them up to the pitiless Pirate, who, perhaps, had not suffered a solitary individual to escape and say, that the vengeance of man, on these encrimsoned shores, had sacrificed those whom the mercy of God had spared amid the dangers of his “mighty deep.”97

Daniel Collins continued his difficult journey and fought against starvation and dehydration. But he maintained his drive and found sustenance where he could. Naked, moving at a rapid pace, and looking for some sign of hope, Collins was beaten by the

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elements and physical injuries, just six days removed from the massacre of his shipmates. He continued to pray “to HIM whose mercy-seat had so often covered me from the tempest,” but wished to meet some human being to whom he could relate his sufferings, “and the murder of my companions.” Still, Collins recalled that

My life glass appeared to be nearly up, and I now began to yield all hopes of being relieved. My feet and limbs began to swell, from the inflammation of the sores, and my limes, the only sustenance I had, although they preserved life, began to create gnawing pains in my stomach and bowels.98

Suffering, but determined to continue, Collins “wandered on,” at times erratic and misguided, but he finally discovered “husks of corn” that started to “renew [his] spirits.” He began to believe that he might actually survive his horrible ordeal. Eventually, after traveling another three miles from where he found the “corn,” Collins encountered a living being. This man, a black slave,

took me by the hand and led me into a large house, occupied by his master, the owner of the plantation. A bench was brought to me, on which I seated myself, and the master of the house, a grey headed Spaniard, probably turned of seventy, came toward me with an air of kindness, understanding from the black I had been shipwrecked.

This gray-haired Spaniard cared for Collins by treating his wounds and “when examining my sores, he discovered on my arm a handsome impression of the Crucifix that had been pricked in with indelible ink, in the East Indies some years before, which he kissed with apparent rapture.” For several days the Spaniard, his servants or slaves, and several others, cared for Collins. They were located on a coffee, sugar, tobacco, and “Indian corn” plantation called St. Claire, which was owned by one family, consisting of about thirty members. Although Collins described the beauty of this place, he argued that the state of his body did not allow him to enjoy the luxuries or comfort offered to him. After

98 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 19.
staying in St. Claire for three days, Collins received help from a local slave, the only person there who could speak English and formally a native of St. Thomas, for the permission of one of the heads of the plantation to transport him to Matanzas. As Collins prepared to depart, three armed men calling themselves Spanish soldiers stormed into his lodging and demanded that he come with them because they “had a commission to present me to some officer of Government at Villa Clara, on the ground that some suspicion rested on me.” With help from a local carpenter and the English-speaking slave, Collins was allowed to continue his journey towards Matanzas. They would accompany him on their journey for several miles and then Collins would be left to take the rest of the journey on his own.99

Collins had not proceeded far when he saw,

Coming out of a wheelwright’s shed in a field beside the road, a negro and Spaniard, both armed; who, coming up, seized me by the collar, and before I could defend myself, wrested the cane from my hand, dragged me out of the path, and commenced stamping on and beating me with the cane, a blow of which over my shoulder, left a scar which I shall bear to my grave.100

Collins fell to his knees and pointed to his sores, begging his attackers to stop. But that only motivated them further to continue their “cruelty.” They would have killed him, if they had not been scared off, but not before they robbed him of all money he had, which the carpenter had given him. Once again, Collins was left bruised, bloodied, and with nothing but his jacket and his wits to take on the elements and whatever other obstacles and dangers he faced. After another day’s travel Collins reached a local village, one that the carpenter spoke of, and there was treated well and given much needed provisions for


100 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 23. Collins was given this cane from the local carpenter he had met. Ironically this instrument, which should have been used for his protection, became a weapon used against him by, once again, another vicious attacker.
him to continue his journey to Matanzas. At this village he was able to come into contact with a few English-speaking men to whom he related his horrific tale. After a few hours he continued his journey knowing that he was very close to his destination by this point.

For the first time Collins walked towards Matanzas “leisurely along, admiring those beauties of nature for which my fears had hitherto precluded a relish.” With his fears behind him, Collins was able to admire those Cuban surroundings and think to himself of where he had come from and how. Then he could observe the majestic beauty of those plains, sea, and wilderness that had proved to be scenes of his traumatic past, but had transformed into signs of his pleasing present and promising future. Still, even as he observed the beauty around him, Collins recalled:

How could I repose amid such a scene as this, without contrasting it with that at the COVE; where I had literally made my escape through the blood of my companions, whose mangled carcasses were now perhaps mouldering on the shore.

One day after contemplating his past and present, Collins arrived at Matanzas at about eight o’clock in the evening and proceeded, while fearing that pirate spies might be around seeking to kill him before he could relate his story, to meet with a US Agent named Mr. Adams. Collins was then under the care of the United States, his home country, and his emotional state cannot clearly be discerned, but must have seemed joyous to all who witnessed it.

The next day Collins met with Captain Holms of the ship Shamrock, a vessel that had also sailed out from Wiscasset, Maine, a few days before the brig Betsey. The Shamrock was owned by well-known and wealthy ship owner, the Honorable Abiel


Wood, who had owned several vessels that had plied the sea out of Wiscasset, Maine during the “age of sail.” Captain Holms listened to Collin’s tale and “conducted” him to board the Shamrock where he would have his sores dressed, be given refreshment, and go to the Governor’s officer where he would “give oath to the murder of my shipmates.”

Collins was accompanied by both American and British officers, who assured him that they served to protect him. He related the story of his journey to the Governor, who “enquired of what nation were the Pirates?” Collins replied that the pirates belonged to Spain and when asked if he could affirm that, he answered, “I can tell a Spaniard as far as I can see his evil eye.” The Governor, as Collins remembered watching, then “bit his lip, shrugged his shoulders, and concluded by observing, ‘Spaniards have to bear all the piracies.’”

Collins spent that night on board the vessel Shamrock, while the US schooner Ferret sailed off in search of the pirates and fisherman who had killed his shipmates. At this point, Collins remembered that

No one who had seen me in health would now have recognized me; for I was reduced to a living skeleton. My head and face were very badly bruised and swollen, from the beating received on my journey – the skin of the latter had peeled entirely off, and I had been nearly blinded since leaving the Keys – add to this, the wounds and sores on my feet and legs had degenerated into foul, unhealthy ulcers, that caused them to swell enormously.

Collins recalled that the “American ship masters and sailors who saw me on my first arrival at Matanzas” constantly professed that

they had never beheld a human being more disfigured by sufferings, or emaciated by wasting disease. I was soon surrounded by American tars, whose generous

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103 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 26.
104 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 26.
105 Collins, Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine, 26.
hearts were as ready to relieve my present wants, as were their powerful arms, to
defend me from future insult or injury.\textsuperscript{106}

He was under American protection. Yet to Collins this protection was more than defense,
it was emotional protection as well. Collins eventually joined the US schooner *Ferret* in
its search for the treacherous pirates who inflicted suffering upon him, but after twenty-
one days and turning up no sign of pirates the *Ferret* returned to Matanzas. Although his
physical injuries had healed, Collins believed that his “general health” was wasting away
and therefore sought passage home so that he could die among friends.

As the *Shamrock* prepared to depart for Maine with Collins on board, he was met
by a familiar individual, Manuel, “who had numbered” Collins “among the murdered of
the crew.” In a moment of pure chance and circumstance, Manuel happened upon Collins
and they spoke of their flights to freedom from the bloodied cove. As it turned out,
Manuel had made his way to the brush in the moments after Captain Hilton had been
murdered. He had hidden there for several hours only returning to the cove when the
pirates were gone, and then proceeded to steal one of their canoes. Manuel was
eventually captured by a Spanish armed brig, carried to Havana and thrown into prison.
But he was later released when an American commander of the vessel *Sea-Gull* heard of
this American’s fate and demanded his being turned over to him. It was a brief reunion
between the two surviving member of the *Betsey*, but it must have been emotional.
Collins departed Matanzas towards Maine on the *Shamrock* and did not attempt to take
part in a second cruise on the *Ferret* in search of the rogue Spanish pirates. Collins later
learned that on that second cruise, the *Ferret*, several hours out of Matanzas, fell prey to

weather and capsized with most of her crew lost. Daniel Collins had escaped another tragedy as he sailed home to Wiscasset, Maine and on 2 April 1825 arrived home.\textsuperscript{107}

**The Collective Meaning of Traumatic Maritime Memory**

Whether a traumatic experience, devastating recollection, or a seemingly common, but powerful, memory, these sailors experienced what historian Robert McGlone has called an “aphoristic” memory. As he wrote, the term “aphoristic” epitomizes a “distinctive class of reminiscences characterized by unquestioned belief about special moments in life.”\textsuperscript{108} Traumatic memories were “special memories,” especially as they were utilized by those who lived through them and those who read about them and collectively interpreted them. Sailors reflected on traumatic events, which they lived through, and assigned them some personal, and then eventually, collective meaning. Throughout these pages we have seen just how privateers, whalers, impressed sailors, and nautical abolitionist, attempted to use “special memories,” whether good or bad, in these cases mostly bad, and how they have come to form what can been considered as “aphoristic memories.” These types of memories, McGlone asserts, “confirm one or more cherished truths about the rememberer’s sense of self or about his or her understanding of life in general.”\textsuperscript{109} Like McGlone’s subject of the memories of Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and the creation of the Declaration of Independence, these sailors’ narratives can be used to discuss the same overall idea. Although their memories indicate and reflect a rich image of their maritime past through their memories

\textsuperscript{107} Collins, *Narrative of the Shipwreck of the Brig Betsey, of Wiscasset, Maine*, 27.


\textsuperscript{109} McGlone, “Deciphering Memory,” 412.
during traumatic exposure, their writing about those events can be looked at through its “aphoristic” component that enables one to see those events as important and “special,” even if catastrophic. While these traumatic moments establish long-lasting, upsetting memories, they also form private “aphoristic memories” and publicly shared memories.

Sailors’ stories served purposes beyond the retelling of a personal tragedy. Coming to terms with unending nightmares seamen served to create a “collective” understanding of the dark side of the maritime world and the tragic life of a sailor. People read them and observed their world through the sailor’s “sea eye.” Yet their stories might fade as the collective imagination changed, was rewritten, and restructured. The writings of those literary figures, like Melville, who sought to establish new understandings of that same maritime world did so through prose, poetry, and fictional epics. W. Clark Russell, a British writer of “nautical fiction” and who Hester Blum considers influential, served as an advocate for seamen and wrote “A Claim for American Literature.” This work, which appeared in the *North American Review* in 1892, only months after Herman Melville’s death, “revisits the sea writings of Melville and Richard Henry Dana, whose contributions to their national literature Russell finds an unmatched literary achievement in a time ‘when men thought most things known.’”

Significantly, Russell, according to Blum, viewed both Melville and Dana’s “artistic efforts as a kind of exhumation of the class of seamen” and both “American sailors, men of letters and of genius, seizing the pen for a handspike, pried open the sealed lid under which the merchant-seamen lay caverned.”

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of obscurity through literary attention to the particulars of maritime life.”¹¹² As Russell wrote, “Dana and Melville created a world, not by the discovery, but by the interpretation of it.”¹¹³ Yet was Russell entirely correct in his judgment, analysis, and conclusion?

In fact, sailors’ stories, while not erased or destroyed by men like Melville, may not have been made more prevalent either, but rather might have been eclipsed. Of course, writers like Melville and Poe, and in an autobiographical sense Dana, did tremendous things for the acknowledgement and understanding of the maritime world. But, contrary to Russell, they presented a reality of their own imagination infused with facts and details that were only used to enhance their own story, not the lives of those who had felt the true pain. If anything, what a man like Melville did was to interpret what he read by those who sailed before and after him, and then used those stories to “discover” a new world of understanding. Collins, Downs, Davis, and Drayton have been lost to the study of maritime tragedy because Melville, Poe, and Cooper crafted much better literary stories. Consider, a poem by Poe referred to in chapter one called “A Descent into the Maelström,” which depicts a shipwreck caused by a hurricane and is filled with references to emotion, danger, and oceanic scenes that must have been influenced by seafaring narratives Poe had read. Poe’s stories that were ocean based were fueled by seafaring horrors that were both written of and spoken about. It makes sense that his imagery is so real, so terrifying, and so factual in its representation of oceanic danger and inclusion of the dark side of the maritime world. Poe had read narratives by men like Chase and possibly Downs, Collins, and Jewitt, maybe even hearing lectures by Davis and Holden, and as a result crafted his own literary pieces that elaborated on their


sufferings. Poe, a Boston native and admirer of maritime New England, included seafarer tribulations into his gothic, gloomy, and masterfully written, and historically important, tales in an effort to bring forth their “factual” words not to destroy them. Poe’s notable stories overshadowed those factual works. At the same time Poe’s stories successfully immortalized, for public readership, the idea of a perilous maritime world, even if it was through fiction rather than fact. Readers, those outside of maritime communities, came to comprehend the dangerous world beyond the eastern seaboard, but might have understood that reality through fiction without the realization that that fiction was inspired by fact.

As Melville, Cooper, Poe, and others wrote about the maritime world, the memory of the “actual” sailors’ story faded from the collective imagination of American society. Their trials and tribulations vanished under the weight of fiction, which their “facts” could not match in literary effectiveness. So, although Russell is seemingly correct in his belief that stories like Moby-Dick, Ned Myers, or Two Years before the Mast brought greater public attention to the life of the seamen, he was wrong in his conclusion that such attention enhanced the memory of the individual sailor. In reality, the sailors’ harrowing memory and devastating maritime experiences failed to retain the attention of their “landed” contemporaries who sought out not oceanic reality, but fictional depictions of a nautical world they had never met. Melville, Cooper, and Poe, and even Dana, who wrote of his own factual nautical story, had experienced that world themselves and therefore proved to be capable voices and “middle men” to present it in all its glory and power. But they addressed it through the medium of fiction. To be sure, Melville, especially Poe and Dana, did use factual events as the basis of their stories. But
these “references” rarely took into account the cultural or collective understanding of society or memory of the actual sailor caught within that moment of tragedy. People read their stories and did not come to see the men behind the fiction. Rather readers focused on “Ishmael” not Owen Chase, whose written narrative and memories of maritime tragedy, Melville utilized while crafting his epic tale.

Maybe it is better for an individual to remain focused on the fiction instead of addressing the factual horror of what they read and watch. Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* has proved to be a dynamic and powerful novel that presents the maritime world in a realistic, emotional, and poetic way. One looks to Melville as he seeks to see the maritime world through the “sea eye” of a sailor. They observe a man whose landed past seems inconsequential and whose maritime future was promising. Melville captured the adventurous seeking sailor whose pursuit of the mighty whale would prove his manliness, his self-worth, and also his maritime identity. Melville had lived that life, many years before he wrote *Moby-Dick*, and he wrote from a position of authority when conveying that world to a general reader. The historian must admit that Melville’s depiction of the maritime world of the mid-nineteenth century is powerfully truthful and visually stunning in its effectiveness in rendering the reader emotionally static and historically linked to that world through the power of the written word. I do not seek to diminish the “authority” of Melville, or his literary work *Moby-Dick*, but rather to describe how such a work can have dire effects for those whose memory, failures, and traumas have “seemingly” been addressed through fiction. This chapter has argued that works like *Moby-Dick* failed, in a historically collective sense, to initiate a re-reading of the life of the traumatized sailor, whose experiences the work is based on. As literature, this work is
a masterpiece and does, in its own way, prove to be a window into the perilous maritime world. But this is also because Melville, its author, was a sailor and his “sea eye” served as a legitimate source of oceanic knowledge. But in the end, no amount of fiction can add up to historical truth.

Readers of *Moby-Dick* are instantly transported back to a time when whales were hunted, young men went to sea, and one captain sought revenge on the mythical whale that had left him crippled, both physically and emotionally. It is an epic work, an allegory for issues ranging from class and social structures, politics, death, freedom, the existence of God, and life itself. But whose life does it depict? Whose death does it seek to foreshadow? In terms of maritime pasts, whose world is seemingly unearthed in these powerful pages? Instead of Owen Chase becoming a household name, “Ishmael” holds the reigns of cultural and collective recall and it is not the *Essex*, but rather the fictional *Pequod* that is culturally remembered as having been rammed by the mighty whale and sunk to the bottom of the Pacific Ocean.

Melville’s work has done more than illustrate the dangers of the maritime world; for many it has actually rearranged fiction and fact. One cannot blame Melville for such an occurrence, but one may argue that his work does not actually consider the traumatized sailor’s experience when the fictional sailor is given preeminence over the actual suffering seaman. In *Moby-Dick* men and women could read purely to be entertained and not informed. Throughout its fictional pages, although based on a terrible factual event, *Moby-Dick* interwove fact with fiction, considered Shakespearean literary devices, and included a narrator’s reflections on ship life. Owen Chase and the tragedy of the Whaleship *Essex* served as the inspiration of Melville’s *Moby Dick*, but in so doing
served both to inspire and self-implode. Once acceptance of *Moby Dick* as Melville’s “chef-d'oeuvre” was confirmed, which came years after Melville’s death, the story of the *Essex* fades from memory, and those who suffered, died, or survived with a horrible painful past watched as they became mere spectacles and links to, not a traumatic past, but an entertaining literary present.

Nathaniel Philbrick, whose book *In the Heart of the Sea: The Tragedy of the Whaleship Essex*, and his introduction in *Thomas Nickerson, Owen Chase, and Others: The Loss of the Ship Essex, Sunk by a Whale*, have done a great deal to uncover the true story behind Melville’s fictional *Moby-Dick*. Philbrick wrote that

> On 20 November 1820 the Nantucket whaleship *Essex* was cruising the Pacific Ocean, almost a thousand miles from the nearest land, when it was repeatedly rammed by an eighty-five-foot sperm whale. The ship rapidly filled with water and capsized. The men were able to salvage some casks of bread and water from the wreck, along with several Galapagos tortoises. Fearing cannibals on the islands to the west, the twenty-man crew set out in three small whaleboats for South America, 3,000 miles away….Within three months of the wreck, more than half the men were dead, starvation having forced the survivors to enact the very fate they had sailed all that distance to escape.¹¹⁴

Having resorted to cannibalism, the survivors of the *Essex* were obliged to live with the memory of that choice. Instead of taking on the “possible” cannibals in the Island of the Marquesas’, they chose to sail towards South America, an almost impossible feat. Melville actually made this same type of choice when he chose to desert his ship in the Marquesas facing the possibility of cannibals, so it is possible that Melville identified with this story when he ultimately read the accounts of the *Essex* tragedy. During that journey the crew of the *Essex* suffered appalling horrors, and several survivors wrote narratives of their experience only a year after they had been rescued. As Philbrick wrote,

On 23 February, a whaleboat containing the *Essex*’s Captain [George] Pollard and another crew member was picked up by a Nantucket ship almost within sight of the Chilean coast. That night Captain Aaron Paddack recorded Pollard’s account of the ordeal. Paddack’s letter would be the first word of the disaster to reach the *Essex*’s home port of Nantucket Island in June of that year. In November…the *Essex*’s first mate, Owen Chase, published a more detailed narrative.\(^\text{115}\)

It would be two decades later that a young “whaleman by the name of Herman Melville eventually procured his own copy of Chase’s narrative before publishing *Moby-Dick* (1851), in which a whaleship is rammed by a whale.”\(^\text{116}\) According to Philbrick, for the next 130 years the “*Essex* disaster would be known almost exclusively in the context of Melville’s use of Chase’s narrative” and so its truth would be outshined by fiction.\(^\text{117}\)

Chase’s account of the *Essex* disaster is filled with instances of trauma, as well as a fear of reliving this incident over and over again for the rest of his life. In the years after the *Essex* tragedy, Chase, who had gone back to sea in an attempt to erase his traumatic past from memory, descended into madness as he tried to come to terms with what had occurred and the fact that he had convinced Captain George Pollard to steer towards South America instead of the Marquesas. His days were filled with headaches, possibly as a result of aggressive memories, and he eventually began hoarding food in his attic as he constantly feared succumbing to starvation and possible cannibalism. His traumatic stress grew worse and Chase was eventually institutionalized for his own safety.

Chase’s narrative is on par with those other maritime narratives that we have examined, but in terms of literary importance, Chase’s work would be greatly overlooked after Melville used it as the inspiration for his novel. This is not to say that Chase’s “life-

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\(^{115}\) Philbrick, eds. *Thomas Nickerson, Owen Chase, and Others*, vii.

\(^{116}\) Philbrick, eds., *Thomas Nickerson, Owen Chase, and Others*, vii.

\(^{117}\) Philbrick, eds., *Thomas Nickerson, Owen Chase, and Others*, vii.
story” was forgotten, but rather refashioned and given a new meaning, and in larger sense longevity, cloaked in literary fiction. As noted above, the collective imagination of this incident was “owned” by Melville’s Moby-Dick, both in how one thinks about maritime disaster and also in how such tragedy is reflected upon and addressed in a cultural and collective setting. Even so, the reason that Chase is even known or considered by historians today is in great part because of Melville. Even Edgar Allen Poe, in his Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym, made use of “ghoulish aspects of Chase’s account” and “lots are drawn, men are eaten, and one sailor dies in horrible convulsions.” As Nathaniel Philbrick wrote of the Essex disaster, “decades before the Donner Party became snowbound in the foothills of the Sierra, the Essex brought a scandalous tale of cannibalism to the American public.” Masters of the pen, like Melville, while their works came to overshadow those seafarers whose tragedies and stories inspired them, do not sit in opposition to their “parent” but are a product of that entity even as their literary works buried those disturbing maritime stories under the rubble of society’s growing displeasure with that literary medium.

In considering this vanishing of Chase and reawakening of Melville, for the last seventeen years, the New Bedford Whaling Museum has held annually what it calls the “Moby-Dick Marathon.” In 2011 the Museum held its sixteenth annual meeting, which also happened to be the “160th anniversary of Herman Melville’s literary masterpiece.” They honored the author and his work with that years’ twenty-four-hour nonstop reading of the book, coupled with a weekend of activities, performances, and events. Men and


119 Philbrick, In the Heart of the Sea, 219.
women from all over the state of Massachusetts and scholars from as far as Kentucky and beyond, came to read just a small portion of the book to an adoring audience, most of whom grew up on the coast of the Atlantic and identify themselves with a past that is somehow linked to Melville and *Moby-Dick*. It is a highly publicized and attended event, but year after year the focus is maintained on who Herman Melville was and the importance of *Moby-Dick* to literature, history, and the culture of New Bedford. People tour the museum, listen to scholars, watch movies, and look at exhibits. Rarely are the story of the *Essex* or the words of Owen Chase placed in the “foreground.”

Although Owen Chase, personally, could not forget what he went through and sought to describe his sufferings only one year later for an audience who read with awe, his words were forgotten collectively as his work was re-imagined in fictional form by a literary master. Of course we do not fault or attack Melville; rather we praise him for bringing such a story to a vastly wider audience. But, it is sad that while Melville serves to represent both truth and fiction, Owen Chase and the whaleship *Essex* are left behind, seemingly engulfed in a fog of their own terrible making. In the collective memory of a society that maintains its forward progress, Melville’s memory, as well as the eventual “greatness” of *Moby-Dick*, his own unknown and underappreciated masterpiece, serve as a model for the truth without care for what truth it models. Society, whose collective memory we seek to understand, does not so much ignore that which is truth, but instead is inundated with, and molded by, ideas formed by those who came before.

To be sure, Owen Chase has not been forgotten; his memory has just vanished into the pages of *Moby-Dick* and become a part of the fictional world he did not create.
but served to inspire. He lived, and still lives on in Melville’s work, as do the other crew members of the *Essex*, both those who lived through the event and those who did not, because they serve as the example to Melville’s rule. Even Captain George Pollard, like most of the *Essex* survivors, signed onto other whaling vessels only weeks after his return home after the *Essex* disaster, attempted to move on in the face of this horrific event and, again. Unlike Chase, who lived in constant agony of his maritime past, Pollard was able to live with the tragedy that had taken place. Like James Magee, captain of the brig *General Arnold*, Pollard held “anniversary remembrances,” which could have helped to maintain his own traumatic memory. On every 20 November, Pollard would lock himself in his home and “fast” in honor of the *Essex* crew, both those who had died and those who had lived through starvation and cannibalism. At one time, Herman Melville met George Pollard and concluded that he was one of the most extraordinary men he had encountered.

Although the ideas of these sailors’ memories maintain a sense of time and place, they vanish under literary perfection. They may live on through Melville, yet who they were, what trauma they experienced, and what moments seemed to act as harrowing memories for them faded as society collectively and culturally focused on Melville, not them. As Marita Sturken observes,

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120 Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 218-219.

121 Owen Chase did eventually go back to sea, but he was described as erratic, emotional, and filled with a desire for revenge. Many that watched him felt he resembled Melville’s Captain Ahab, a man in search of the whale that had traumatized him and destroyed his physical and emotional past. For a description of Chase after the *Essex*, see Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 219-21.

122 Philbrick, eds., *Thomas Nickerson, Owen Chase, and Others*, vii-xii. See also, Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 219-21.

123 Philbrick, eds., *Thomas Nickerson, Owen Chase, and Others*, vii-xii. See also, Philbrick, *In the Heart of the Sea*, 219-21.
The survivors of traumatic historical events are powerful cultural figures. They are awarded moral authority, and their experience carries weight of cultural value. This does not mean that all such survivors are treated as figures of cultural importance. Survivors of historical events are often represented as figures of wisdom in popular culture while ignored in person.\textsuperscript{124}

The survivors, as Sturken suggests, are the ones who remember, and it is through them that “cultural memory is actively produced, and given meaning... Survivors embody memory, their bodies are the texts of memory, their voices its textures. They stand at the juncture of memory and history, tugging by their very presence at the boundaries of each.”\textsuperscript{125} Chase, Collins, Downs, Drayton, and even Holden and Torrey were all maritime survivors, having survived terrible tragedies, many of which became well-known events regionally, nationally, and historically. They serve as the voice of the shipwreck, the voice of the mutiny, and the voice of the problematic nautical path to human freedom. They each experienced a terrible traumatic moment, and in the end they were looked at as the “authority” for that terrible moment in time. They act as the eyewitness to tragedy and the spokesman elaborating on the information that only they, as the survivors of these tragedies, can provide. Yet collectively and culturally, as Sturken explained, they may be the “main” voice, but that voice can be used by others, which renders their importance limited and lastly, unnecessary when used in such a way that their legacy is no longer required to maintain the collective or cultural recall and power of a particular past.

Survivor stories, like that of Owen Chase, when utilized, vied for the collective imagination of society. But most times, as has been observed, their references are swept to the margins as greater people, written accounts, or just time render them obsolete and unimportant. Although they served to inspire novels, plays, movies, and cultural

\textsuperscript{124} Sturken, \textit{Tangled Memories}, 255.

\textsuperscript{125} Sturken, \textit{Tangled Memories}, 254-255.
imaginings of the maritime world, their part as “parents” is forgotten, blocked, and overshadowed by the forward momentum of time. They may have inspired the cultural recall of the maritime world, but by their memory has vanished under the weight of that same “creation.” It makes sense that Russell looked at Melville and Dana as having created mere “interpretations,” rather than “discoveries.” But where he observed that they considered the life of the troubled sailor, this dissertation argues that these men overshadowed the traumatized sailor and pushed their narratives to the sidelines, even as they used them as models for their popular reading. Although Melville and others brought forth a menacing maritime world that they knew, understood, and respected, they rendered voiceless those devastated sailors whom they had met, talked with, and read about. This is why when, even today, one thinks of the great whale that struck and destroyed the great whaleship, it is collectively understood that the story is fiction created by Melville about Captain Ahab, Ishmael and the Pequod.

It is why the city of New Bedford, Massachusetts, gravitates towards the cultural appreciation of Moby-Dick and holds marathon readings in its honor. New Bedford residents seek to maintain the cultural memory of that work, its importance, and its link to the city’s maritime past, collective memory, and cultural center. To them the line, “Call me Ishmael” embodies a collative and cultural importance that can only be expressed by allegiance to the work that helped to enhance their collective memory and national importance. While this takes place, the reality, which is also represented within Melville’s novel is gradually, incrementally forgotten. “Call me Ishmael” can never be “Call me Owen” because the two, while they share the same conceptual history, one real and one imagined, are not the same story and therefore can never elaborate on either the
other’s fact or fiction. What we are left with is a far-reaching story that depicts a terrifying world that is no longer within our physical grasp.

In order to understand the true trauma that was experienced by “actual” sailors, one must go to the source. There the specific maritime tragedy has a powerful effect, but one must understanding that most oceanic literary works that consider maritime trauma are the product of some of these common seafarer tales. Although Collins, Downs, Chase, Davis, Torrey, and Drayton are absent from cultural and collective memory, their written recollection of tragedy and horror, when read alone, convey more about the dark maritime world, the tragedy sailors faced, or the terrible memories that followed them to land, than any novel, movie, or poem one could imagine. When we read these narratives, rather than solely focusing on the fictional works, one can truly understand and appreciate the perilous oceanic world that awaited these sailors and the distressing memories that they lived with and wrote of – memories that inspired those who made such moments famous in fictional circles.

Memory as History

As Greg Dening has argued, “Memory is our everyday word for knowledge of the past, but memory suggests some personal or institutional immediacy in the connection between the past and those who experienced it.”\textsuperscript{126} Memories that are written down become history, and they “are texts that have their own literary form. They shape the face of battle in their own structures.”\textsuperscript{127} This is the truth for those sailors who have been given preferential treatment in the pages of this dissertation. The past was shaped and molded by those sailors’ harrowing memories, and their recollections, while at one point


\textsuperscript{127} Dening, \textit{Performances}, 36.
lost in popular fiction and literary classics, must fuel our collective understanding of the treacherous maritime world they observed. It is essential that what these sailors went through, what they possibly suffered from, and how they perhaps coped with traumatic oceanic experiences, be examined through their devastating memories and their narratives, which they chose to write for historically important reasons.

Daniel Collins experienced terrible trauma, as well as physical injuries that stayed with him far longer than the brutality lasted. His memory of those moments became his history of that moment. Although his memories enabled him to recall those heartbreaking events passionately and provide his reader with a unique image of early American maritime history, these moments were also a haunting reminder of the fragile nature of human life. Those traumatic memories Collins suffered from refused to let him go. He wrote of the terrible nightmares he experienced and the images of his dead shipmates that stayed with him, but he also constantly relived his past in the present and wrote in an attempt to inspire a rereading of maritime tales and to give those sailors who died a name beyond death.

Greg Dening has looked at history through the concept of “performances.” He believes that history is always made through “social circumstances.” He was also mesmerized by the “terrible experience of men in battle” and sought to examine the “face of battle” though the Battle of Valparaiso in 1814. As he wrote, “this battle, which occurred during the War of 1812” was fought between the USS Essex under Lieutenant David Porter and the HMS Phoebe with HMS Cherub under the command of Captain

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128 Dening, Performances, 49.
James Hillyer.\textsuperscript{129} It was an important battle, Dening wrote, as sixty-five men died and another fifty-odd were crippled. But Dening observed “performances” as the key to this battle and the codes of honor that were utilized and followed, all of which added up to the “face of battle.” As with most of the sailors who have been discussed in this dissertation, studying their impending doom is like “the study of battle.”

It is always a study of fear and usually of courage, always of leadership, usually obedience, always compulsion, sometimes of insubordination; always anxiety, sometimes of elation or catharsis; always of uncertainty and doubt, misinformation and misapprehension, usually of faith and sometimes of vision; always of violence, sometimes cruelty, self-sacrifice, compassion; above all it is always the study of solidarity and usually also of disintegration.\textsuperscript{130}

Dening looks at the Battle of Valparaiso through the signs and “performances” that could be identified, much like one today can see in the film \textit{Master and Commander}. In this film maritime “performances,” especially in moments of battle, are conveyed through the raising of flags, yelling of orders, and these actions underscore Dening’s theories of history as “performance” and battles as having a face or sign that embodies that specific moment in time. This same “face” can be observed in the narratives or recollections of Daniel Collins, Barnabas Downs, and all the other sailors who suffered and then ultimately sought to convey that “performed” past through a literary medium. As Dening argues, “performances” can be “true” in the sense that even as their narratives are a linguistic construction of their past, their performance during those events is established through their memory of that moment and how they believe it was consequential.

In examination of the Valparaiso battle, Dening also argues that “Memories left to us of this battle are few…logs and letters…official reports, memoirs…stories in

\textsuperscript{129} Dening, \textit{Performances}, 79.

newspapers of the time cannibalized of other newspapers, snippets from various witnesses who contemporaries collected. These memories are the past written down, history. As these types of memories are texts, in their own literary form, the narratives produced by privateers, impressed sailors, whalers, and nautical abolitionists constitute a literary genre and thus a face of their own. Their distressing memories and their written recollections of said memories form “performances” that bring the past into the present. The “face” of their trauma, like the “face of battle,” is what they observed and recalled for posterity in journals and written narratives. Their memories make sense of the trauma and, as Dening has written, of similar efforts “that was their literary form” and from there “history feeds on its own meaning.” Sailors used these literary forms to shape a sense of identity and in the collective imagination of an alert public, these memories form cultural perspectives grounded in understood or imagined truths.

Daniel Collins and, especially, Barnabas Downs are perfect illustrations of Dening’s theories on “performances.” From them “we can give a social history of their public roles and relations” and gauge their part in the world of maritime trauma and how such a presence fueled cultural and private understandings of maritime tragedy. Today, we look back at their writings, whether of the shipwreck or the massacre, and observe, through their recollections and literary intent, a maritime past that is often distanced from the historian and unrecognizable to the unaccustomed analytical eye. One rarely recognizes, or even appreciates the existence of the harrowing memory of the sailor, or his tormenting experience, and therefore does not anticipate its presence or significance.

131 Dening, Performances, 95.
132 Dening, Performances, 96-98.
133 Dening, Performances, 98.
Once they are acknowledged, documented, and brought to the surface by historical research, one sees these traumatic experiences from a different perspective and observes that maritime world for both its beauty and darkness. Although Downs’ suffering onboard the brig *General Arnold* was intense and dramatic, it also proves to be telling as it served the function of historical marker intent on transposing his “real” world from his mind to our eyes. The seafarers’ traumatic moments, which acted as consequential and negative flashes in time, because of their psychological and cognitive power, can thus maintain, through their narratives, a consistency and serve to inspire a rereading of both fiction and fact long after the host of those memories has died. What proved to be examples of maritime tragedy can be read as traumatic oceanic “performances.”

Therefore Downs’ traumatic experience is looked upon from several different angles and not solely his written recollection, but from his stories of traumatic memories, some of which he may not even have known he was considering as he wrote. As his stressful thoughts never ceased to maintain their consequential meaning, as he recalled them, they did cease to maintain power and effectiveness for the collective memory that had moved on. The cultural appreciation for his written word, as we have observed, vanished as fictional stories seemed to impart upon the public a much more comfortable understanding of the sea and the types of traumas that occurred on the mighty waves. Yet these fictions too would fail to remain important as society moved beyond their words in favor of westward expansion and California gold. It is to this end that Downs, Collins, and other terrorized seamen figuratively watched as their tormenting memories, which proved to uncloak early American oceanic dark realities, faded into darkness as they each passed on or as the public paid less attention to their recollections. It is a historical irony
that such horrific memories, which proved so invasive in waking thoughts and sleeping nightmares, would be utterly forgotten by a public that had, at one time, read seafarers narratives eagerly. How easily the public forgot, but how difficult it was for the sailors themselves even to understand or rationalize what they had observed or lived through.

**Conclusion**

It has become apparent that the narratives of these sailors are not the first place that people go to discover the world of maritime trauma or even just to explore the lives of sailors. Instead they seek out novels by Melville or movies through Hollywood, and they stop just short of reading the written recollection of the sailor who experienced tragedy and sought understanding through a literary form. Daniel Schacter, Judith Herman, Jonathan Shay, and many more have been assessed through this dissertation to provide another way to look at these sailors’ narratives and to uncover psychological element that can truly elaborate on the life of sailors and the tragedies they experienced. One will never truly know what went on in the head of the sailor, but we have what they have left us and from there we can scratch the surface of what they thought and how they suffered. Through a dedicated and directed interdisciplinary approach to maritime history and memory, historians can uncover a perilous world that they never imagined existed.

Marcus Rediker, Daniel Vickers, and Myra Glenn, among many others, have all trod an impressive path on which we can explore other components of the sailors’ lives. This dissertation has explored the traumatic memory of the sailor and addressed the psychological and historical literature on memory joining it with sailors’ written narratives to argue that what they wrote served to illuminate a dark maritime world overshadowed by time and fiction. This work interpreted the thoughts, fears, and realities
that pushed these sailors to consider the pen in their attempt to make sense of their tragic past and harrowing recollections. Although these sailors wrote about what they went through for varying reasons, some political and some commercial, their tales of traumatic experience illuminate the devastation posed to both mind and body during the “Age of Sail.” Every sailor had his own motive for why he wrote and sometimes his ideas, thoughts, and conclusions were distorted by biases. It is perfectly reasonable to look back at sailors’ narratives and connect them, if the evidence warrants, to concepts like traumatic memory and post-traumatic stress disorder, but also to the development of the maritime world and how sailors understood that world to exist both in promise and peril.

The consequences of this research are far-reaching. One can appreciate that sailors experienced terrible tragedy and understand the dangers of the world they sailed into, but through closer examination of their recollections of those moments of terrible pain, the historian can see that nautical suffering came in many shapes and forms. Both Dennis Brandt and Eric Dean have utilized these ideas to explore “Post Traumatic Stress Disorder” in Civil War veterans, and their approach is clearly suitable to gain that same “edge” in exploring several distinct groups of sailors. Angelo Crapsey suffered from haunting memories of past combat and these visions and flashbacks caused him to descend down a “pathway to hell,” the same path that Daniel Drayton traveled down.

Historians can examine past wars, past conflicts, and past instances of tragedy to explore their effects on those caught in the middle of disaster and who might suffer from distressing memories. When thinking solely of maritime tragedy, historians have examined the written recollections of privateers, nautical abolitionists, crew members on the Titanic, sailors stationed in Pearl Harbor on 7 December 1941, and examine the
words of those victims of Somali pirates in the Indian Ocean. We know that maritime tragedy occurs, but rarely give the memory of victims’ sufficient consideration and the traumatic stress that they might have encountered. When one of these victims puts his memory to paper, he seeks some aspect of literary immortality in his own traumatic memory. But, as we have observed, maritime fiction typically builds upon and then eventually overshadows the seaman’s last ambitious feat. The true story becomes “fashionable” only if it is given consideration through fiction. It is only then that the collective imagination of the public is “perked” up and drawn to the sailor’s struggle.

As one has seen, of course, when these sailors first started writing about what they saw, what they experienced, and how they lived, usually in the service of their country or moral code, they were followed by an admiring public interested in how they had helped shaped the course of the nation. Privateers battled the British, impressed sailors were abused by a common enemy, nautical abolitionists stood up for those with no voice, and even whalers were viewed through local and regional prisms of bravery and labor. It is in part through the stories of all these sailors that serious political, cultural and social problems in the country at the time they wrote were addressed. Historians Hester Blum and Myra Glenn both addressed some of these sailors’ writings in an effort to show that maritime literature stood for something important and that these narratives were meant to be read by both sailors and the general public. They were to be read with the understanding that these men were not literary masters, but rather common sailors who had lived on the ocean and sought to present that life for a public interested in tales of the sea. Each man found an outlet with his writing and they all wrote about their past at times
when they could gain great readership and interest. They sought to be understood in their own terms and to achieve a semblance of the fame that their past had failed to produce.

What this dissertation has sought to present is that although they wrote for several reasons, each man who wrote had experienced a horrific past that served to ground his writings. These sailors suffered and addressed concerns by referencing their horrific past and may have been attempting to understand that past in current terms. Through their writing one can infer, with help of interdisciplinary methods, that these particular sailors suffered life-long trauma. It was harrowing memories arising from a series of traumatic oceanic events that allowed them to witness the worst of life and death. The sailors considered for this dissertation spoke of nightmares, visions that would not go away, constant panic, and endless fear. Their writing always seems to end with their seeking closure on their past terrors. This indicated the existence of memories that they could not diminish and a perilous maritime world that has been shadowed by a cultural imagination intent on focusing on the beauty of the waves not the darkness of the clouds. Some sailors, like Bates, M’Lean, and Downs, to name a few, gravitated toward belief in God for their ultimate answers. Yet others – like Davis, Durand, and Penny – acted like Melville’s Captain Ahab who was overcome with the need for revenge and hoped that their written narratives would enhance the spirit of nationalism or spark a war to avenge wrongs committed against sailors. Still, men like Sherburne, Torrey, even Lay, and Walker used their works to craft specific images of themselves in the public eye, while also seeking to understand the horrific things they had seen and experienced.

Yet only one individual, Daniel Drayton, as we have seen, failed to see his narrative, or memoir, serve the purpose he unknowingly sought. Although all of the men
depicted experienced terrible suffering and witnessed events and instances that would have shaken even a mythical Odysseus in pain, most of these men went on to live common lives, falling victim to the march of history, their names vanishing from record, their ends unknown even to the dedicated researcher. Unlike the devastating memories that chased William Lay and Comstock after the *Globe* mutiny and massacre, or the evil thoughts that penetrated Collins years after the *Betsey* disaster, or the nightmares that Holden, Davis, and M’Lean, could not shake loose, Daniel Drayton’s post-traumatic stress eventually seized him and pushed him, as Dennis Brandt has put it, “down the pathway to hell.” Drayton took his own life and sought out a comfort from death that in life had eluded him. The historian judges not his decision, but his traumatic past and subsequent years of pain to unearth a pattern of harrowing memories, as well as a failed abolitionist endeavor, that followed him and arguably drove him to his grave.

When we consider these sailors and explore their harrowing memories of traumatic events, their legacies are given new life and their suffering new appreciation. When we appreciate the difficulties that followed the sailor, both during his experienced tragedy, observed in his recollections, and his life post trauma, we see the ocean in a different way. We no longer see a poetic world of mythical beasts, triviality, or a place of comfort and ease. Rather we recognize a real world, where the opportunities were great and the hazards insidious. If one seeks truth, he or she must understand the tragedies that befell the common sailor, observing the upsetting memories that sparked the traumatized sailors’ need to recall. One must read as his story unfolds in ways that will help us understand the fact that fictional maritime lore was born through the sufferings of common seafarers.
Chapter SEVEN

Epilogue:  
Ships that Pass in the Night

“The anchor was up, the sails were set, and off we glided”

- Herman Melville in Moby-Dick, Chapter 22, “Merry Christmas”

What does all this oceanic tragedy tell us about early maritime history and what does the study of memory, maritime trauma, and sailors’ literary endeavors add up to as a historical study? The patriotic privateer, the resilient impressed sailor, the audacious and dutiful whaleman, and the dogmatic nautical abolitionist – they variously sailed the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans from the American Revolution until just before the dawn of the American Civil War and each serves as a representation of maritime life and tragedy. They all spoke of the intention to win freedom, some for the rights of sailors, others for an economically solvent nation. A couple finally argued that the young nation had made missteps in tolerating slavery and sought to redeem the country through maritime civil disobedience. Through their narratives, historians may trace the creation of a nation, the growth of a republic and its Northern economic interests through maritime trade. In the end they watch as that same nation is ripped apart by institutions, ideas, and behaviors
that could only be remedied by the warship. These sailors, had they not experienced a traumatic past, may not have had the psychological or cognitive need to write about what they went through, and therefore who they were and what they had witnessed might have gone unnoticed by historians. Yet their memories that proved disturbing were often ample enough to motivate them to write about their nautical past. Those narratives of endurance and misfortune provide historians not only with a view of the American maritime world as it grew and defended itself, but unique access into the sailors’ life and the dark side of early-American maritime history.

These sailors suffered and their writings are a product of that distress. Not only is it because what they went through was often gruesome and horrible, but they spoke of that agony, not always from a political or economic position, but through those traumatic memories that proved somewhat resilient to outside influence. Even when some of these sailors included political propaganda statements or others sought to enhance religion by giving greater consideration to God’s ultimate role in their tales, we can acknowledge these possible “fallacies.” Even so, we can move forward by focusing on those distressing moments that indicate the existence of a dark and dangerous oceanic world. These sailors, probably subconsciously, did not attempt to rework their narratives or erase them because their memories, which at first may have been “dissociative,” were unrelenting. Therefore they were not easily changed or rewritten, but reflected both their tragic pasts and their current literary ambitions. These seamen, who overcame political, religious, or social constraints, attempted to position their devastating memories in the backdrop of their narratives. Yet tragic remembrances were never far from ordinary view. Historians can detect, in these disturbing moments, a fascinating and dramatic portrayal,
even if not a perfect representation of the past they actual experienced, of the psychological trauma that these sailors suffered. Based on psychologists’ research and analysis of memories rooted in traumatic experiences like captivity, political violence, and brutality, historians have an array of “methods” and interpretative frameworks to consider when thinking about these narratives and the sailors who serve as narrators and historical agents.

Dennis Brandt wrote that “Many Civil War veterans had to put years behind them before the psychological anguish lessened and they could reunite on the battlefields of their youth. They had a chance to relish the glory then, glory they did not feel amid bursting shells and whizzing bullets, glory impossible” as they lived through their “hell” and maintained their composure.¹ Our sailors – these privateers, impressed men, abolitionists, and whalermen – never felt the glory of their deeds till many years later, if they felt it at all. Sherburne lived to see his deeds glorified and admired and his narrative fit well in that literary world, but men like Drayton, even Brant’s Angelo Crapsey, never won the reputation that was needed for them to maintain a stable mind. Brandt concluded in his powerful book that “Before veterans of any conflict,” and in this case sailors of all sorts, “can face the horrors of their pasts, they have to move forward.”² Like Daniel Drayton, “Angelo Crapsey discovered that forward was a direction blocked by emotional and physical barriers too high for him to scale.”³

According to Brandt, Civil War veterans “no more gained instant peace of mind after Appomattox Court House than their Vietnam equivalents did after the last helicopter

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¹ Brandt, *Pathway to Hell*, 178.
² Brandt, *Pathway to Hell*, 178.
³ Brandt, *Pathway to Hell*, 178.
lifted from the American embassy in Saigon,” and some “never found peace.”⁴ Many of our sailors, although they moved on, lived and died years after with little recognition. In their narratives, they declared that they suffered from consequential “images” and constantly lived in the shadow of that harrowing past. Often they sought publication, as Judith Herman’s psychological theories have shown, to achieve a sense of “recovery,” or address those memories in a way to give them a sense of rest and acceptance. As Robert F. Kennedy declared, paraphrasing his favorite poet Aeschylus, in response to Martin Luther King Jr.’s assassination, “In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.”⁵ In his own way, and at a time of intense sorrow and trauma, Robert Kennedy elaborated on his belief that suffering through the personal pain of loss gives birth to wisdom. One must, perhaps, suffer to understand the value of his life. Privateers, impressed seafarers, whalemen, and nautical abolitionists – all suffered. Years after they all continued to experience pains of uneasiness, and continued to search for the wisdom that the Greeks had argued followed suffering.

Although some sailors like Barnabas Downs, William Lay, and others found a sense of comfort in this idea, it is strikingly possible that although they may have put some parts of their stress to rest, the recollections of specific moments in time were unwittingly illuminated further from such attempts. But the sailors lived on, most of them never going back to sea and instead living off the welfare of the state, or finding odd jobs in an expanding industrial economy. Today we read their stories, if we choose to read

⁴ Brandt, Pathway to Hell, 178.

⁵ Robert F. Kennedy, “On the Death of Martin Luther King Jr.,” (Speech delivered regarding Death of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from Indianapolis, Indiana on 4 April 1968. Robert F. Kennedy Senate Files Archive in the John F. Kennedy Library, part of the National Archives.)
beyond the fictional epics that used their stories as inspiration, and observe them in “their” time, in “their” moment, and in “their” distressing past. They are, when we set aside the religious, political, and cultural constraints of their work, what their traumatic memories have allowed them to become. Their words elaborate on a dangerous world that young men both knowingly, and unknowingly, took part in based on communal traditions, youthful ambition, and the search for oceanic greatness. Historians view these sailors through their trauma and how that suffering bestowed upon them powerful, if imperfect, memories that they wove into a literary form, which in turn contribute to a collective memory of their time.

These men, therefore, become their memories, as Alfred Young observed during his research on George Robert Twelves Hewes. These sailors forgot some details, added others, twisted even more, but the traumatic memory that terrorized them remained insidious and a consequential reminder of a distressing past that they could not let go.

This dissertation’s traumatized sailors, whose lives were built upon the waves, suffered both during and after their pain was both illuminated and described. Because of this “perfect storm” of psychological cognizance, we observe these sailors not for who they wished to be observed as, or even for the message they intended to be understood from their written record. Rather, we observe young men through moments of trauma and emotional instability, living as pawns in an expanding and dangerous maritime world. Their significance rests in their ability to participate self-consciously in life, observe their own position in a growing republic, and react to moments of unexplainable terror.

Barnabas Downs, our quintessential sufferer who survived the horrendous events on the brig *General Arnold*, lived without the use of his legs for many years and found
some reprieve from his traumatic past, which, though it haunted him, did not control him. He attempted to move on with his life, suffering like his captain and our other sailors, from possible survivor’s guilt. But as Judith Herman has observed,

The survivor who has accomplished his recovery faces life with few illusions but often with gratitude. His view of life may be tragic, but for that very reason he has learned to cherish laughter. He has a clear sense of what is important and what is not. Having encountered evil, he knows how to cling to what is good. Having encountered the fear of death, he knows how to celebrate life.6

This is why many of the sailors in this dissertation find an ending that is unlike that of Daniel Drayton, who lost his battle with life. We started this journey into the dark recesses of the sailor’s mind and oceanic world with Barnabas Downs and it is there that we will conclude. Downs served to see, first, what the sea could do to those men who attempted to use its waves to sail the world in search of prizes, whales, or humans held in bondage and fleeing towards freedom. Downs’ shipwreck, survival, and painful, incomplete recovery, serves as a traumatic past that is probably not the worst event the maritime world has observed, and sadly will not be the last. Downs, the teenage sailor from Barnstable, Massachusetts, watched as his ship was destroyed and his shipmates perished in terrible ways. But he did survive and his “sea eye,” his traumatic memory, and his painful past have opened the door to the disastrous maritime world that is rarely discussed outside the fictional exploits of literary masters. Collectively, and culturally, Downs’ suffering is ignored or discarded in favor of fictional depictions of maritime tragedy that his shocking story might have inspired. Even so, Downs’ historic eyewitness account of the tragic shipwreck of the brig General Arnold remains a representation of how maritime tragedy actually occurred to those who called the ocean home.

6 Herman, Trauma and Recovery, 213.
From Barnabas Downs and our other sailors we can understand and appreciate other maritime disasters like the tragic wreck of the Titanic and even the disaster of the Costa Concordia or the loss of the replica HMS Bounty, which wrecked during Hurricane Sandy in 2012. As journalist Emery Dalesio wrote, “The final hours of the HMS Bounty were as dramatic as the Hollywood adventure films she starred in, with the crew abandoning ship in life rafts as their stately craft slowly went down in the immense waves.”

Dalesio compared the tragic wreck of the replica Bounty to dramatic movies rather than factual horrors written about by men like Downs, Holden, and Lay, all of whom experienced and wrote about the devastation caused by weather on their vessels.

Seemingly in opposition to the decision made for the brig General Arnold nearly 250 years ago, the HMS Bounty, which had been first built for the 1962 film Munity on the Bounty starring Marlon Brando, chose to leave port and take on the mighty storm at sea feeling that “a ship is safer at sea than in port.” While history might have given the captain of the HMS Bounty that impression, as we learned as the General Arnold was destroyed in Plymouth Harbor while the Ranger sailed on and survived, the ocean showed its treacherous dark side and threw its might against the replica eighteenth century sailing vessel. The captain’s choice proved wrong and centuries of maritime danger maintained power. In 2012 the crew of the HMS Bounty experienced an incident that many of the sailors in this dissertation experienced – oceanic horror. Two crew members perished in this incident and they became the latest victims of an unpredictable and mighty watery agent that proves that trauma on the sea is ongoing and always


8 The ship had also been used in the second of the Pirates of the Caribbean films and Master and Commander.
possible as one sails upon the waves. It is sadly ironic that in this incident the vessel was
a replica eighteenth century vessel and fits well in this assessment of oceanic danger,
which sadly even today has once again taken its toll. Even so, it always shows how
powerful the appeal of the ocean is to men and women, young and old, who observe upon
its waves the prospect of adventure and a connection with the past.

Instead of sailors in search of enemy ships or whales, today passengers on cruise
ships, or crews of masterfully built replica eighteenth-century vessels, can find
themselves victims to maritime tragedy and inundated with possible painful memories.
Today people can still be captured by the dark side of the maritime world. By
understanding this unique psychological dimension at play in the history of the American
maritime narrative these ideas may inform other “traumatic” experiences of American
history. This dissertation does not claim to be a definitive work on this subject, nor does
it seek to speak for the psychologists studying long-term episodic memory. Yet starting
with the narrative of New Englander Barnabas Downs, this dissertation observes
possibilities to exploit cognitive psychology in historical research. If anything can
elucidate a world in which Jack Tars battled both physical and emotional dangers caused
by tragic events that inscribed terrible memories, interdisciplinary studies can best make
sense of it.

To conclude, one can read more into Herman Melville’s ruthless Ahab, the
captain of the Pequod in Moby-Dick. Melville, who had his own maritime career, may
have understood the demons that followed the mariner better than most and sought to
create in his vengeful fictional Captain Ahab a man in search of more than one enemy.
Maybe the white whale was not the only physical target of his emotional torment. Could
it be that Captain Ahab, whose traumatic experience with the white whale, Moby Dick, had left him with a devastating recollection that caused him terrible anguish? It was a complex and tragic maritime world Melville had experienced, understood, and feared. He considered that world when he created Ahab, his pain, and his ultimate obsession. It seems possible, if not probable, since Ahab’s need for revenge was so strong, so devilish, and so devoid of danger, that he risked his own life and the life of his crew in the endeavor to ease his emotional and physical suffering. Like Joshua Davis and many other vengeful sailors depicted in this dissertation, Melville’s Ahab was overcome with the “fantasy” of revenge by way of the pen and that the white whale, Moby Dick, established as his psychological enemy needing to be slain. One need only look to Melville’s brilliant work, hopefully as it relates to the “actual” sailor narratives, like Owen Chase’s, written before, to see this idea considered and given “performance” in a literary theater.

“All that most maddens and torments,” wrote Melville,

All that stirs up the lees of things; all truth with malice in it; all that cracks the sinews and cakes the brain; all the subtle demonisms of life and thought; all evil, to crazy Ahab, were visibly personified, and made practically assailable in Moby Dick. He piled upon the whale’s white hump the sum of all the general rage and hate felt by his whole race from Adam down; and then, as if his chest had been a mortar, he burst his hot heart’s shell upon it....Towards thee I roll, thou all-destroying but [un-conquering] whale; to the last I grapple with thee; from hell’s heart I stab at thee; for hate’s sake I spit my last breath at thee. Sink all coffins and all hearse to one common pool! And since neither can be mine, let me then tow to pieces, while still chasing thee, though tied to thee, thou damned whale! Thus, I give up the spear!  

In that moment the revenge he felt, and the disturbing past he had endured, all poured out as he unleashed his hatred upon the whale. As we know, Ahab’s revenge cost him his ship, crew, and life, and yet the mighty Moby Dick departed and lived, leaving in his

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wake a predator whom this “mythical creature” had psychologically tormented, dead, attached forever to the demon he sought to slay. By attempting to destroy that which haunted him, Ahab was doomed to remain attached to his hatred both in the final moments of life and in death. Like Ahab our sailors, who had their own memories of past trauma, each sought to face off against their inner “hell” in different ways, but each used the pen to slay the beast. Yet the important point is, as has been argued, Melville’s fiction portrays actual maritime concerns. Melville himself was a sailor who experienced tragedy, but we must not lose sight of the many other sailors who observed horror and experienced near death and considered, through their “sea eye,” their traumatic exposures and harrowing memories from the literary genre of non-fiction.

Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* is a must read for anyone interested in great literature or the dark maritime world. His times as a sailor enabled him to understand that complex world and write about it passionately and honestly. One should not overlook Melville in searching for factual maritime trauma, but rather use his story as a guide to those sailors’ stories that inspired his masterpiece. Through him their stories are given life again and in that sense their oceanic suffering and literary feats are thrust to the “bow” of our collective understanding. As Mark Twain wrote, “Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because Fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities; Truth isn’t.”

Alexander Starbuck emphasized in 1877, in his *History of the American Whale Fishery*, that sailors’ lives have ever been one continual round of hair-breadth escapes…Many a tale of danger and toil and suffering, startling, severe, and horrible, has illumined the pages of the history of this pursuit, and scarce any, even the humblest of these

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10 Mark Twain, *Following the Equator* (1897), Chapter 15.
hardy mariners, but can, from his own experience, narrate truths stranger than fiction.\textsuperscript{11}

It is time that one not flounder under the assumption that, as Henry Wadsworth Longfellow once wrote, “Ships that pass in the night, and speak to each other in passing, only a signal shown, and a distant voice in the darkness.”\textsuperscript{12}

The voice of the traumatized sailor “on the ocean of life,” at one time an admired and well-acknowledged voice in both the maritime and literary worlds, has grown to be ignored as we “pass by” their words and focus on fictional representations of their deeds. We give their lives and sufferings present merely “a look and a voice, then darkness again and a silence.” Even so, in their own recollections they brighten the “ocean of life” and bring those “passing ships” into perpetual union and final understanding. In the end, it is not only important that we glance out past the breakers and notice the beauty of the ocean, but look towards our maritime heritage, as well as present nautical existence and fearful oceanic future, to note that the sea presents a clear danger. In that danger, we can learn a tremendous amount from the words brought forth by Downs, Davis, Holden, Drayton, and Collins, as well as the fictional Ishmael, and understand that the maritime world can be, and is, deadly. This knowledge is important, but our sailors depicted throughout this dissertation also had prior knowledge of oceanic dangers as they stepped off \textit{Pickering Wharf, Long Wharf, Fisherman’s Wharf}, and countless others along the New England coast, and onto tall ships ready for action of all sorts. For many, this knowledge was not helpful, for others it proved their salvation. This knowledge must be

\textsuperscript{11} Alexander Starbuck, \textit{History of the American Whale Fishery: From its Earliest inception to the year 1876} (Published by Starbuck, 1878), 2.

\textsuperscript{12} Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, \textit{Tales of a Wayside Inn} (1863), Part III, “The Theologian’s Tale: Elizabeth,” Stanza IV.
both a warning of present oceanic fears and a guide to read, take in, and admire the stories of those that sailed out with unwavering courage and witnessed images that proved haunting and historic.
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