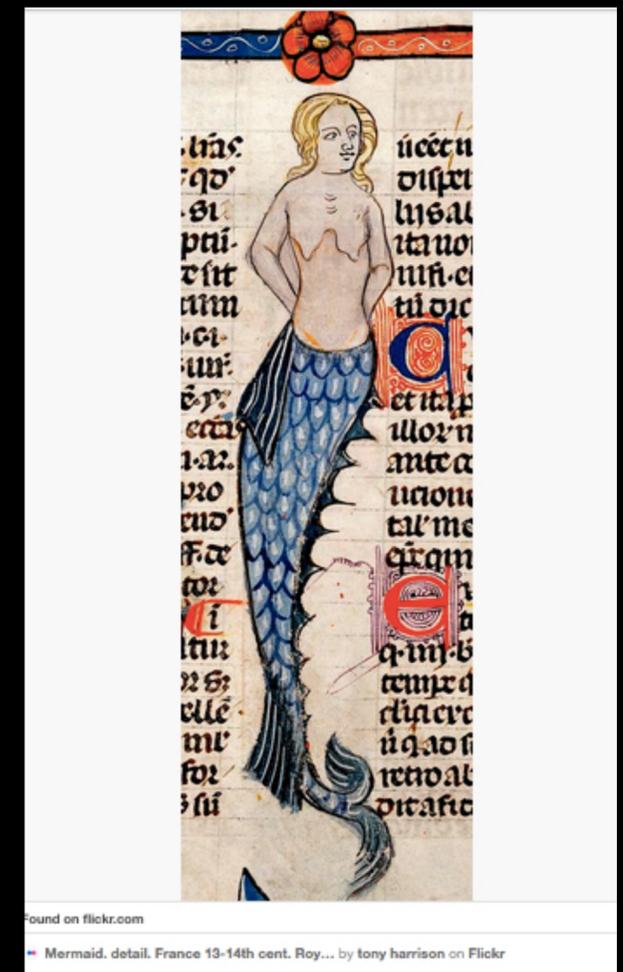




Mermaids

ECL: Literature and the Environment
Spring 2025. Professor Pressman
Day 5: *Penguin Book of Mermaids*



ADMIN

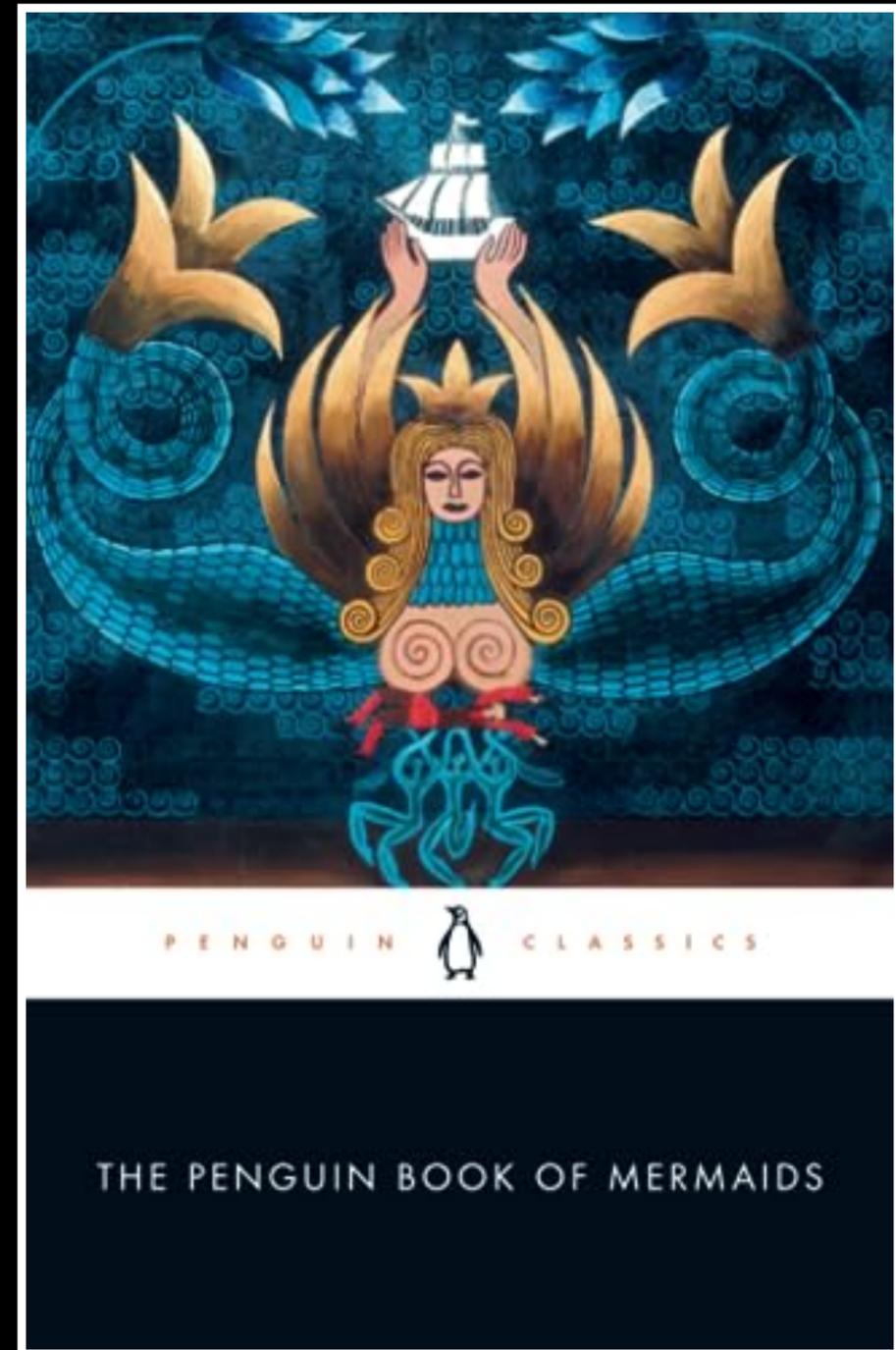
- Extra credit blog: questions for Steve Mentz conversation
- You should be blogging each week— SUNDAY at midnight deadline
- TIPS for Reading: Annotate. Write down quotes and page numbers
- TIPS for Writing the Blog: use quotes, be specific, interpret the text

ADMIN

- Extra credit discovery assignment
- Blogs that are promising future projects: Gale

DISCUSSION:

- **First impressions of the reading:**
- Points of interest? Questions?
- Passages to share?



Myths= explanations/science

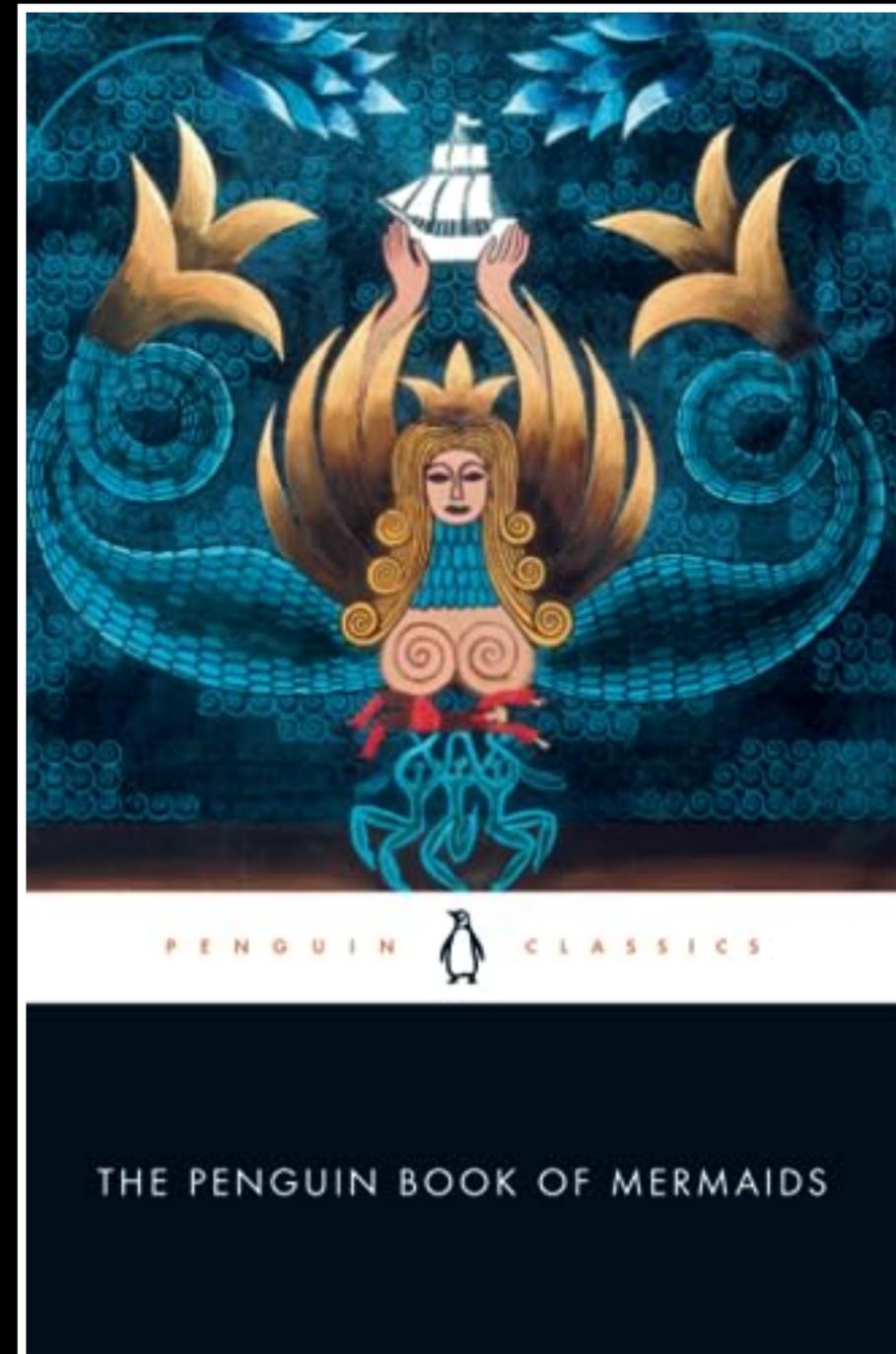
“Mermaid stories did not emerge as fairy tales—that is, as fictions—but as myths and legends” (xvi)



The Penguin Book of Mermaids

Eds. Cristina Bacchilega and Marie Alohani Brown

Penguin Books, 2019



Environment

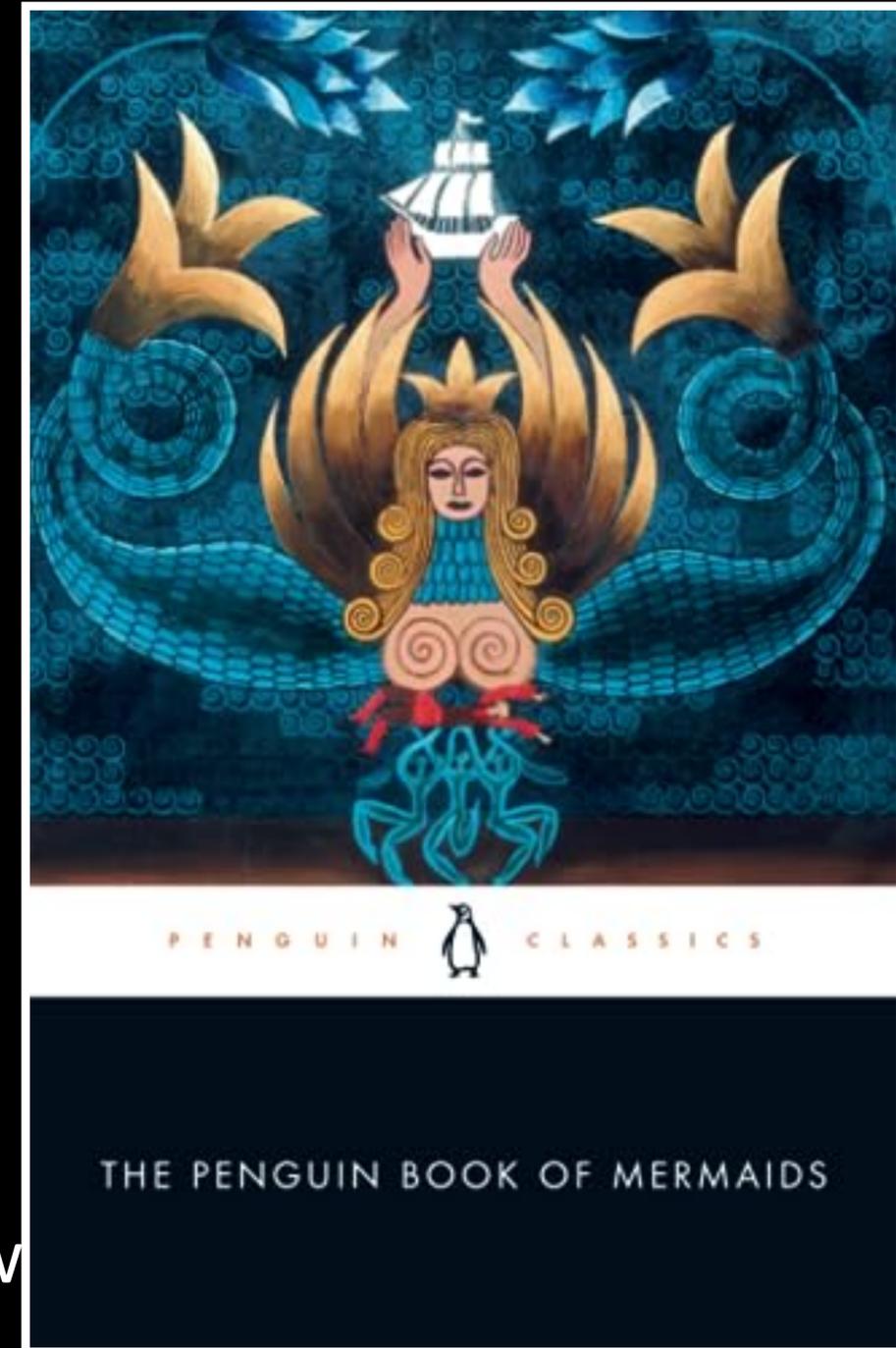
MERMAID TALES ARE ABOUT LOCAL ENVIRONMENTS:

Lorelei's tale "emerged in the early nineteenth century as a local legend and cautionary tale connected with a dangerous waters in the echo heard in the vicinity of the tall cliff Loreley along the river Rhine in Germany" (ix)

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Reflections & Paradigm Shifts

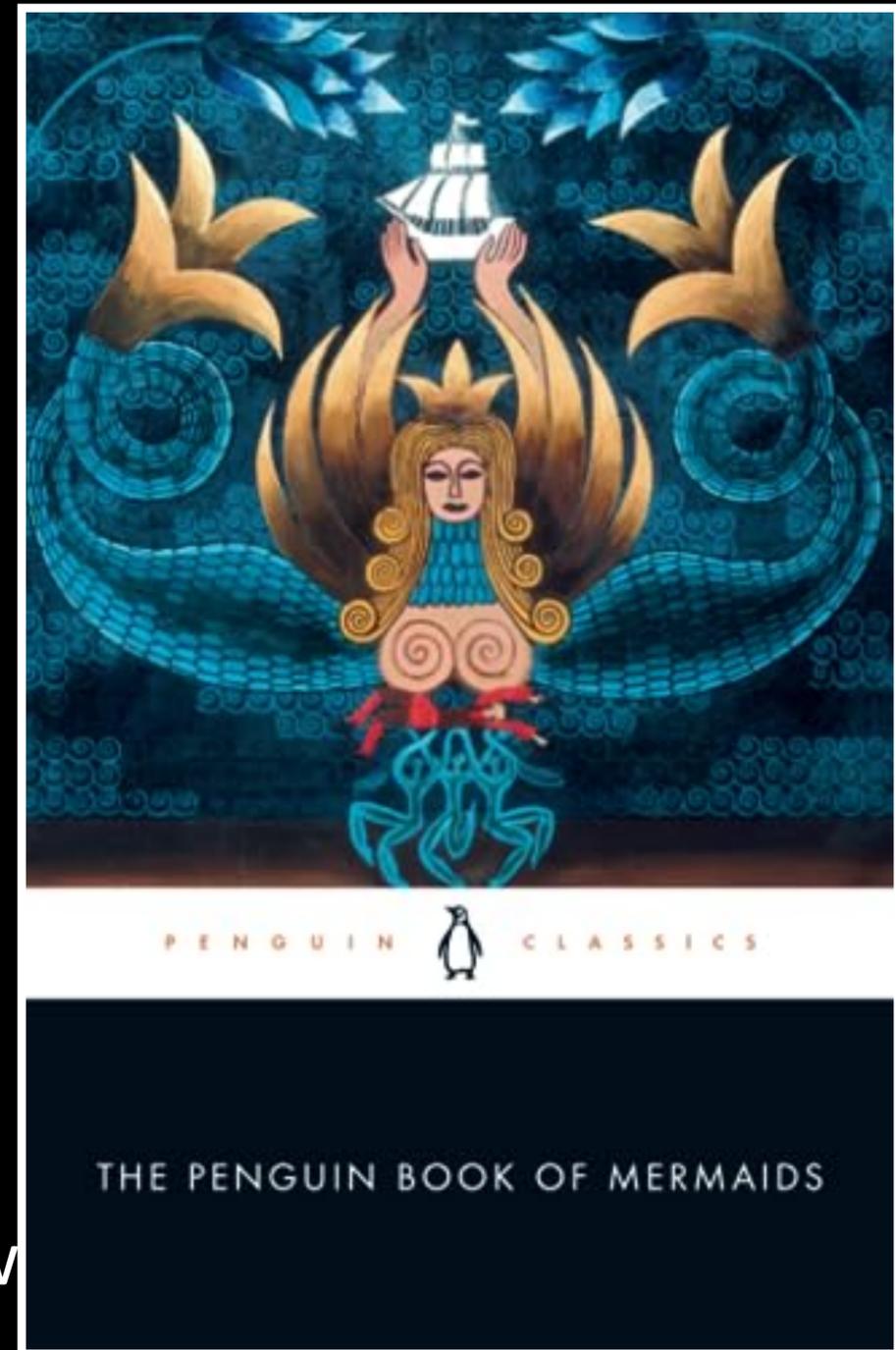
Mermaids “raise questions about what it is to be human and what lies beyond a human-centered world” (xi)

“we are strangely drawn to the other who is in part a mirror image of us and appears within reach, even if mentally ungraspable” (xi)

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Penguin Books, 2019



Gender and Fear of “other”

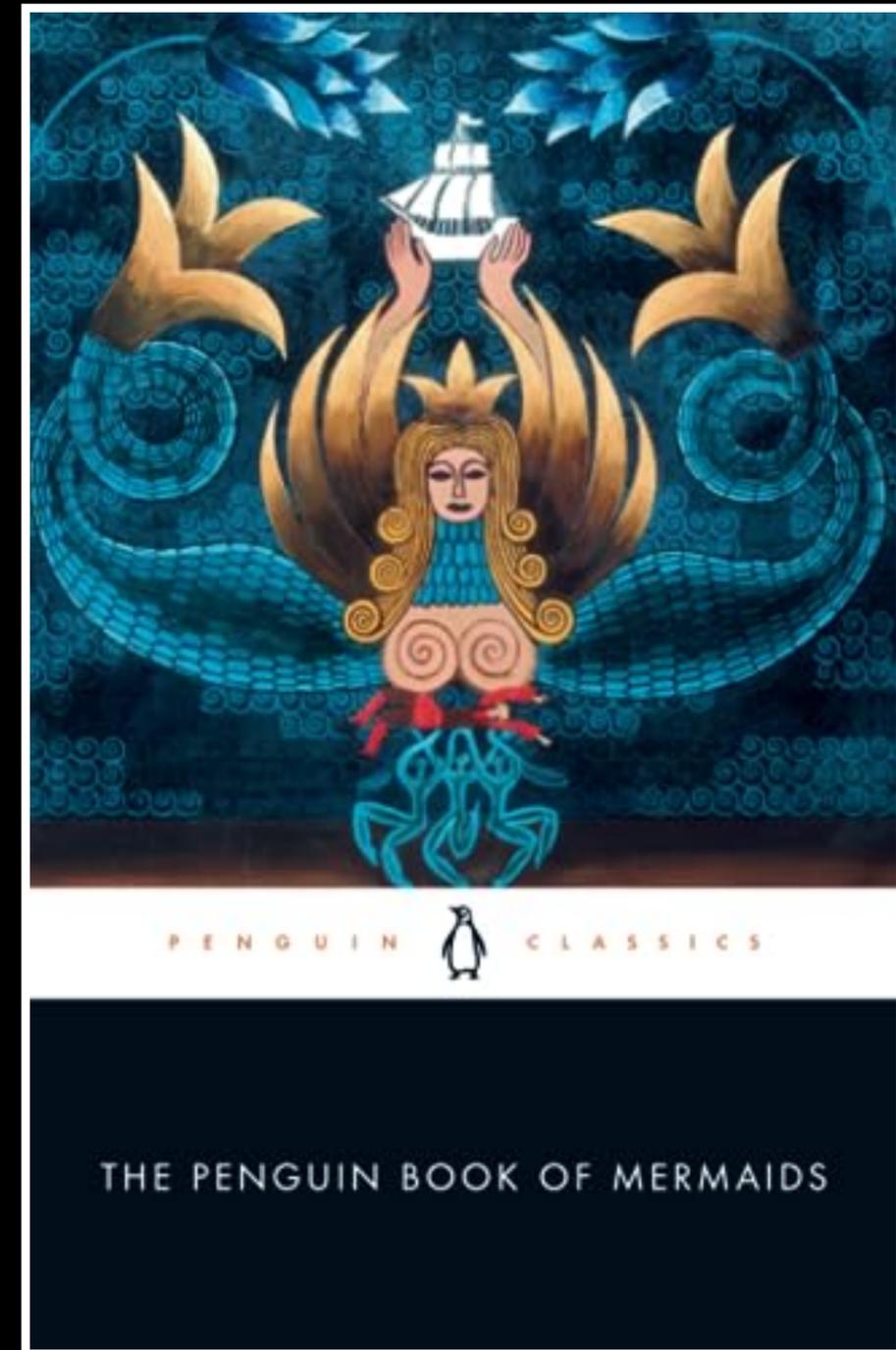
“what does our fascination with this dangerous yet desirable other suggest about us?” (xiv)

“They reflect our fascination with and fear of female bodies and of water and our dread of predators or poisonous creatures that live in or near water. But such tales are also social and cultural commentaries about what it means to be human” (xiv)

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Penguin Books, 2019



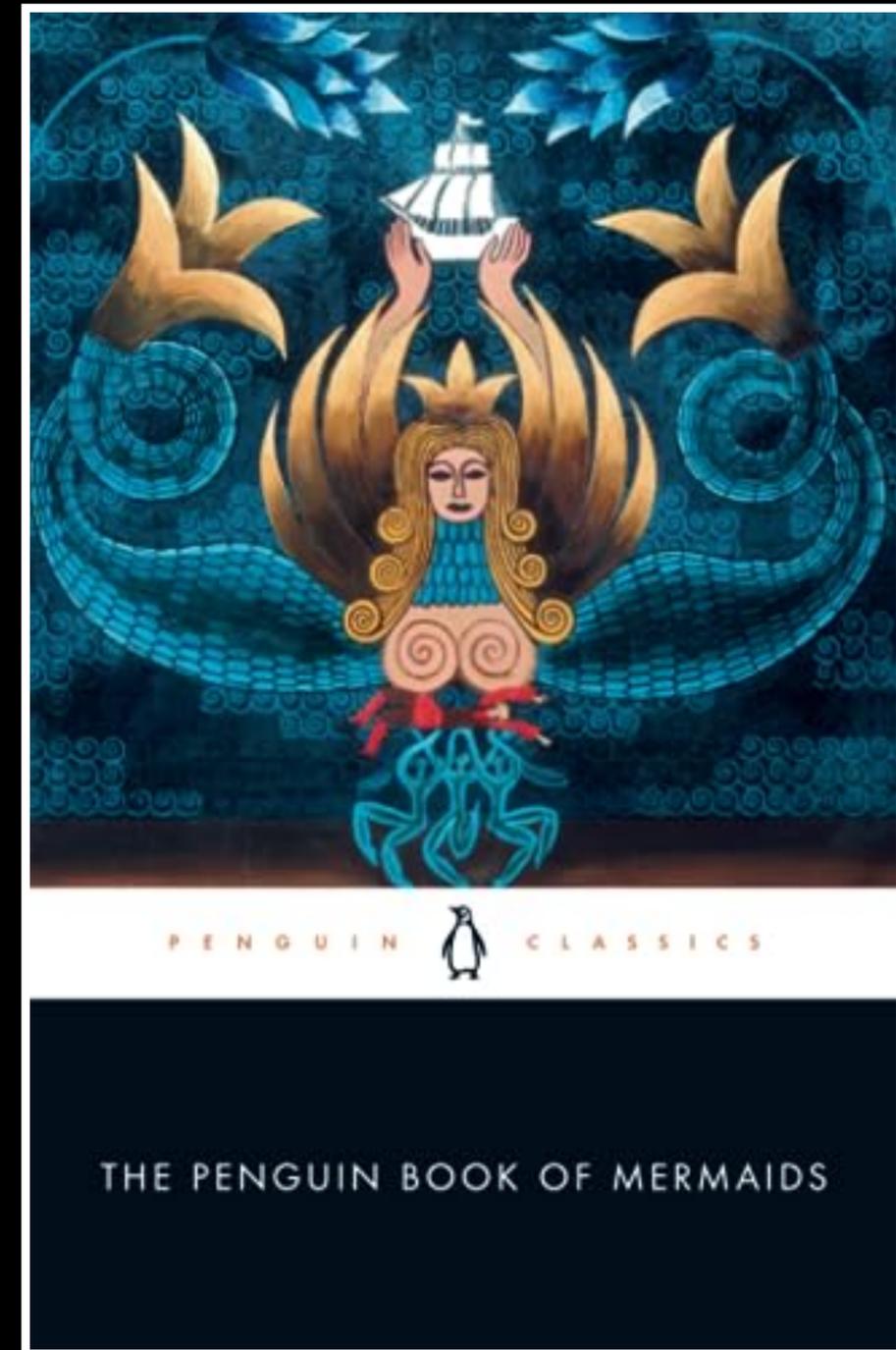
Why study stories?= history, sociology

“What bears keeping in mind is that the value of stories is not the degree to which they are authentically native, but the ways that they reflect the concerns or values of the group who tells and retails them” (xv)

The Penguin Book of Mermaids

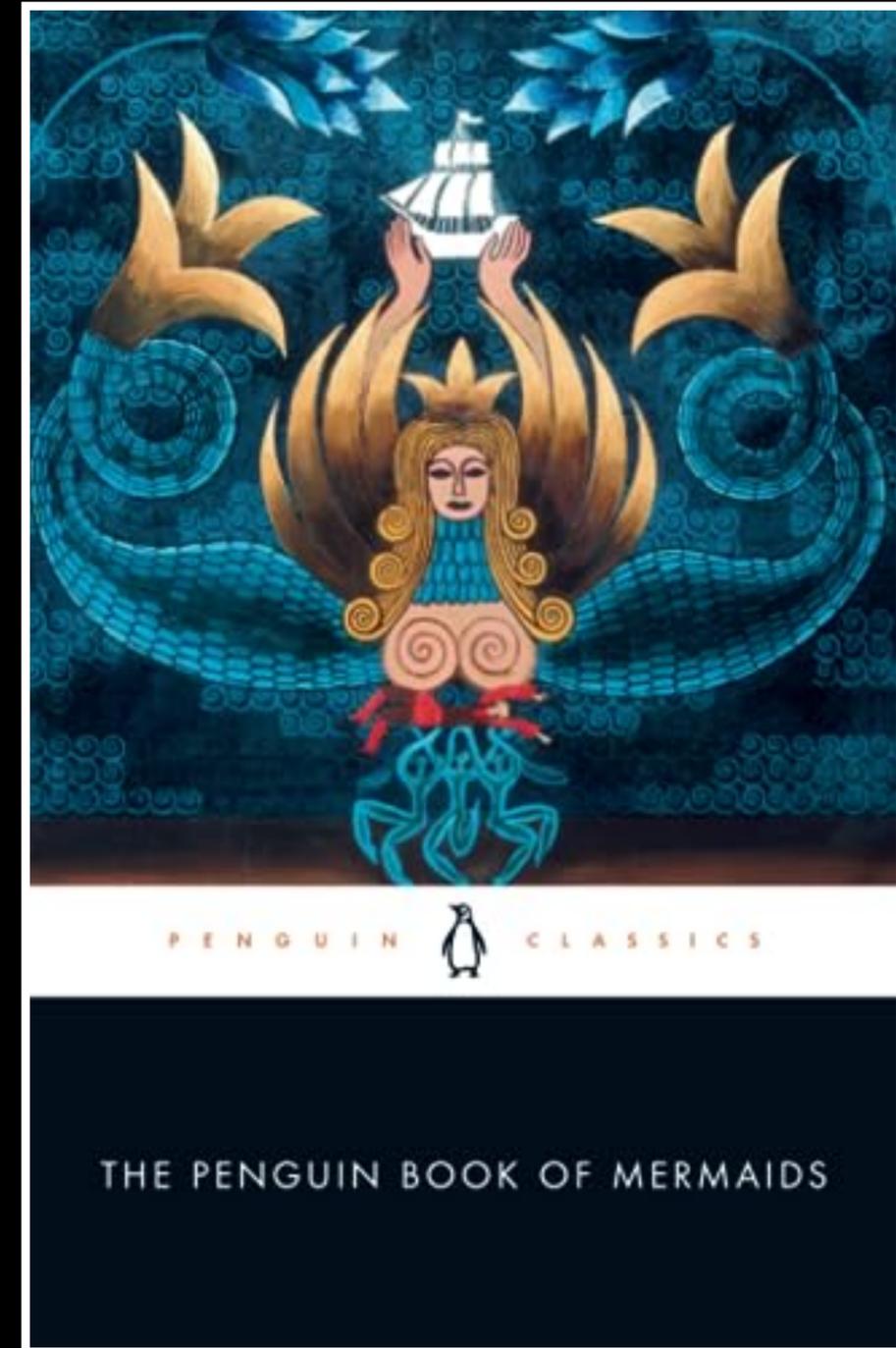
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Monster

Etymology: “that which warns”
Also, demonstrate, teach



The Penguin Book of Mermaids

Eds. Cristina Bacchilega and Marie Alohani Brown

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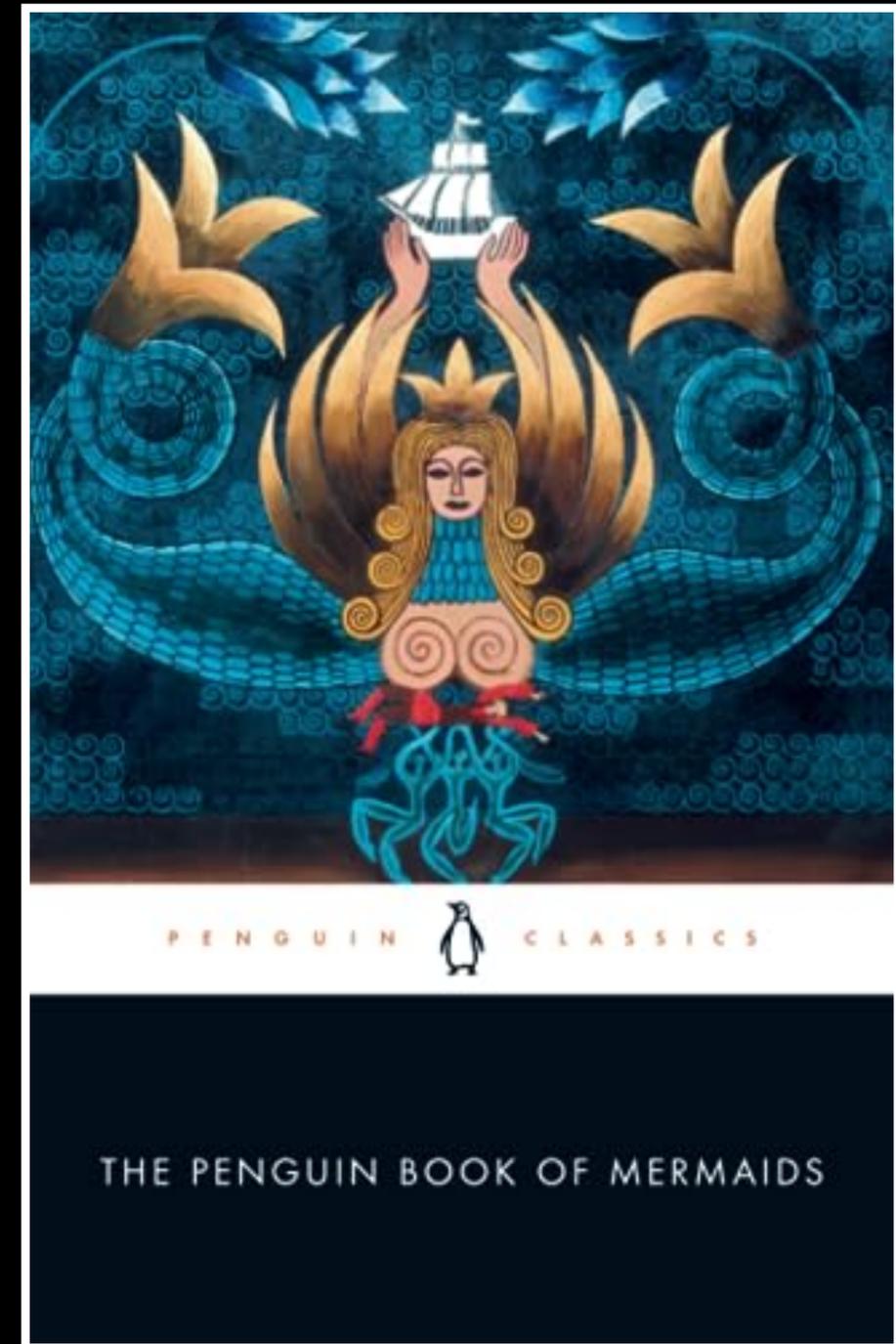
How to study stories?= relational

“Thinking of currents and crosscurrents of stories encourages us not to compare and contrast them as separate and innately different, but rather to think of them in dynamic relation to one another” (xvi)

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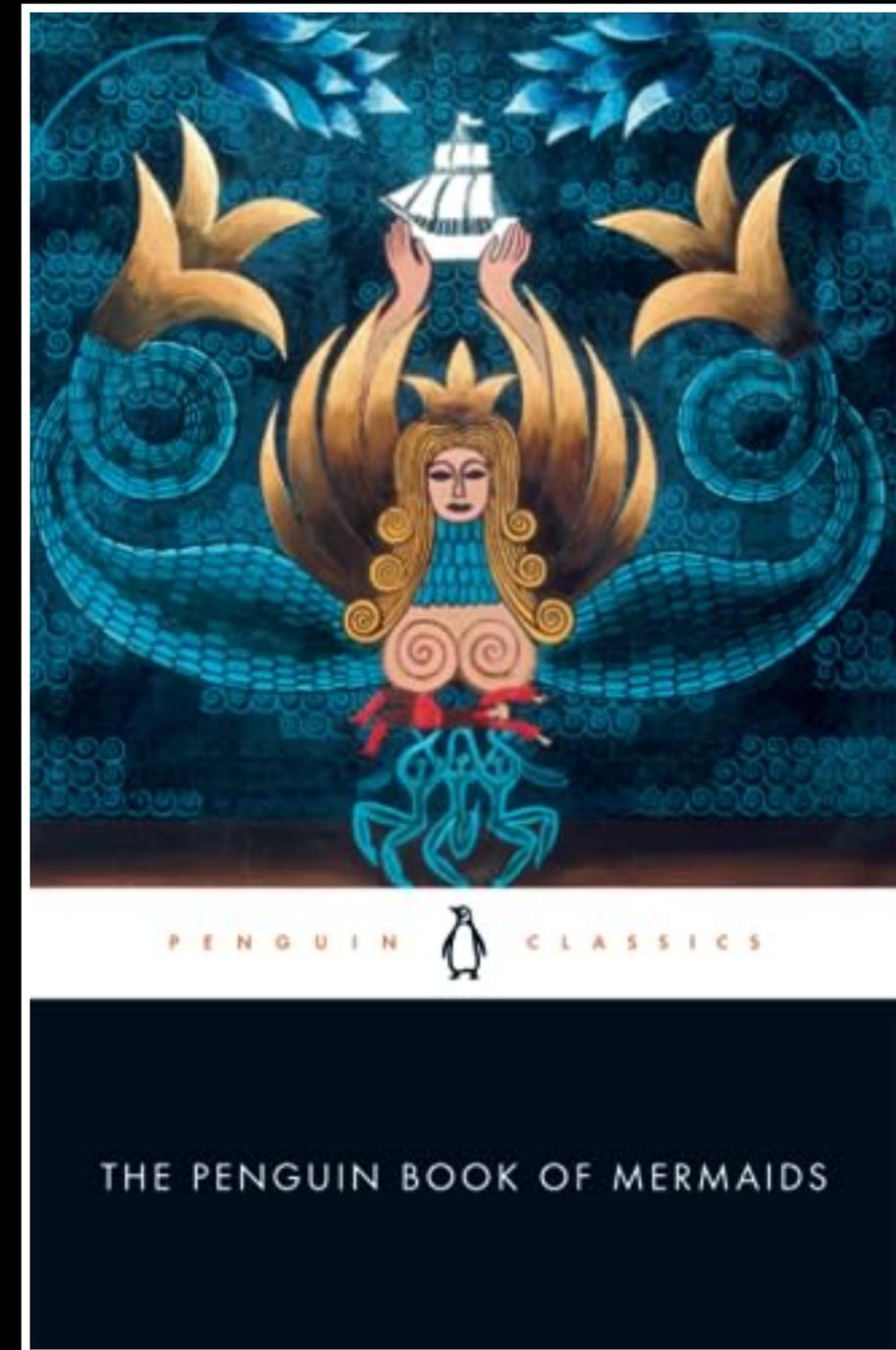
Why study mermaid stories for Lit and the Environment?

“In all of these tales, our places humans in the world is negotiated within a set of social relations that are not limited to sexual or gender dynamics, and encourage reciprocity and humility when interacting with other species and nature” (xx)

The Penguin Book of Mermaids

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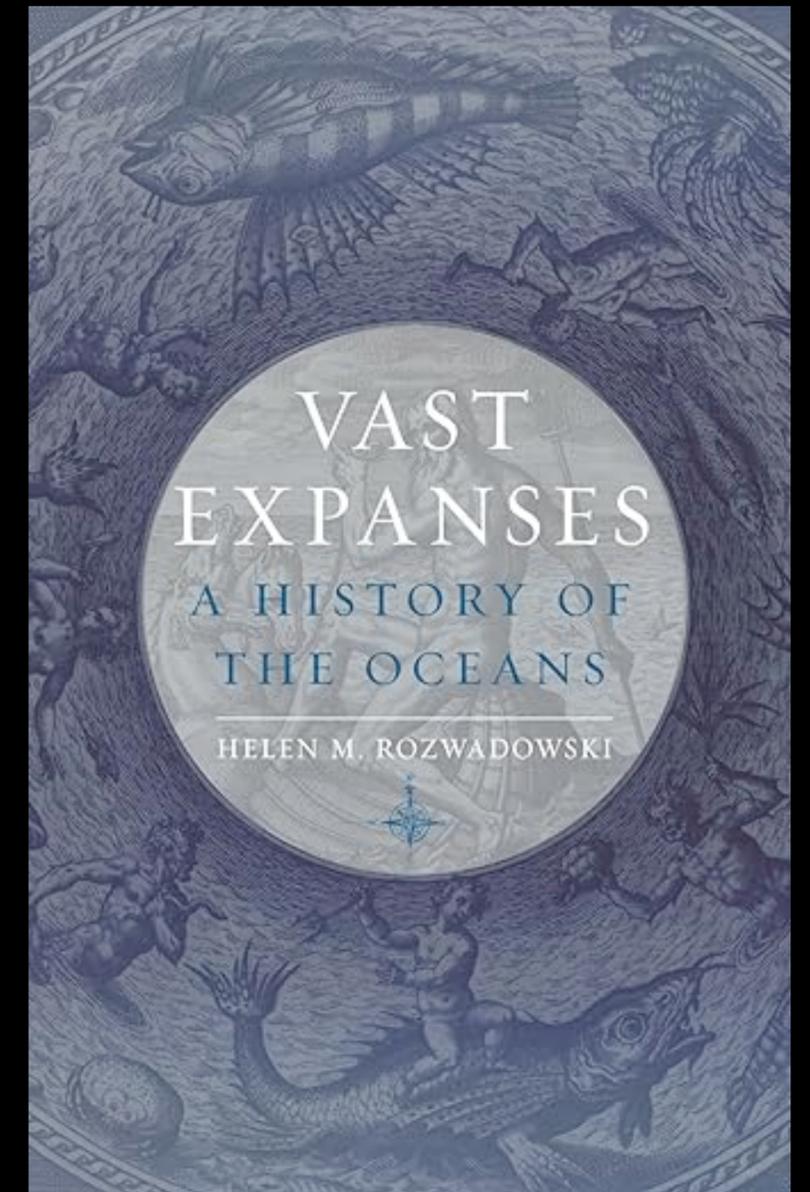
Penguin Books, 2019



Science + folklore = ocean history

“Since the human relationship with the ocean stretches back to evolutionarily time, archaeology and folklore must inform ocean history. Pre-history has labored under the same terrestrial bias as history, no doubt in part because inundation of coasts around the world following the end of the last great ice age has hidden sites of coastal settlement out of sight and consequently out of mind.” (39)

—Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* (Reaktion Books, 2018)



History of Oceans

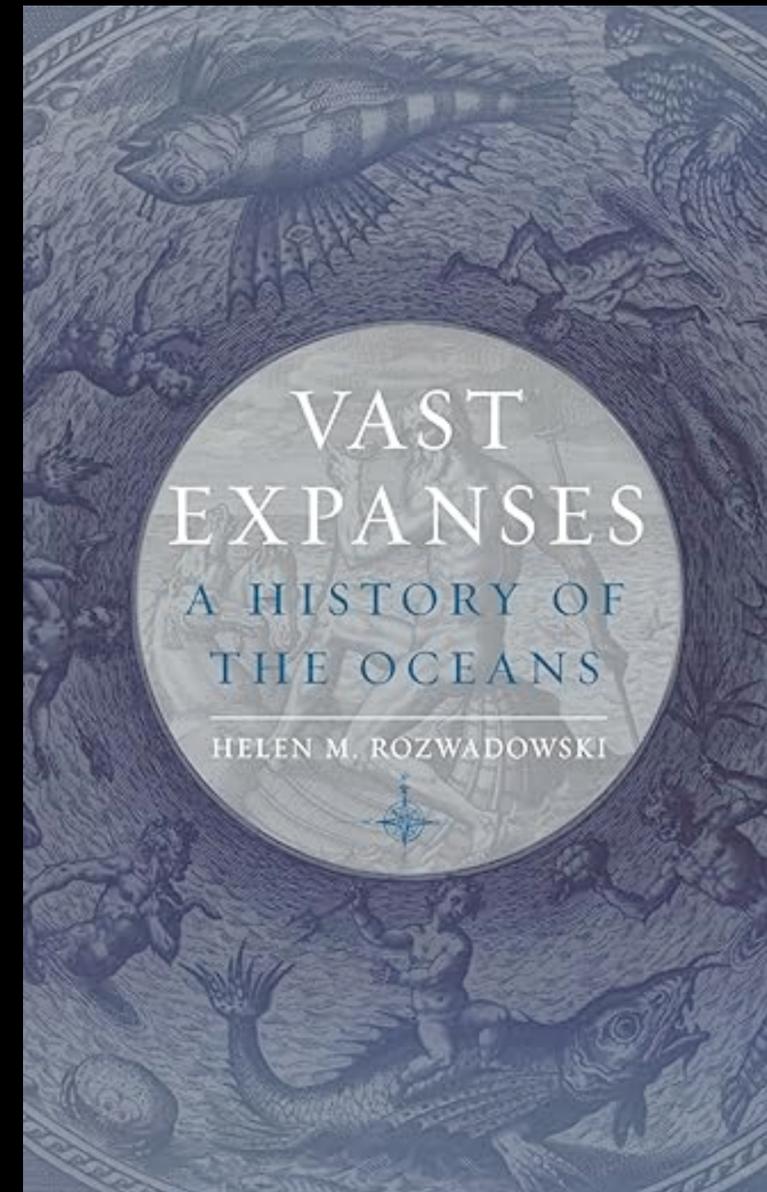
Dark to Middle Ages (500-15th C)=

“The sea existed externally to society, constructed as a space devoted to trade. It represented a distance to be crossed rather than territory belonging to the state.” (47)

15th-18th C= Age of Discovery, Slavery, Navy and State building, capitalism

“By the end of the 18th century, conceptions of land and sea had shifted. New worlds had once been imagined as islands..... Discovery of the sea reorganized geographic understanding of the globe, so that continents rather than islands become the primary unit of land territory.” (98)

—Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* (Reaktion Books, 2018)

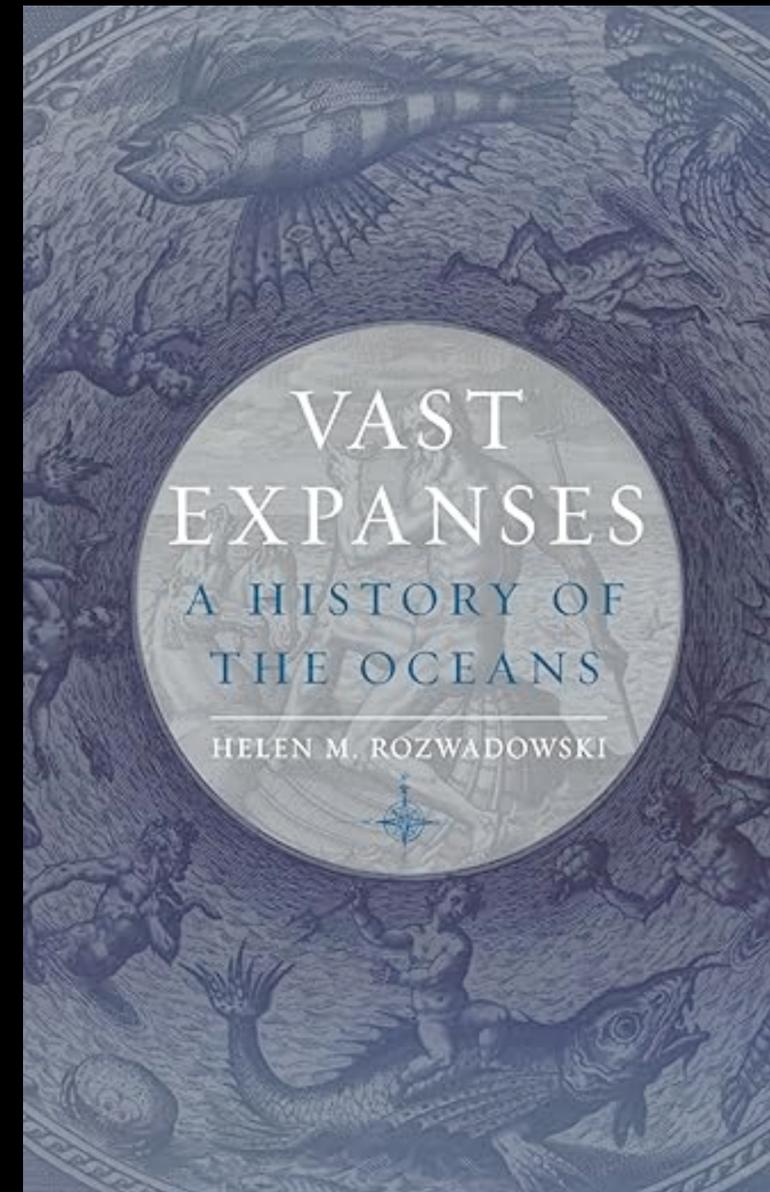


History of Oceans

19th C: “Traditional uses of the sea, especially fishing, trade, emigration, and travel, intensified during the nineteenth century as industrialization transformed the blue water into a workplace on an entirely new scale.” (104)

“More revolutionary than the increased scale of work at sea was the innovation of playing by and on the ocean.” (105)

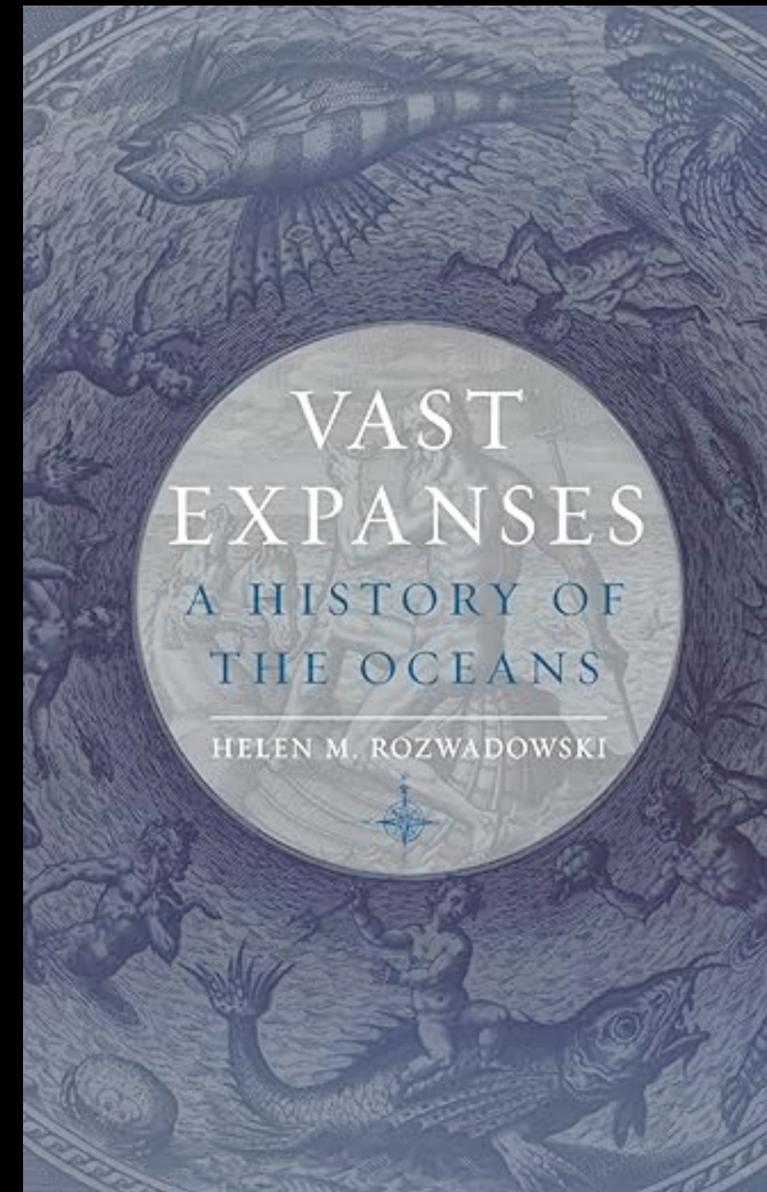
—Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* (Reaktion Books, 2018)



History of Oceans

19th C: “New to the nineteenth century was an appreciation of wilderness, which began with the Romantic embrace of its sublimely mysterious, dark and frightening elements and shifted to the desire to experience the intensity of personal encounters with the sea.” (147)

—Helen M. Rozwadowski, *Vast Expanses: A History of the Oceans* (Reaktion Books, 2018)



Inventing the Beach



Eugene Boudin, *On the Beach, Trouville 1887*



📷 *Fishermen upon a Lee-Shore, in Squally Weather*. Credit: Southampton City Art Gallery

JMW Turner

Inventing the Beach

- “Wilderness”
- Medical cure
- Social and class-related
- Swimming: gender and race



"On the Beach at Trouville" by Claude Monet

Inventing the Ocean as playground

“In the modern era, the Ocean has become a recreational space, which it never really was for most of human history. In less than two centuries, many areas of the sea have turned into playgrounds” (377)

-Eric Paul Roorda, ed. *The Ocean Reader: History, Culture, Politics* (Duke UP, 2020)



Take-aways?