CHAPTER 3

Rough Seas

The Blue Waters of Early Nonfiction Film

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ABSTRACT

Images of rough seas – waves crashing against the seashore, sea storms, or shipwrecks – were one of the most potent visual tropes of the silent era. Rough seas appeared in numerous fiction films and were a staple of early nonfiction actualities, travelogues, and nature films. These and other water images were also frequently coloured with the applied hues that were common in the period: not just blue, but also green, orange, yellow, and pink tinting, toning, and stencil colouring. While the rough seas topos emerged in the Romantic era, this essay explores how it became a commercial style in silent cinema. Colour, with its contradictory tension between realism and sensation, functioned as an important part of this commercial transformation.

KEYWORDS
sublime, Romantic, lyricism, nonfiction, water

'I'm walking along the beach in a howling gale
Another year is passing
In the roaring waters
I hear the voices of dead friends.'
– Derek Jarman, *Blue* (1993)

'Colors soothe us and give poetry to the commonplace.'
– Louis Reeves Harrison, *Moving Picture World* (1912)

Colour is a tricky question for film history, spanning as it does the broad topics of science, technology, and aesthetics. As colour in silent-era cinema has become a newly important topic of research, scholars and archivists have made great strides in exploring its technological and industrial history in the late nineteenth and early 20th century,[1] but the aesthetic questions raised by colour in cinema remain complex. Building upon recent work by Joshua Yumibe, Tom Gunning, and others, this essay explores the aesthetic dimension of colour in a handful of nonfiction films from the silent era.[2] Specifically, I explore the depiction of water, which was a topic of fascination in its own right during this period. In my book, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film,* I began to explore water as a common subject matter of early nonfiction.[3] What is remarkable about early films featuring water – including rivers, waterfalls, oceans, fountains, ice, mist, and rough seas – is how frequently they display the colour processes of the era, including both applied colours and early photographic processes such as Kinemacolor and Prizmacolor. More often than not, colours are used in these watery shots to enhance tone, emotion, and mood. How do these films draw upon Romantic aesthetic traditions to shape a sense of water as poetic? And what is the relationship between realism and the spectator's affective, emotional response to these films? In order to gain perspective on this large topic of water, colour, and aesthetics in silent-era cinema, I will restrict my analysis to one particularly potent type of water imagery: rough seas.

Although the presence of colour in silent cinema is becoming more recognized with each passing year, there remains a persistent and mistaken belief that early nonfiction films were mostly black-and-white. Even Richard Misek, in his otherwise excellent 2010 book *Chromatic Cinema,* incorrectly writes that 'Naturally coloured phenomena – trees, rivers, rocks, sky, etc. – typically remained uncoloured' in the silent era.[4] In fact, my research suggests just the opposite: colour was a particularly crucial component of early nonfiction genres, especially travelogues and scenic films. In the heyday of the single-reel era (1907–1915), nonfiction films very frequently received the lush colour treatments of the period.[5] Applied colour processes such as tinting, toning, and stencil colouring were a crucial part of early nonfiction film's commercial viability and popular appeal. As one commentator wrote in 1911:

3.1: *[Rotsen en golven]* (Gaumont, circa 1911). Frame enlargement. Courtesy EYE Film Institute Netherlands.

> There are many patrons of moving picture theaters who are attracted more by colored films than by the finest masterpiece in purely dramatic or comedy lines. [...] [S]pectacular and scenic films [...] have hitherto constituted the bulk of the colored releases in America.[6]

Rough seas have been part of cinema from the start; it is my contention that they were particularly significant in the silent era, and that colour functioned as an integral part of this significance. The silent-era films in which rough seas appear are not generally well-known today, but a quick scan across film history demonstrates the resilience of this particular topos. Rough seas appeared at the dawn of moving pictures with *Rough Sea at Dover* (Birt Acres and R. W. Paul, 1896), and flourished in the single-reel era in films such as *Storm at Sea* (Gaumont, 1912) and *Rocks and Waves* (Gaumont, c. 1911), both of which feature colour tinting and/or toning.

Rough seas continued to appear in fiction films throughout the silent era in films such as *The Sands of Dee* (D.W. Griffith, 1912), *Dark Road* (F.W. Murnau, 1921), *The Sea Beast* (Millard Webb, 1926), and *The Yankee Clipper* (Rupert Julian, 1927), the last of which survives today with blue tinting. Rough seas persisted well past the silent era; *Portrait of Jennie* (William Dieterle, 1948) even features a rough sea sequence using the by-then-archaic process of green tinting.[7] The trope continued: *The French Lieutenant's Woman* (Karel Reisz

1981) uses the rough-sea topos as a key visual element, even in its posters; Derek Jarman refers to rough seas in his moving, magisterial 1993 film *Blue*, as quoted in the epigram above. Films about global warming and rising sea levels arguably constitute a new version of the topos today. Rather than explore the various iterations of rough seas across film history, this essay remains focussed on the silent era and its unique use of applied colour.

The rough seas of silent cinema remediate Romantic aesthetics in the context of early twentieth century seaside tourism. These rough seas were frequently coloured with the applied hues that were common in the period: mostly blue, but also green, orange, yellow, and pink tinting, toning, and stencil colouring.[8] Images of water in motion are, of course, highly cinematic. The mechanically reproduced movement of water rolling, crashing, splashing, and shimmering produces a strongly affective experience for the spectator, and when colour is added to the experience, the films reach a kind of lyrical affective peak. In this article, I argue that the materiality of applied colour – literally, aniline dyes applied to individual celluloid prints – can be seen as an apt extension of the already materialist fascination with oceans evident in the rough seas topos.

ROMANTICISM, NATURE, AND THE SUBLIME

Images of rough seas – waves crashing against the seashore, sea storms, or shipwrecks – depict wild nature in contact with frail humanity. Pictures of oceans and storms have always been made, but the 'rough seas' topos emerged in the Romantic era. The pictorial and symbolic density of the trope arises from a new appreciation for nature (and new ideas about humanity's relationship to nature) that emerged at this time. As numerous scholars of Romanticism have pointed out, Romantic aesthetics involve a reverence for nature and wilderness that was produced in part by a reaction against the Enlightenment and the scientific revolution. Crucially, however, this Romantic reverence was ambivalent from the start. According to Mario Praz, 'romantic' initially had two meanings: one a sense of exaggeration and ridiculousness derived from the old Romantic literary genre of chivalrous and pastoral romances, the other a link to the setting of these stories: 'Side by side with the depreciatory use of the word in relation to the events and sentiments of the old romances, "romantic" came to be used also to describe scenes and landscapes similar to those described in them, and this time without any note of scorn.' Castles, mountains, forests, and seas all fit into this category of Romantic settings, which came to express 'more and more the growing love for wild and melancholy aspects of nature'.[9] It is important to emphasize that not all Romantic settings produce the same effects: while mountains have been analysed for their production of a 'magisterial gaze', seascapes are most often rendered as uncontrollable, threatening, and vast.[10] These are all, of course, key characteristics of the sublime. What I aim to explore here is the way rough seas were transformed from a Romantic aesthetic to a commercial style in film.

While an account of rough-sea imagery in the Romantic era is beyond the scope of this short essay, it is useful to briefly consider how the topos looked when it first developed. Rough seas are plentiful in the shipwrecks of the nineteenth-century sea painting tradition; think of Theodore Gericault's *The Raft of the Medusa* (1819), J.M.W. Turner's *A Disaster at Sea* (1835), or Winslow Homer's *The Gulf Stream* (1899). These three famous paintings all depict a larger dramatic narrative frozen in a moment of time, and all use the deeply saturated hues of oil paint to produce intense and even terrifying effects. Resisting the temptation to analyse these paintings here, I want simply to observe that, while each features a different colour palette, in general the colours are dark hues of blue, brown, and black, with some brighter colours used for contrasting details (red and yellow) in each. Seen in the context of a long history of visual imagery, the specificity of the medium (oil painting, still image) and the material quality of the oil paint contribute to the singularity of these three 'rough seas' as much as the individuality of the artist and the historical moment each work exemplifies.

While blue had traditionally been used as the colour for the Virgin Mary's dress in Renaissance painting, the colour took on a melancholy and otherworldly cast in the Romantic era. The figure of the blue flower became a kind of Romantic totem in the nineteenth century.[11] Goethe wrote at length about blue in his landmark book *Theory of Colours*, praising its ambiguity: 'Its appearance, then, is a kind of contradiction between excitement and repose'.[12] Moreover, in this period, new blue pigments became available: cobalt blue was discovered in 1802 and the less-saturated cerulean blue became widely available for oil paint after 1860. The blue aniline dyes used for film tinting often fall into the cerulean range of hues.[13]

As demonstrated by each of these three paintings, one of the main cultural functions of the rough sea topos is to dramatize human suffering by locating it in the setting of a turbulent ocean. Rough-sea images can thus be understood as a projection of human subjectivity and emotion onto the external world, as though the water mirrors the state of the humans. The idea that nature reflects, complements, or brings out the human is deeply anthropomorphic, but it also gestures towards a sense of the interrelatedness of the human and the natural realms. This relationship between interior and exterior – or the human and nature, or subjectivity and setting – is a key dimension of Romantic aesthetics, in which individual experience was elevated over and against traditional

Classical ethical and aesthetic values. In the rough seas trope, humans are not the only living force present, and sometimes not even the most important force present. In rough seas imagery, the human realm and nonhuman nature contend with each other for importance. Rough seas thus possess at least two of the four elements that Lawrence Buell claims 'might be said to comprise an environmentally oriented work': first, 'The nonhuman environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history', and second, 'The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest'.[14]

While Romanticism is a historical sensibility, it has found a long and rich life in modernity and postmodernity, and it has proved to be an adaptable mode in mass culture. Cinematic rough sea images are particularly linked to the technology with which they are produced. In other words, the technology of silent-era cinema (specifically mechanically reproduced movement and applied colours) produces a particular kind of rough sea in this period. In order to explore this history, we must adopt a materialist historiographical perspective in which colours applied to the surface of the image are just as important as the image itself. I argue that the development of rough seas into a commercial trope was partly effected through the use of colour in magic lantern slides, postcards, and films. The deep colours used by Romantic artists producing sublime seascapes bear the weight of carefully considered decisions. Colours in early cinema, in contrast, fit the needs of an industrial-commercial mode of production. While early cinema's applied colours were hardly unsystematic, they have a more arbitrary and ornamental function than the colours of handcrafted artworks. That is to say, although the sublime emerged as an aesthetic philosophy in the fine arts, it quickly gained influence in mass culture, though it changed in the process of its commercial reimagining. What was once intensely terrifying became instead soothing and beautiful. An aesthetic that once bore world-historical significance came to take on meaning for personal and even touristic experience.

In fact, colour is often associated with the commercial, the lurid, and the feminine, as David Batchelor has discussed in his influential book *Chromophobia*. It is worth considering which colours in particular have been gendered, how, and when. Not all colours are the same, and the different hues of rough seas in different art forms and media can illustrate the changing function of the trope over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. According to Edmund Burke, one of the key Romantic theorists of the sublime and the beautiful, colours fit into different aesthetic categories depending on their intensity. Burke writes that 'darkness is more productive of sublime ideas than light'.[15] In contrast, he finds that 'the colours of beautiful bodies must not be dusky or muddy, but clean and fair [...] they must not be of the strongest kind. Those which seem most appropriated to beauty, are the milder of every sort; light greens; soft blues; weak whites; pink reds; and violets'.[16] One might imagine that Burke would have labeled the blues of early cinema merely beautiful rather than sublime, but I would argue that they serve as a commercialized version of the sublime, something more akin to what Laura Mulvey has described as the cinema's 'clumsy sublime'. As Mulvey writes, 'the image of a cinematic sublime depends on a mechanism that is fascinating because of, not in spite of, its clumsy visibility'.[17]

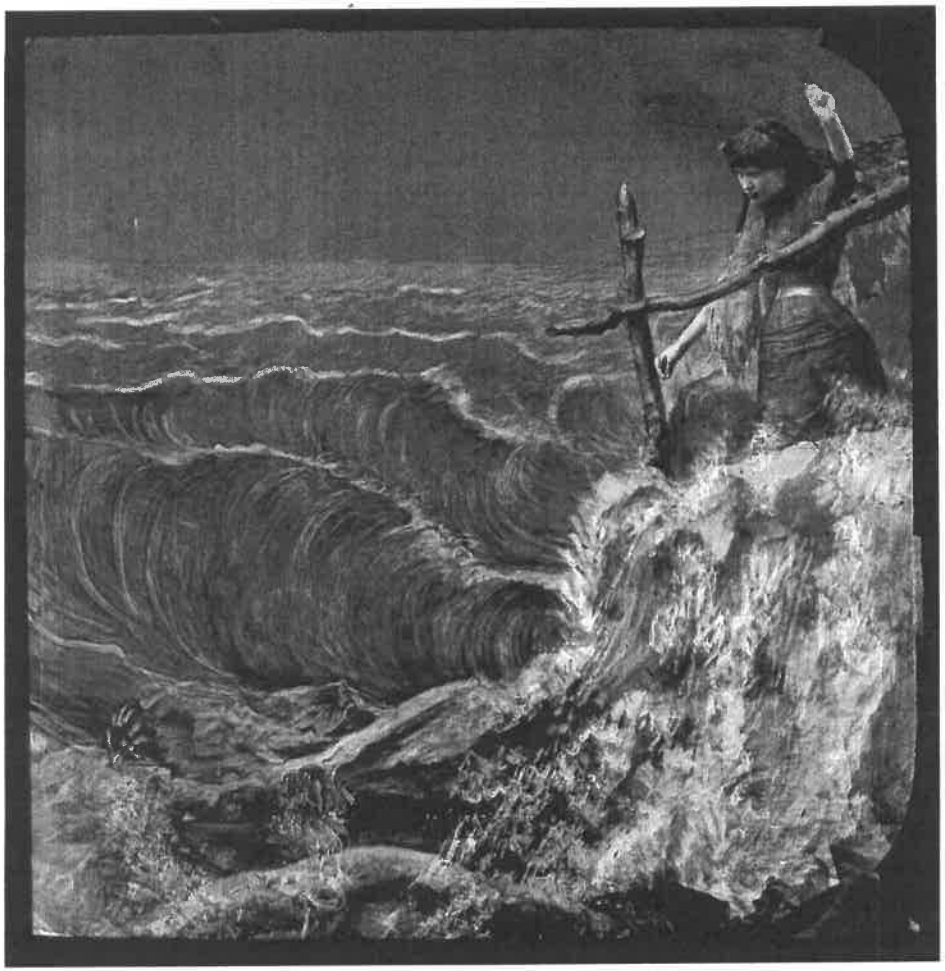
CINEMATIC ROUGH SEAS: REALISM + SENSATION

Like all topoi, which are intermedial by nature, the topos of 'rough seas' can be found not just in early films, but also in a broad range of other media including painting, photography, literature, postcards, and more. The trope appears frequently in nineteenth-century magic lantern slides, such as this image from the slide set *A Ballad of the Sea* (Bamforth & Co., 1892). (See Figure 3.2)

Early films were frequently coloured by the same companies that made lantern slides; the British Bamforth & Co. produced a number of early films in colour, and they also manufactured a series of 'saucy seaside' postcards. The cinematic iteration of the rough seas topos, however, displays specific technological effects.

Rough seas were a particularly potent image in the silent era because they combine two of the most remarked-upon aspects of cinema in the early years: movement and colour. Film's ability to present physical reality in the most trivial detail – and in movement – produces the sense of actuality that was fundamentally important in early cinema. But the use of applied colour processes in all their glorious technological-historical specificity foregrounds colour's nonrealistic potential, adding a kind of emotional overlay to images of actuality. This is, in effect, a cinema-specific iteration of the age-old artistic distinction between *disegno* and *colore* – or line drawing and colouring-in – in which line drawing in black and white is favored as more intellectual, rational, and well-suited to represent form (as in the line drawings of Michelangelo), whereas colour is viewed as vibrant, lifelike, and expressive, but also secondary, an addition, ornamental. Cinematic rough seas particularly embody this push-pull between actuality and emotional expressiveness.

Rough Sea at Dover was one of the most popular moving-picture subjects of 1896–1897. Indeed, it became so legendary that an early historian of film wrote in 1922, 'a rough sea at Dover [has] come down to us as part of film history'.[18] The film's first viewers made note of the combination of verisimilitude and sensation in the film:



3.2: *A Ballad of the Sea* (Bamforth & Co., 1892). Lantern slide. Illuminago Collection – reproduced by permission. Digital image © 2006 Ludwig Vogl-Bienek / Media Studies, Universität Trier. Lucerna Magic Lantern Web Resource.

> the most successful effect [of the kinetoscopic work], and one which called forth rounds of applause from the usually placid members of the 'Royal', was a reproduction of a number of breaking waves, which may be seen to roll in from the sea, curl over against a jetty, and break into clouds of snowy spray that seemed to start out from the screen.[19]

This reviewer particularly remarks upon the movement of the images – the waves roll, curl, break, and 'seem to start out from the screen'.[20] At the same time that cinema perfects a kind of objective visual perception, it also has the power to foreground the sensational, embodied experience of that perception. *Rough Sea at Dover*'s kinetic, three-dimensional effects are therefore both realistic and sensational. Early nonfiction embodies the contradictory appeal of realism and sensation, even before the application of colour.

Rough Sea at Dover was a black-and-white film; or rather, it survives today as a black-and-white print, and I have found no evidence (so far) that colour prints circulated. In the earliest years of cinema, watching the movement of natural phenomena was captivating in and of itself. I refer here to the celebrated 'wind in the trees' effect, noticed immediately by early film audiences who commented on the leaves fluttering in the background of the Lumière Brothers's film *Feeding the Baby*. Half a century later, D.W. Griffith lamented the loss of this element in film, remarking in a 1948 interview (a few months before his death), 'What the modern movie lacks is beauty – the beauty of moving wind in the trees'.[21] The 'wind in the trees' is a wonderfully evocative phrase that sums up cinema's unique ability to represent the materiality of the physical world, or what theorist Jane Bennett calls 'vibrant matter'. In film landscapes, nature appears as a material presence with a force of its own, only to disappear again with the evanescence that is the hallmark of this time-based medium. Just as much as the wind in the trees, rough seas can serve as a potent metaphor for cinema's singular ability to produce pathos out of realism.

Although the topic might not seem to lend itself to remakes, rough seas continued to appear regularly in early cinema. The Edison Manufacturing Company quickly produced several rough seas films of its own: *Surf at Long Branch* (1896), *Surf at Monterey* (1897), and *Storm at Sea* (1900). Indeed, films showing all different kinds of moving water – not just rough seas but also waterfalls, rivers, lakes, and fountains – were some of the most common subjects in early cinema.[22] Although surviving copies of these very early rough seas films are not coloured, this does not mean that coloured versions were not shown. At this time, however, I have not been able to find any evidence to support this hypothesis (the Edison films mentioned above are paper prints, which means that colour – which would have been hand painted on individual prints at this early date – would not have been preserved in any case), so, for now, I must restrict myself to speculation about their colour possibilities.

While dance films were at first the most frequently coloured film subjects, the earliest hand-painted nonfiction films that survive such as *Conway Castle* (British Mutoscope & Biograph, 1898) indicate that actuality subjects were also considered worthy of applied colour in the 1890s. By the turn of the century, there was an established tradition of coloured water shows in Europe: fountains illuminated with coloured lights had become a special attraction in the late nineteenth century and were featured in the Exposition Universelle

in Paris in 1889 and 1900. A surviving film in the EYE collection, *Les grandes eaux de Versailles* (Pathé, 1904), demonstrates just this effect, with hand-painted pastel colours glistening atop the fountain's water. In the United States, Niagara Falls was illuminated by coloured electric lights in the 1890s, and the Yosemite firefall was established in the 1870s, in which burning embers were shoved over the side of Yosemite Falls at night to create a lighted waterfall effect. So while the hand-painted colours found in so many early dance films were influenced by the live coloured light dances of Loïe Fuller, it stands to reason that there may have been some hand-painted colour water films in the first decade of film history, even though these colours have mostly not survived to the present day.[23]

Seascapes lend themselves to extreme long shots, and the tradition of rough seas in silent-era cinema is filled with long shots and horizon lines that emphasize the integrity of space, in opposition to tighter shots of human subjects that rely on montage, fragmenting space. Rough seas thus figure into a larger discussion about cinematic realism along the lines of André Bazin's theory of deep focus and the long take.[24] The revitalization of the ontological realism debate today can be extended to new questions about cinema's relationship to materiality: not just the material, nonhuman world of water, trees, mountains, and animals represented in film, but also the materiality of celluloid itself. While additive colour would seem to detract from cinematic realism, since it is so patently non-naturalistic, it is most certainly a material aspect of film, and thus it has a role to play in discussions about the ontology of cinema.

NONFICTION AND THE SENSUAL REALISM OF COLOUR

Both Gunning and Yumibe have discussed colour in silent-era films in terms of two opposing traditions: sensual colour vs. indexical colour.[25] We might also characterize this opposition as lyrical vs. educational, fantastical vs. naturalistic, or emotional vs. realistic uses of colour. But while these categories make sense for fiction films and the hand-tinted trick films of early cinema, I want to suggest that these two traditions are not opposed in quite the same way in nonfiction. Rather, silent-era nonfiction films bind the sensual together with the indexical or realistic. Indeed, in the most lyrical early nonfiction film genres such as scenic and nature films, and even some science films and industrials, it is precisely this joining of the fantastical and the real that functions as the films' attraction.

Given that nonfiction films lay a claim to indexical realism as their very reason for being, the question of realism is never absent when considering these films, but the interplay between colour's sensuality and colour's realism formed a different set of tensions in nonfiction than in fiction films of this period. Generally speaking, nonfiction film colours were marketed as – and praised in terms of – their relative level of realism. A reviewer of Gaumont's *A Stormy Sea* writes in 1909, 'The toning in some of the scenes is exquisite and faithfully reproduces the appearance of the water and foam'.[26] While the presence of blue toning in a rough sea film might seem to make sense from the standpoint of realism, the monochromatic saturation of everything in the frame that occurs with blue toning exceeds the pretense of realistic blue water. Colour in early nonfiction foregrounds the sensational or emotionally affective dimension of supposedly realistic educational subjects. Colour is an important part of nonfiction films' lyrical, sensual dynamic.

In fact, applied colours are anything but naturalistic. Stencil colouring was generally promoted as 'natural colour' in nonfiction films, as seen in Pathécolor or the stencil colouring by Gaumont in films such as *Cascades of the Houyoux*,[27] but stencil colouring processes are dominated by pastels, and present a limited palette of a few colours at a time, creating an effect very unlike the colours of human vision. Colour tinting and toning were ubiquitous in nonfiction films, and their historical function is perhaps the most confounding of the early colour processes to understand today. Nonfiction film can help us to unravel the historical significance of tinting and toning. The monochromatic colours produced by tinting and toning processes bathe the film's diegetic world in a single non-naturalistic hue such as red, pink, yellow, or blue. Of course, we can point out when there is a discernable logic to colour tinting, as when water shots are tinted blue or fire shots are tinted red, but even then, the monochromatic nature of the colour is non-naturalistic, for humans do not see the world as though it were dipped in a dye bath. What does it mean when an image of the ocean is tinted red, or green, or orange, as we see in numerous surviving examples? I want to push another interpretation of monochromatic colouring, and consider its function not as an auxiliary of realism, but in the service of the unreal. Seen in a single still image, the colour seems somehow to float above or beyond the continuum of realism/non-realism. Monochromatic applied colours have psychological resonance; they produce surprising and unpredictable responses in the spectator. With colours freed from the burden of indexical referentiality, a blue-tinted mountain landscape or a green-tinted mushroom seen in close-up edges towards abstraction, *at the same time* that it retains its indexical referentiality as a mountain landscape or a mushroom. Understood in this way, the monochromatic tinting/toning aesthetic feels profoundly modern, foregrounding as it does an aesthetic experience that pushes toward abstraction.

Whether colour tinting and toning were understood in this way at the time is another question. Certainly, colour's function in silent nonfiction was

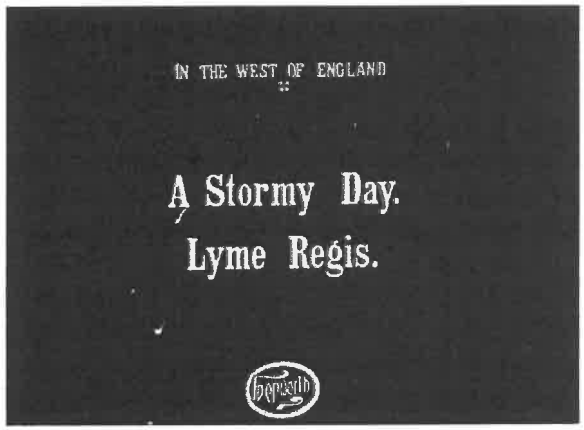
not fixed or systematic across all film production companies and national cinemas. Nicola Mazzanti has claimed that film colouring could be changed for different audiences in different countries (although this has yet to be substantiated by archival evidence); if true, this would support the argument that the monochromatic colours of tinting/toning processes were not understood as realistic, but as unreal or ornamental.[28] *Moving Picture World* commentator Louis Reeves Harrison, one of the foremost writers on film aesthetics in the early period, clearly appreciated the aesthetic dimension of applied colours, and monochromatic colours in particular. He writes,

> I love the variety of low-toned, deep-toned and rich-toned pictures. I do not mean the calico-colored daubs, but bluish-green depths in the marines, mellow lights like those of Titian and Rembrandt where tints are applied to interiors, where the reds glow softly, and rosy dawns, because what is generally appropriate in tint, though it may be uniform, is refreshing to the eye. Colors soothe us and give poetry to the commonplace.[29]

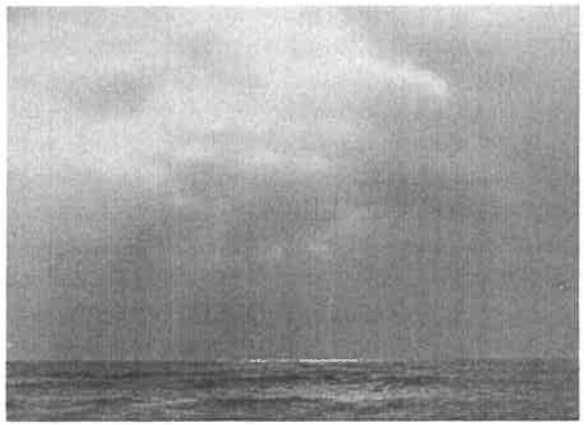
Seen in movement, the role of colour tinting and toning takes on even more complexity as the colours flicker and change from shot to shot. The first shot of the 1912 Gaumont film *Storm at Sea,* which is toned blue, gives us the perspective of a sailor looking out the prow of a ship. The blue here certainly makes sense from the perspective of realism. Even when a later shot in the film is tinted a pinkish red, this colouring might be rationalized as a sunset shot, in which case it can be seen in line with realism once again. Two points can be made here. First of all, just as much as this film shows us a series of seascapes (with shifting horizon lines), this film functions as a procession of a series of colours: blue, orange, pinkish red, orangeish red. It would be hard to imagine a fiction film using colour tinting and toning in quite the same way, changing colours in every sequential shot. This has much to do with the way nonfiction films were edited differently than fiction films of this period, following a principle of 'one shot per topic' or what I have elsewhere called the 'string of pearls' principle of editing.[30] This film that flickers across a range of colours can thus be seen as an aesthetic experience just as much as an educational experience. Perhaps, even, this film is more about aesthetics than any particular ship or sea or sailing subject. In fact, the Gaumont company specialized in just this sort of generalized scenic subject. In the years 1910–1913, Gaumont's film titles include: *A Sea of Clouds*; *Sunset*; *O'er Crag and Torrent*; *O'er Hill and Vale*; *Autumn Leaves*; *By the Sad Sea Waves*. Although we can find these titles and some reviews of these films in the trade press – and even some advertisements – the only extant print I have found (so far) is *Storm at Sea*, so it is unfortunately impossible to study this group of films as a series.

Rough seas continued to serve lyrical purposes in numerous other early nonfiction films. *In the West of England* is one of several 'Stereo-Scenic' films made by the Hepworth company in the mid 1910s.[31] These films were not actually stereoscopic, but *In the West of England* does feature compositions in depth and planar compositions that emphasize a sense of deep space.[32] A review of a different Hepworth Stereo-Scenic from 1915 describes the effect this way:

> *A Ramble in the New Forest.* – A demand for scenic pictures had sprung up even before the Hepworth Stereo-Scenics appeared, and their arrival quickened this demand immensely. Their brightness, variety, and



3.3: *In the West of England* (Hepworth, 1917). Frame enlargement. Courtesy EYE Film Institute Netherlands.



3.4: *In the West of England* (Hepworth, 1917). Frame enlargement. Courtesy EYE Film Institute Netherlands.

> wonderful quality made them so different to anything that had been produced before. This picture is a good example of what a stereo-scenic should be, and has for its subject that interesting and beautiful spot the New Forest, 'the hunting-ground of England's Kings.' –Hepworth Stereo-Scenic, 400 feet (June 14).[33]

Every shot of *In the West of England* features movement. The first few shots of this six-minute film show scenes along the Devon coast (in what is now Exmoor National Park) taken from a moving railway car. This portion of the film, which shows cottages, a river, and trees, is first tinted a very light brown and then tinted amber. At the town of Lynmouth, the shot is tinted blue, and a panning/tracking shot, clearly taken from a moving vehicle, shows us the ocean and then the town situated at the mouth of the River Lyn. The final shots of the film shift to the southwest of England, showing 'A Stormy Day. Lyme Regis' (Figure 3.3), first in a shot tinted grey-blue and finally ending with a blue-green tinted shot of a placid ocean after the storm with heavenly sunlight shining down on the sea (Figure 3.4).

This concluding two-shot pattern is a 'rough seas' convention: after a portrayal of nature's fearful power, these films tend to end on a positive note with a display of God's beneficence in nature. We might assign various meanings to the grey-blue and blue-green colours used for these two concluding shots: they are both melancholy, not comforting but chilly, and suggest a larger narrative significance. Not only does the grey-blue signify a storm, but the location itself, famous to many as the location in which the concluding scenes of Jane Austen's 1818 novel *Persuasion* are set, signifies not seaside leisure, but seaside melancholy.[34] Most of all, what is striking is that these seascapes are rendered in colour at all, for the world does not actually exist in a glowing grey or a glowing green monochromatic tint. The non-realism of colour tinting produces the lyrical or sensual element of colour in nonfiction film.

While I do not analyse any films made with early photographic colour systems such as Kinemacolor or Prizma Color in this essay, it is worth mentioning that such systems were often promoted with just this combination of realism and sensation that I have discussed, as can be seen in a Kinemacolor advertisement pronouncing: 'It's just as if you were actually there'.[35] In this and many other advertisements for early colour systems, colour adds both realism and sensation at the same time: it is as if to seem realistic, a film has to make the viewer feel something. According to this notion, realism is defined as a sensory experience. In this way, colour underscores nonfiction film's role as a form of what Vanessa Schwartz calls 'spectacular realities'. In defining realism as sensation, early cinema produces a decidedly commercial definition of realism with distinct aesthetic values: sensation-as-realism is a potent aesthetic experience that is accessible to the masses. This is Romanticism remediated in a more commercial form.

In Romantic aesthetics, the viewer's feelings are projected onto the landscape. It is as if nature exists as an empty vessel to be activated by human emotion. This is a profoundly anthropomorphic way of understanding the world. To return to Praz and his analysis of Romanticism, I would like to conclude by bringing this discussion of rough seas back to a larger sense of the trope's function as expressing the unexpressible – in great part through colour. Praz writes,

> The word 'romantic' thus comes to be associated with another group of ideas, such as 'magic', 'suggestive', 'nostalgic', and above all with words expressing states of mind which cannot be described such as the German 'Sehnsucht' and the English 'wistful [...] The essence of Romanticism consequently comes to consist in that which cannot be described'.[36]

Natural settings, with their mute expressivity, function perfectly as just this sort of 'suggestive expression, which invites much more than it states'.[37] What, then, could be more romantic than rough seas, a nonhuman plane of existence which suggests and evokes moods not through words, but through movement and colour. Rough seas, as depicted in films, photos, postcards, and magic lantern slides of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, offer a chromatic refraction of modern experience.

NOTES

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1 See the Timeline of Historical Film Colors, an online database developed by Barbara Flueckiger at http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/.

2 See Joshua Yumibe, *Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012) and Tom Gunning, Joshua Yumibe, Giovanna Fossati, and Jonathon Rosen, *Fantasia of Color in Early Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2015).

3 See Jennifer Lynn Peterson, *Education in the School of Dreams: Travelogues and Early Nonfiction Film* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2013), 197–201, 246.

4 Richard Misek, *Chromatic Cinema: A History of Screen Colour* (Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 16.

5 In addition to the films I discuss in the body of this essay, numerous other films held in the EYE Film Institute's collection contain significant coloured water footage, including *Aan de Kust van Groenland* (Pathé, c. 1920); *Aan de oevers der Pescara, Ascension du Pic du Midi de Bigorre* (Gaumont, c. 1914); *Binnenland van Africa* (Éclair, c. 1910); *Cataract Island, De Pescara* (Ambrosio, 1912); *De Rivier Velino* (Cines, 1912); *Descente en Barque à travers les gorges de l'Ardèche* (Gaumont, c. 1910); *Les Environs de Luchon* (Gaumont, c. 1912); *From Pau to Cauterets* (Lux Film, 1913); *Geographie les bords de l'Yerres* (Gaumont, c. 1912); *L'Orne* (Gaumont, 1912); *Le Niagara, Les Gorges de Sierroz* (Eclipse, 1913); *Het Nationaal Park in Amerika, Les Roches et grottes de Baume* (Eclipse, 1913); *Rotsentgen van de Ardeche, Sur la Mer Caspienne* (Gaumont, 1912); *Visscherij in de Poolstreken.* (Production company and date listed when known.)

6 Jas S. McQuade, 'Chicago Letter'. *Moving Picture World,* 9 September 1911, 698.

7 The use of colour tinting in *Portrait of Jennie* remains to be explored, but I believe the colour in this sequence functions as a reference to the silent era in which the rough seas trope flourished, since the narrative involves a plot in which the main character travels back in time.

8 For a useful overview of applied colour processes, see Yumibe, *Moving Color*, 3–6.

9 Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony.* 2nd Edition, translated by Angus Davidson (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 12, 13.

10 Albert Boime, *The Magisterial Gaze: Manifest Destiny and American Landscape Painting c. 1830–1865* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian University Press, 1991).

11 The blue flower emerged from the 1801 Novalis novel *Heinrich von Ofterdingen,* then circulated in the extremely popular 1818 poem 'Die blaue Baume' by Joseph Freiherr von Eichendorrf. Even Goethe searched for the blue flower while on a trip to Palermo, and Walter Benjamin later referred to it in his work. On Goethe's search for the 'primordial plant', see Johannes Endres, '"Primordial Plant" and "Blue Flower": Goethe and Romanticism', in *Goethe e la Pianta. Natura, Scienza e Arte.* (Covegno, Palermo: Università degli Studi di Palermo, University Lübek, 2006), 93–100.

12 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Theory of Colours* [1810], translated by Charles Lock Eastlake (London: John Murray, 1840), 311.

13 See Michel Pastoureau, *Blue: The History of a Color* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

14 Lawrence Buell, *The Environmental Imagination: Thoreau, Nature Writing, and the Formation of American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), 7.

15 Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* [1757] (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1958), 80.

16 Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry*, 117.

17 Laura Mulvey, 'A Clumsy Sublime', *Film Quarterly* 60, no. 3 (spring 2007): 3.

18 Mary McKenzie French, 'The Motion Picture: Yesterday and Today', *Visual Education* 3, no. 4 (April 1922): 242 (italics and capitalization of film title missing in original).

19 'Novelties at the R.P.S.', *Photogram,* 1896.

20 'Novelties at the R.P.S.', *Photogram,* 1896.

21 Ezra Goodman, 'Flash-Back to Griffith', in *D. W. Griffith Interviews*, edited by Anthony Slide (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 217.

22 See Ivo Blom, '"Comme l'eau qui coule": les filmes des rivières de Gaumont dans la collection Desmet', *1895,* 18 (1995): 156–163.

23 On colour in early dance films, see Yumibe, *Moving Color*, 52.

24 See Dudley Andrew, *What Cinema Is! Bazin's Quest and Its Charge* (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010); Dudley Andrew, Ed., *Opening Bazin: Postwar Film Theory and Its Afterlife* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

25 Tom Gunning, 'Colourful Metaphors: The Attraction of Colour in Early Silent Cinema', *Living Pictures,* 2 (2003): 4–13; Yumibe, *Moving Color.*

26 Review of *A Stormy Sea, Moving Picture World,* 3 April 1909, 404.

27 Frames from this 1911 film can be seen at the Timeline of Historical Film Colors: http://zauberklang.ch/filmcolors/timeline-entry/1218/#Cascades_of_the_Houyoux_(1911).

28 Nicola Mazzanti, 'Colours, audiences, and (dis)continuity in the "cinema of the second period"', *Film History,* 21, no. 1 (2009): 67–93.

29 Louis Reeves Harrison, 'Studio Saunterings', *Moving Picture World,* 17 February 1912, 557.

30 See Peterson, *School of Dreams*, 149, 199.

31 Although the film is dated 1923 in the EYE database, the film was made at least six years earlier; it was exhibited at a theatre in Richmond Australia in 1917. Richmond Theatre programme listing, *Richmond Guardian* 17 February 1917.

32 Rachel Low, *The History of British Film 1914-1918*, vol. 3 (New York: Routledge, 1997), 145.

33 *Pictures and the Picturegoer*, 1915, 218.

34 Lyme Regis is also the setting of *The French Lieutenant's Woman,* which, as mentioned earlier, is a key 1980s example of the rough seas topos.

35 Kinemacolor advertisement, 1911, National Media Museum, Bradford, UK. My thanks to Oliver Gaycken for bringing this ad to my attention.

36 Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 14.

37 Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 15.

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