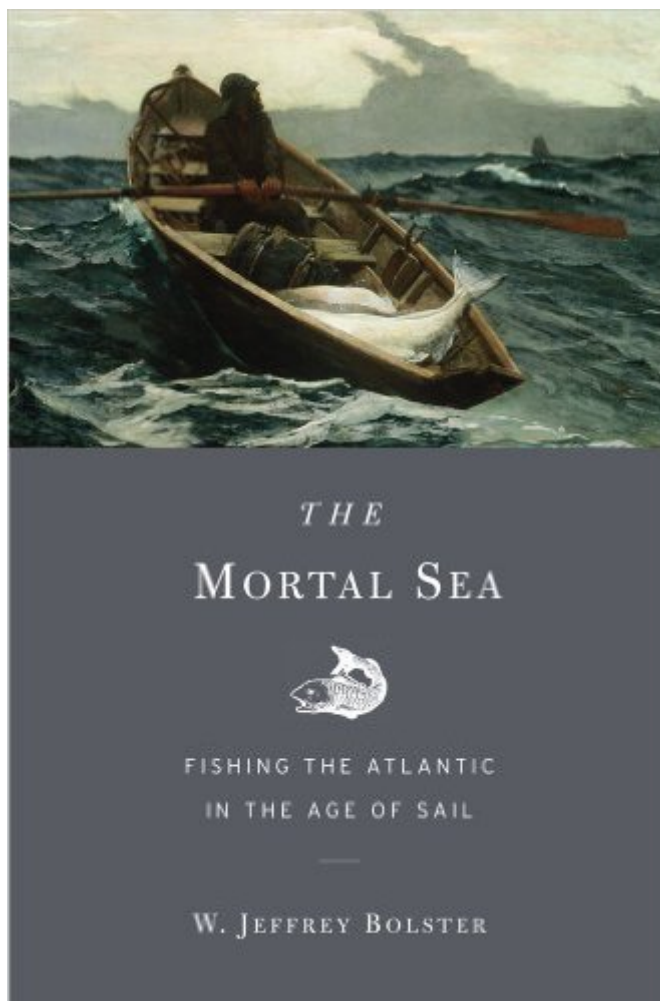


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The Mortal Sea: Fishing The Atlantic In The Age Of Sail



Synopsis

Since the Viking ascendancy in the Middle Ages, the Atlantic has shaped the lives of people who depend upon it for survival. And just as surely, people have shaped the Atlantic. In his innovative account of this interdependency, W. Jeffrey Bolster, a historian and professional seafarer, takes us through a millennium-long environmental history of our impact on one of the largest ecosystems in the world. While overfishing is often thought of as a contemporary problem, Bolster reveals that humans were transforming the sea long before factory trawlers turned fishing from a handliner's art into an industrial enterprise. The western Atlantic's legendary fishing banks, stretching from Cape Cod to Newfoundland, have attracted fishermen for more than five hundred years. Bolster follows the effects of this siren's song from its medieval European origins to the advent of industrialized fishing in American waters at the beginning of the twentieth century. Blending marine biology, ecological insight, and a remarkable cast of characters, from notable explorers to scientists to an army of unknown fishermen, Bolster tells a story that is both ecological and human: the prelude to an environmental disaster. Over generations, harvesters created a quiet catastrophe as the sea could no longer renew itself. Bolster writes in the hope that the intimate relationship humans have long had with the ocean, and the species that live within it, can be restored for future generations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

A stupendous book. Of course, growing up in the age of Mrs. Paul's fish sticks and TV ads for Gortons of Gloucester, and Captains Courageous and The Perfect Storm, I've been aware of fish

and fishing. Add to that the health industry's not very helpful back-and-forth of "fish is bad for you, it has mercury in it" and "fish is good for you, it has omega 3 oils." But since I moved to the New Hampshire seacoast (fourteen years ago yesterday, Feb 02, 2013) my curiosity has been piqued. The news about the fishing industry is constant. And government opinions and scientists' opinions in the local and national news, are constantly counter balanced (and what a balance it is, with at least three armies battling for the high ground) with the fishermen and their families who are my ubiquitous neighbors. I bought this book after it was reviewed and the author interviewed in the Portsmouth (NH) local paper, THE WiRE. At last, a book that attempts to make it all clear for the reader: what is the problem, how did it become the problem, what is the solution. But, as with all good stories, nothing about fishing is that simple. So the author begins with the Vikings in the New World and covers the history of fishing the northwest Atlantic until about 1930's, and the last cry of the age of sails. It's a tremendous story, full of rich detail, and every actor in it has contradictory motives. It is also, I must warn, an extremely erudite book. This was a hard read, on a Masters or Doctorate level. Extremely rich, complex vocabulary and compound-complex sentence structure that had me re-reading pages on many occasions. But I don't get the impression that it is showiness for the sake of showiness. (Grammar usually goes hay-wire when an author is substituting ego-driven logorrhea for sense.

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