The Flying Dutchman

The Flying Dutchman is a legendary ghost ship that can never make port and is doomed to sail the oceans forever. The myth is likely to have originated from the 17th-century golden age of the Dutch East India Company (VOC). The oldest extant version has been dated to the late 18th century. Sightings in the 19th and 20th centuries resulted the ship to be glowing with ghostly light, if hailed by another ship, the crew of the Flying Dutchman will try to send messages to land, or to people long dead. In ocean lore, the sight of this phantom ship is a portent of doom.

Origins

The first print reference to the ship appears in Travels in various part of Europe, Asia and Africa during a series of thirty years and upward (1790) by John MacDonald:

The weather was so stormy that the sailors said they saw the Flying Dutchman. The common story is that this Dutchman came to the Cape in distress of weather and wanted to get into harbour but could not get a pilot to conduct her and was lost and that ever since in very bad weather her vision appears.

The next literary reference appears in Chapter VI of A Voyage to Botany Bay (1795) (also known as A Voyage to New South Wales), attributed to George Barrington:

I had often heard of the superstition of sailors respecting apparitions and doom, but had never given much credit to the report; it seems that some years since a Dutch man-of-war was lost off the Cape of Good Hope, and every soul on board perished; her consort weathered the gale, and arrived soon after at the Cape. Having refitted, and returning to Europe, they were assailed by a violent tempest nearly in the same latitude. In the night watch some of the people saw, or imagined they saw, a vessel standing for them under a press of sail, as though she would run them down: one in particular affirmed it was the ship that had foundered in the former gale, and that it must certainly be her, or the apparition of her; but on its clearing up, the object, a dark thick cloud, disappeared. Nothing could do away the idea of this phenomenon on the minds of the sailors; and, on their relating the circumstances when they arrived in port, the story spread like wild-fire, and the supposed phantom was called the Flying Dutchman. From the Dutch the English seamen got the infatuation, and there are very few Indiamen, but what has some one on board, who pretends to have seen the apparition.

The next literary reference introduces the motif of punishment for a crime, in Scenes of Infancy (Edinburgh, 1803) by John Leyden:

It is a common superstition of mariners, that, in the high southern latitudes on the coast of Africa, hurricanes are frequently ushered in by the appearance of a spectre-ship, denominated the Flying Dutchman... The crew of this vessel are supposed to have been guilty of some dreadful crime, in the infancy of navigation; and to have been stricken with pestilence... and are ordained still to traverse the ocean on which they perished, till the period of their peneance expire.

Thomas Moore (1779-1852) places the vessel in the north Atlantic in his poem Written on passing Dead-man's Island in the Gulf of St. Lawrence, Late in the evening, September, 1804: "Fast gliding along, a gloomy bark / Her sails are full, though the wind is still, / And there blows not a breath her sails to fill." A footnote adds: "The above lines were suggested by a superstition very common among sailors, who call this ghost-ship, I think, 'the flying Dutchman.'"

Sir Walter Scott (1771-1832), a friend of John Leyden's, was the first to refer to the vessel as a pirate ship, writing in the notes to Rokeby: a poem (first published December 1812) that the ship was "originally a vessel loaded with great wealth, on board of which some horrid act of murder and piracy had been committed" and that the apparition of the ship "is considered by the mariners as the worst of all possible omens."

According to some sources, 17th-century Dutch captain Bernard Fokke is the model for the captain of the ghost ship. Fokke was renowned for the speed of his trips from the Netherlands to Java and was suspected of being in league with the Devil. The first version of the legend as a story was printed in Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine for May 1821, which puts the scene as the Cape of Good Hope. This story introduces the name Captain Hendrik Van der Decken for the captain and the motif (elaborated by later writers) of letters addressed to people long dead being offered to other ships for delivery, but if accepted will bring misfortune; and the captain having sworn to round the Cape of Good Hope though it should take until the day of judgment.

She was an Amsterdam vessel and sailed from port seventy years ago. Her master's name was Van der Decken. He was a staunch seaman, and would have his own way in spite of the devil. For all that, never a sailor under him had reason to complain; though how it is on board with them nobody knows. The story is this: that in doubling the Cape they were a long day trying to weather the Table Bay. However, the wind headed them, and went against them more and more, and Van der Decken walked the deck, swirling at the wind. Just after sunset a vessel spoke him, asking him if he did not mean to go into the bay that night. Van der Decken replied: "May I be eternally damned if I do, though I should beat about here till the day of judgment." And to be sure, he never did go into that bay, for it is believed that he continues to beat about in these seas still, and will do so long enough. This vessel is never seen but with foul weather along with her.

Reported sightings

There have been reported or alleged sightings in the 19th and 20th centuries. A well-known sighting was by Prince George of Wales, the future King George V. He was on a three-year voyage during his late adolescence in 1880 with his elder brother Prince Albert Victor of Wales and their tutor John Neill Dalton. They temporarily shipped into HMS Inconstant after the damaged rudder was repaired in their original ship, the 4,000-tonne corvette Bacchant; the prince's log (indeterminate as to which prince, due to later editing before publication) records the following for the pre-dawn hours of 11 July 1881, off the coast of Australia in the Bass Strait between Melbourne and Sydney:
Explanations as an optical illusion

Probably the most credible explanation is a superior *mirage* or *Fata Morgana* seen at sea.

Another optical effect known as *looming* occurs when rays of light are bent across different refractive indices. This could make a ship just off the horizon appear hoisted in the air.

Adaptations

There is a 20-foot *one-design* high-performance two-person *monohull* racing dinghy named the *Flying Dutchman (FD)*. It made its Olympic debut at the 1960 Olympic Games and is still one of the fastest racing dinghies in the world.

In artworks and design

The *Flying Dutchman* has been captured in paintings by Albert Ryder, now in the Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C., and by Howard Pyle, whose painting of the *Flying Dutchman* is on exhibit at the Delaware Art Museum. Dutch artist Joyce Overheul also adapted the name of The Flying Dutchman onto her crochet pattern designs (*The Flying Dutchman Crochet Design*), resembling the similarity of her designs ‘roaming’ the world just like the ghost ship once did.

**Flying Dutchman** Tobacco was a popular blend for pipes and smoking. Many of their tins are still readily collected by those who appreciate packaging art and design.

In television series and comics

- Scooby-Doo featured a Flying Dutchman ghost modeled after the illustrator Howard Pyle’s 1900 depiction of the character.
- "The Flying Dutchman" is both the name of a *pirate ghost* (a flying Dutchman) and his haunted pirate ship (*The Flying Dutchman*) in the *Nickelodeon* animated series *SpongeBob SquarePants*. The former is voiced by Brian Doyle-Murray, and the latter is based on *Queen Anne’s Revenge*.
- Carl Barks wrote and drew a 1959 comic book story where Uncro Scoogo, Donald Duck, and Huey, Dewey, and Louie meet the Flying Dutchman. Barks ultimately explains the “flying” ship as an optical illusion.
- In *Tintin*, the Flying Dutchman’s namesake, manga *One Piece* as well as the anime television series, Fishman Vander Decken IX (Band? Dekken Ky?sei) a descendant of the original Captain Vander Decken is the *Flying Dutchman* current captain who appears as a major villain in the "Fishman Island" arc. Like in the real world, the *Flying Dutchman* is feared by sailors in the world of One Piece as a legendary and infamous ghost ship, though in actuality it is a pirate ship used by Fishman Vander Decken IX and his crew the Flying Pirates. The original Vander Decken is believed to have murdered his crew and defied the heavens and incurred the wrath of God, while others say it had sunk in a storm, but was cursed to sail his ship until doomsday, however though other than Vander Decken’s madness, most of these stories are considered to be myths and in truth Vander Decken came to Fishman Island in search of the legendary Mermaid Princess Poseidon one of the so-called ancient weapons who possesses the power to communicate with Sea Kings, but failed. However Vander Decken IX later discovers the current mermaid princess Shirahoshi possesses this unique ability and becomes obsessed with making her his wife, stalking her using his devil fruit powers. He later enters into an alliance with Hody Jones Captain of the New Fishman Pirates who wishes to takeover Fishman Island to wage war against humanity. However the Straw Hat Pirates defeat the New Fishman Pirates and Vander Decken is arrested and imprisoned. While the ship can never make it to land, Decken is unable to get into contact with the sea.
- In *Soul Eater*, the Flying Dutchman is the soul of the ghost ship.
- In the 1967 *Spider-Man* cartoon episode "Return of the Flying Dutchman" the legend of the *Flying Dutchman* is used by Spider-Man’s enemy *Mysteria* to frighten villagers and plunder their wealth.
- In 1967, the *Flying Dutchman* was featured in the *Voyage to the Bottom of the Sea* episode "Cave of the Dead".
- In a 1976 episode of *Land of the Lost*, the Marshalls discover the captain of a mysterious ship that appears in "the mist". Later in the episode, it is discovered that the ship is the *Flying Dutchman*.
- In the 1982 *Fantasy Island* episode "A Very Strange Affair, The Sailor", Peter Graves plays a portrayal of the Flying Dutchman in the hopes of breaking his curse by meeting someone who is willing to die for him.
- On the animated comedy series *The Simpsons*, Captain Horatio McCallister or just simply the Sea Captain is a sea captain and owner of the Frying Dutchman Restaurant.
- An episode called "The Arrival" (1961, written by Rod Serling) of the television series *The Twilight Zone* depicts an airplane that arrives at a busy airport. The airplane is discovered to have no crew, passengers, or luggage. At the tail end of the prior episode ("Two"), Rod Serling advertises "The Arrival" as a retelling of the *Flying Dutchman* tale. It also gets a mention in *Spider-Man*. Mysterio ("Spidey Sense") who is willing to die for him. The story was dramatised in the 1951 film *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, starring James Mason (who plays the Dutch captain Hendrick van der Zee) and Ava Gardner (who plays Pandora). In this version, the Flying Dutchman is a man, not a ship. The two-hour long film, scripted by its director Albert Lewis, sets the main action on the Mediterranean coast of Spain during the summer of 1930. Centuries earlier the Dutchman had killed his wife, wrongly believing her to be unfaithful. Providence condemned him to roam the seas until he found the true meaning of love. In the only plot device taken from earlier versions of the story, once every seven years the Dutchman is allowed ashore for six months to search for a woman who will love him enough to die for him, releasing him from his curse, and he finds her in Pandora.
In opera and theatre

Richard Wagner's opera, *The Flying Dutchman* (1843) is adapted from an episode in *The Memoirs of Mister von Schnabelewopski* (1833), in which a character attends a theatrical performance of *The Flying Dutchman* in *Amsterdam*. Heine had first briefly used the legend in his *Renseider: Die Nordsee (Pictures of Travel: the North Sea)* (1826), which simply repeats from *Blackwood's Magazine* the features of the vessel being seen in a storm and sending letters addressed to persons long since dead. In 1833, after the first novel was titled *Castaways of the Flying Dutchman* and was first published by Puffin Books in 2001, the second was titled *The Angel's Command* and was released by Puffin in 2003. The third and final book of the trilogy (due to Jacques' death in 2011) was titled *Voyage of Slaves* and was released by Puffin in 2006.

In the novel *The Flying Dutchman* (2013) by the Russian novelist *Anatoly Kudryavitsky*, the ghost ship rebuilds itself from an old barge abandoned on the bank of a big Russian river, and offers itself as a refuge to a persecuted musicologist.

The comic fantasy *Flying Dutch* by *Tom Holt* is a version of the *Flying Dutchman* story. In this version, the Dutchman is not a ghost ship but crewed by immortals who can only visit land once every seven years when the unbearable smell that is a side-effect of the elixir of life wears off.

The Roger Zelazny short story "And Only I Am Escaped To Tell thee" tells of a sailor who escapes from the *Flying Dutchman* and is rescued by sailors who welcome him to the *Mary Celeste*.

In literature

In literature Amiri Baraka, although Wagner's assertion is often repeated. Berlioz thought Pierre-Louis Dietsch similarly planned to take place off the coast of Scotland, although during the final rehearsals he transferred the action to another part of the North Sea, off the coast of the Netherlands. The first author to introduce the chance of salvation through a woman's devotion and the opportunity to set foot on land every seven years was Frank Moore in his 1951 story "Flying Dutchman". This in turn was later adapted as a script for the television series *Termeuze*.

Fitzball's play, which was playing at the *Adelphi Theatre* in London, but the run had ended on 7 April 1827 and Heine did not arrive in London until the 14th. Heine was the first author to introduce the chance of salvation through a woman's devotion and the opportunity to set foot on land every seven years when the unbearable smell that is a side-effect of the elixir of life wears off.

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In music

- In 1949 RCA Victor, inventors of the single 45 RPM format, released as one of their first 45s a recording of the legend in song in bandleader Hugo Winterhalter's "The Flying Dutchman", sung as a sea shanty.
- Captain Video (Early TV serial) introduction has the overture to Wagner's "The Flying Dutchman" as background music.
- Jethro Tull refer to the *Flying Dutchman* with a song of the same name from their 1979 album *Stormwatch*.
- Tori Amos refers to the *Flying Dutchman* in her 1992 single B side "Flying Dutchman", the A side being "China". It was re-released in 2012 on her album *Gold Dust* and performed on The Gold Dust Orchestral Tour.
- Jimmy Buffett refers to the *Flying Dutchman* in his 1995 song "Remittance Man" on the album *Brotherhood*.
- Rufus Wainwright refers to the *Flying Dutchman* in his song "Flying Dutchman" on the album *Poses*.
- Dutch symphonic black metal band Carach Angren wrote a concept album about the *Flying Dutchman* entitled *Death Came Through a Phantom Ship*.
- God Dethroned a Dutch death metal band, featured the song "Soul Capture 1562" about the *Flying Dutchman* on their album *Bloodly Blasphem*.
- In the 1969 classic self-titled album by The Band, the *Flying Dutchman* was referenced in the song "Rockin' Chair".
- Eighties Australian band The Hoodoo Gurus seem to tell the story of the *Flying Dutchman* in their song "Death Ship" from the 1984 *Stoneage Romeo* album, although the lyrics never specifically mention the *Flying Dutchman* by name.
- The second track on Rob Bruce's 2001 long play album "All Fools' Day" is a song entitled "The Flying Dutchman" which retells the tale of the *Flying Dutchman* and its cursed crew.
- The second track of band Tom Jolly Roger's album XXV is called *The Flying Dutchman* and describes the crew receiving a barrel of letters for the dead before being pursued to harbour.
- Jole Richard Hughes, better known by his stage name S3RL, is an Australian UK hardcore DJ, record producer, and musician from Brisbane who has a song titled "Flying Dutchman" based on the tales and the legend itself.
- The Dutch Classic-Rock band Vanderhuyss made a concept album called "The Flying Dutchmen". All tracks on the CD refer to the *Flying Dutchman* and his fictional VOC captain.
The story was adapted by Judith French into a play, *The Dutch Mariner*, broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on 13 April 2003.

### In video games

*The Flying Dutchman* is a cheat unit in the video game *Age of Empires*. It is a ship that can travel on both land and sea.

In the 1993 multimedia game *Alone in the Dark 2*, fictional detective Edward Carnby investigates a missing girl who he discovers has been kidnapped by the undead One-Eyed Jack who, in the game, is captain of the undead crew of *The Flying Dutchman*.

*The Flying Dutchman* is depicted in the sandbox platformer game *Terraria* as a flying wooden ship with four destructible, broadside cannons. It appears within the Pirate Invasion as a boss enemy.

*The Flying Dutchman* is also used as a warship in a game called *Warship Battle 3D*.

### In leisure

The *Efteling* amusement park in the Netherlands has a rollercoaster called *The Flying Dutchman* which features the captain named Willem van der Decken (*nl*).

*World of Fun* amusement park in Kansas City, Missouri has a swinging boat ride called *The Flying Dutchman*.

*Six Flags over Georgia*, an amusement park located in Austell, Georgia also had a swinging boat ride called *The Flying Dutchman* which was added in 1980.

The Haunted Mansion attraction in Disneyland features a painting of the *Flying Dutchman* before it became a ghost ship that transforms into a ship with torn sails sailing during a storm.

In Disneyland Shanghai, the park's Pirates of the Caribbean Ride features a battle between ships under the sea; one of which is the *Flying Dutchman*.

### In aviation

The Dutch aviation pioneer and an aircraft manufacturer Anthony Fokker was nicknamed *The Flying Dutchman*.

KLM Royal Dutch Airlines references the endless traveling aspect of the story by having *The Flying Dutchman* painted on the rear sides of all its aircraft with regular livery.

### In education

"The Flying Dutchmen" is the public school mascot in Hope College residence halls.

The nickname of Lebanon Valley College is "The Flying Dutchmen", and its mascot "The Flying Dutchman*. The nickname references the college's location in the Pennsylvania Dutch Country.

Hofstra University on Long Island, New York was unofficially named "The Flying Dutchman" and has many references to Dutch culture around the university including Residence Halls.

Hope College in Holland, Michigan is also the home of "The Flying Dutchman" because it was founded by settlers from the Netherlands in 1866.

"The Flying Dutchman" is also the mascot of Guilderland High School in Guilderland, New York.

### See also

- Caleuche
- Peter Rugg
- Wandering Jew
- Wild Hunt
- List of ghosts
- Chasse-galerie
- 90377 Sedna - nicknamed the Flying Dutchman

### Notes

1. George Barrington (originally Waldron) was tried at the Old Bailey in London in September 1790 for picking pockets and sentenced to transportation for seven years. He embarked on the convict transport Active which sailed from Portsmouth on 27 March 1791 and arrived at Port Jackson (Sydney), just to the north of Botany Bay, on 26 September, having anchored briefly at Table Bay in very late June. The various accounts of his voyage and activities in New South Wales appear to be literary forgeries by publishers capitalizing both on his notoriety and in public interest for the new colony, combining turns of phrase from his trial speeches with plagiarized genuine accounts of other writers concerning Botany Bay. See George Barrington's *Voyage to Botany Bay* edited by Suzanne Rickard (Leicester University Press, 2001). A Voyage to Botany Bay and *A Voyage to New South Wales*, both issued in 1795, were revamped versions of An Impartial and Circumstantial Narrative of the Present State of Botany Bay, which had appeared in 1793–94, but which did not include the *Flying Dutchman* reference.

2. Leyden says that Chaucer, echoing Dante's *Inferno*, Second Circle of Hell, alludes to a punishment of a similar kind in his poem *The Parliament of Fowles*: "And breakers of the laws, sooth to sain, / And lichens forlorn, after that / They been dead, / Shall whilst about the world alway in pain , / Till many a world be passed out of dead.

3. The 48-page text published c. 1829 acknowledges Blackwood's 1821 story as the source, although the two have little in common.


### References


2. *Barrington 2004* p. 30

3. *Barrington 2004* p. 30


5. The author has been identified as John Howison (fl. 1821-59) of the East India Company. See Alan Lang Strout: *Don't Shoot the Albatross!: Nautical Myths and Superstitions* A&C Black, London, UK. ISBN 978-1-4081-3131-2


### Bibliography


### External links

- [Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine, May 1821](https://www.blackwoodsmagazine.com/may21.html)
- [On the history and sightings of the Flying Dutchman](https://www.blackwoodsmagazine.com/may21.html)
- [Mainly about Wagner's possible sources](https://www.blackwoodsmagazine.com/may21.html)
- [Melodramatic Possessions: The Flying Dutchman, South Africa and the Imperial Stage ca. 1830](https://www.blackwoodsmagazine.com/may21.html)
- [The Phantom Ship by Marryat at Project Gutenberg](https://www.blackwoodsmagazine.com/may21.html)
The Flying Dutchman was an infamous supernatural ghost ship. Originally, the Dutchman held the sacred task of collecting all the poor souls who died at sea and ferrying them to the afterlife. During the Golden Age of Piracy, the Dutchman would become a ship feared by many across the seven seas. According to legends and lore, the Flying Dutchman was given to Davy Jones by his love, the sea goddess Calypso, who gave Jones the duty of ferrying the souls who died at sea into the next world. After ten The Flying Dutchman variant (sources differ on whether Flying Dutchman was the name of the ship or a nickname for her captain) first popped up in the seventeenth century, and was said to be an old sailing superstition. Wonderfully subverted in Tom Holt’s Flying Dutch, where the Flying Dutchman and his crew had accidentally drunk some elixir which gave them immortality, but also the most outrageous body odor for all but one month in every 7 years.