CHAPTER 4

The Sailor's Daughter
Girlhood and the Maritime Family Story

Oh! where is the guide of my infantile years?
The father who left me enveloped in tears;
The ocean's false surges induced him to roam
Far away from his child – far, far from his home.
Home! home! sweet, sweet home!
No more will my father enliven his home.

'Hymn, By a Sailor's Daughter' [Sung by the Children of the Sailor's Orphan Institute, at Hull, England]'

Memory made them rebels, though they'd usually been good girls at the time.

Alison Light, *Mrs Woolf and the Servants: The Hidden Heart of Domestic Service*

Introduction: Dutiful Daughters

A girl sits at her father's feet in John Everett Millais's celebrated painting *The North-West Passage*, presented at the Royal Academy of Arts in 1874 (Figure 4.1). With the sea and a sail visible through the window behind him, the ageing mariner rests one hand on a table upon which is spread a navigational chart of the Northern coast of Canada tracing the treacherous sea route that European explorers used in their quest to reach Asia through the Arctic Northwest Passage.[1] His other hand is held comfortingly by the smaller one of his daughter who is dressed in pink and white, with a blue coral necklace at her neck. Her eyes are downcast as she appears to be absorbed in her father's old logbook, pursuing the pages with a careful finger, perhaps reading aloud to him. Other weather-beaten journals from the old sailor's travels occupy a prominent position in the painting's foreground, while the backdrop displays the recognisable paraphernalia of a sailor's life including the British Ensign, the Union Jack, and an image of Lord Nelson. As Phillips has noted, the painting's 'imaginative

Figure 4.1 *The North-West Passage*, 1874. Sir John Everett Millais. Tate, Presented by Sir Henry Tate 1894. Photo: Tate.

geography [is] explicitly tied to constructions of masculinity and imperialism. The geographical fantasy belongs to the man.'[2] This 'geographical fantasy', however, is notably supplemented by the presence of the daughter with her feminine touches: a delicate floral pattern on the wallpaper of the interior, a sprig of flowers in the china jug on the table, while a bouquet of pink roses, evidently selected from her basket lying in the corner of the room, holds down the edge of the map. The duality of father and daughter is reinforced by the proposition of other binaries within the frame: maleness is linked to travel and femininity with domesticity; old age is contrasted to youth; the residual paraphernalia of global exploration are juxtaposed with the still life of the domestic interior; memories of treacherous icy, arctic passages are set against the more benign nature represented by English garden flowers. The activities of reading and writing are set into contrast too; the seafarer is positioned not only as the active explorer of the past, but as the author whose writing is preserved in the sea-stained logs. Sitting sidelong at the captain's feet, the daughter is presumed to be the keeper and reader of these records, although it is not

clear whether she reads for herself or for her father whose eyesight may be failing. Significantly, while the veteran seafarer seems present but absent – apparently lost in thoughts of the past – the painting suggests that it is the daughter who may keep and tell the sailor's story.

Another sketch of a captain's daughter – this one in words – can be found in Virginia Woolf's 1935 essay, 'The Captain's Death Bed'. In this short piece for the *Times Literary Supplement*, Woolf imagined the deathbed scene of the celebrated maritime novelist first encountered in Chapter 1 – Captain Marryat. Attended by his loyal eldest daughter, Augusta:

> The Captain lay dying on a mattress stretched on the floor of the boudoir room; a room whose ceiling had been painted to imitate the sky, and whose walls were painted with trellis work covered with roses upon which birds were perching. Mirrors had been let into the doors, so that the village people called the room the 'Room of a Thousand Pillars' because of its reflections. It was an August morning as he lay dying; his daughter had brought him a bunch of his favourite flowers – clove pinks and moss roses; and he asked her to take down some words at his dictation.[3]

As Marryat's thoughts in his dying hours 'turned to love and roses', Woolf depicts the dutiful daughter taking down his final words: 'World, adieu.'[4] In her sketch, Woolf mentions the dedicated acts of the captain's second daughter – Florence Marryat – who took up her father's words in another way, going on to publish a biography drawn from the captain's unpublished personal papers, including his private logbook kept aboard the frigate *Imperieuse* at the age of 14.[5] Like other reviewers of the ensuing tomes, *Life and Letters of Captain Marryat* (1872), Woolf criticised what she viewed as the prosaic and desiccated style of Florence Marryat's rendering of her father's biography. She skewered, for example, the verb-heavy, action-led, masculinist logbook prose reproduced in the book verbatim: 'So it goes on. Every other day [Marryat] was cutting out a brig, taking a tower, engaging gunboats, seizing prize ships or being chased by the French.'[6] Yet Woolf was sympathetic to the difficulty of Florence's task in attempting to relay her father's story. It cannot have been easy, she mused, for the stay-at-home captain's daughter to translate these seafaring notes into an engaging narrative:

> Clearly if the extracts from the private log had been expanded it would have swollen to a row of volumes; but how was the private log to be expanded by a lady who had presumably never burnt a bridge, dismantled a battery, or blown out a Frenchman's brains in her life? Very wisely she had recourse to Marshall's Naval Biography and to the Gazette. 'Gazette details,' she remarked, 'are proverbially dry, but they are trustworthy.' Therefore the public life is dealt with dryly, if trustworthily.[7]

Woolf surmises that another reason for the lack of psychological depth in Florence's biographical portrait may have been due to the fact 'that she was his daughter, imbued with filial reverence and the belief also that "a biographer has no business to meddle with any facts below the surface"'.[8] In this sense, Florence Marryat's narrative of 'filial reverence' adhered to a conventional mode of biography practised by Victorian women writers, one that 'notionally conformed to the feminine codes of selflessness, deference and duty'.[9]

Woolf knew a lot about the burden and ambivalence of being the daughter of an eminent male public figure. Indeed, her own biographical sketches of her father, Sir Leslie Stephen – founder of the *Dictionary of National Biography* – contained a 'frustrated fury' that deviated from received codes of filial biography, and left a lasting legacy in its construction of the figure of the imposing Victorian patriarch.[10] Yet in her characterisation of the Marryat daughters, Woolf glossed over the more creative and unconventional aspects of their lives and literary output. For while Florence may have been unable to bring her father's biography to life, her own writings and life story were far from ordinary: she published over seventy-five novels, mainly popular romance, sensation, and Gothic fiction (including the 1897 novel *The Blood of the Vampire*), and was the editor of the *London Society* journal; twice married, she was also a playwright, comedy actress, opera singer, lecturer, and manager of a school of journalism.[11] Augusta, the silent, dutiful daughter who brought roses to her dying father in Woolf's set piece, was the author of global adventure stories. Though it appears she did not visit the continent, Augusta wrote the bestselling *Left to Themselves: A Boy's Adventure in Australia* (1878).[12] And Emilia, the third of his seven daughters to become a novelist, wrote numerous children's stories, including adventure stories set at sea.

Dutiful daughters then frame Millais and Woolf's sketches of illustrious seafaring captains and they slip easily into the iconography of Victorian domestic ideology in which daughters, like wives, played specific roles within the home as helpmate and comforter to the breadwinner and loyal companion to their brothers. Thus conceived, they exemplify Sarah Stickney Ellis's advocation in *The Daughters of England* (1845) that 'the object of a daughter is to soothe the weary spirit of a father when he returns home from the office or the counting-house, where he has been toiling for her maintenance'.[13] In the analysis that follows, my chapter shows that there were other more intricate narratives of daughters and maritime fathers, particularly when the focus is turned away from the interiors and social landscape of the middle-class family. This chapter thus foregrounds the

complex relations of daughterhood in the context of Victorian proletarian-maritime life, thereby contributing to what Helen Rogers has called 'the much-neglected history of father-daughter relationships'.[14] It does so by taking the sailor's daughter both as a subject in her own right – in cultural and historical representations – and as a lens through which to explore broader questions about the relations of girlhood and femininity to the sea, the father–daughter relationship in working-class maritime family life, and the relations between geographical and social mobility.

Victorian Girls and the Geographical Imagination

There is no extensive cultural history of girls and the sea. Western histories of seafaring have largely centred on male experience and the homosocial worlds of maritime labourers and seafarers, although a growing body of scholarship has focussed on historical women seafarers (some who disguised or presented themselves as men), and the presence of other women on ship, from seafarers' wives who accompanied husbands on voyages, to ayahs and amahs from the South Asian continent who travelled in the paid service of British families.[15] Other studies have taken account of the role women played in maritime affairs, even as they remained on shore, including their significance within the creation of imperial geographies.[16] A body of scholarship exists on the shore-based lives of seafarers' wives – particularly those wedded to captains and other high-ranking individuals – since they often left archives of documents that provide valuable evidence of lived experience in the form of letters, diaries, and records of voyages.[17] A rich history has thus emerged that highlights examples of both women's geographical mobility and the ways in which their physical and emotional labour underpinned and enabled maritime work, from the point of the sailor's embarkation to his return to shore.

Notwithstanding this new work, less attention has been paid to the experience of girls in the context of maritime life and cultural representations of the sea. This stands in marked contrast to the vast and still proliferating scholarship that traces the extent to which Victorian boyhood was interpellated by constructions of masculinity and imperial space throughout the nineteenth century, primarily through the cultural apparatus of adventure fiction.[18] For according to Joseph Bristow, empire and boyhood were 'mutually supportive' and both were sustained through the literary matrix of adventure fiction, novels and travel writing.[19] Thus without leaving his home, imperial textuality provided the boy reader with a vicarious and 'illusory power' that 'placed him at the top of the racial ladder and at

the helm of all the world'.[20] One aspect of this ideological work was its reinforcement of Victorian gender roles and spheres. As Phillips writes: 'Most adventure stories were written by men, for and about boys and men. Girls and women were marginalised. In stories, they are the marginalised sisters, girlfriends, wives and mothers whom the boys leave behind. As readers, they were marginalised, since writers and publishers refused to acknowledge them by writing explicitly to or for them'.[21] Pointing to John Ruskin's well-known delineation of separate gendered spheres in *Sesame and Lilies* (1865), Phillips goes on to observe how this division penetrated not just real but imaginary geographies: 'Girls, Ruskin argued, should be confined not only to the real home, but also to the imaginary home, while their brothers roamed the imaginary geographies of adventure.'[22] Adventure fiction, in its mid-century form at least, adapted for a juvenile audience an ideological binary that equated masculinity with mobility and femininity with domesticity and stasis.[23]

As many critics have observed, the boy's longing for travel in adventure stories has been rendered through the trope of the outspread map, an object of desire that represented the British boy's imaginative propensity to roam, conquer, and settle. In Ymitri Mathison's formulation, such maps function as engines of travel, narrative storytelling, and imperial ambition: 'Most boys' adventure fiction begins with a map, signifying the symbolic importance of cartography to heroes' quests for the wealth and social status that the empire promised its servants.'[24] For Jim Hawkins in *Treasure Island* (1883), for example, the map contains an almost erotic allure: 'I brooded by the hour together over the map, all the details of which I well remembered. Sitting by the fire in the housekeeper's room, I approached that island in my fancy, from every possible direction; I explored every acre of its surface.'[25] Stevenson's representation of the boy meditating over maps predates and anticipates the pivotal expression of imperial desire in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899), in which Marlow admits to a 'passion for maps' in childhood:

> I would look for hours at South America, or Africa, or Australia and lose myself in all the glories of exploration. At that time there were many blank spaces on the earth, and when I saw one that looked particularly inviting on a map (but they all look that) I would put my finger on it and say, When I grow up I will go there.[26]

By contrast, the trope of maps does not appear as a dominant mode in narratives of Victorian girlhood. Where it does occur, the girl's cartographic gaze – and her pursuit of geographical knowledge – are more inscrutable

and open to interpretation.[27] In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), for example, Sylvia Robson's geographical education is administered at the discretion of her cousin, the slavish Philip Hepburn, who brings a set of maps to her farm home for her to peruse under his surveying eye. Yet despite hailing 'her interest in geography as another sign of improvement', Philip finds himself frustrated by Sylvia's apparently wayward focus, her 'strange fancies respecting the places about which she wished to learn', and her cool indifference 'to the very existence of other towns, and countries, and seas, far more famous in story'.[28] Even Philip's physical proximity to Sylvia cannot determine the object of her gaze:

> He liked dearly to sit a little behind her, with his arm on the back of her chair, she stooping over the outspread map, with her eyes, – could he have seen them, – a good deal fixed on one spot in the map, not Northumberland, where Kinraid was spending the winter, but those wild northern seas about which he had told them such wonders.[29]

Sylvia's cartographic gaze is not controlled by Philip's guidance, nor is it drawn, as the reader might expect, to the areas of the map in which Sylvia's lover, the sailor Charley Kinraid, is thought to be located. Sylvia's perusal of the map eludes Philip's watchful look as well as the reader's access to any transparent expression of her interiority.[30]

Maps, and the specific form of geographical knowledge they offer, also appear in other genres that represent girlhood. In Flora Thompson's semi-autobiographical *Lark Rise* (1939), the narrator 'Laura' (a thinly veiled version of the author in childhood) reflects on the limited geographical teaching dispensed at her primary school: 'There were no geography readers and, excepting what could be gleaned from the descriptions of different parts of the world in the ordinary readers, no geography was taught.' But Thompson also makes clear her fascination with the 'splendid maps' pinned to the walls of the schoolroom:

> During long waits in class for her turn to read, or to have her copy or sewing examined, Laura would gaze on these maps until the shapes of these countries with their islands and inlets became photographed on her brain. … Baffin Bay and the land around the poles were especially fascinating to her.[31]

Like Gaskell's Sylvia, Thompson's geographical gaze wanders to the extreme polar regions of the map, echoing the imaginative escapism of another Victorian girl protagonist, Jane Eyre, whom the reader first encounters as she peruses *Bewick's History of British Birds* in the scarlet

cove of the curtained window-seat: 'Of these death-white realms I formed an idea of my own: shadowy, like all the half-comprehended notions that float dim through children's brains, but strangely impressive.'[32]

It was primarily through their reading of fiction, however, that girls encountered global geographies. The novelist Charlotte M. Yonge observed in her survey of children's literature, *What Books to Lend and What to Give* (1887), that while boys may not have been inclined to read books aimed at girls, Victorian girls had no compunction in expressing their enthusiasm for books for boys, including adventure fiction.[33] Indeed, before writers of that genre began to cater expressly for girls in the last decades of the nineteenth century, young females were already fervent, if unacknowledged, readers of adventure in spite of – or perhaps precisely because of – the domestic orientation of their lives.[34] Like boys, they enjoyed the work of the popular imperial adventure writer G.A. Henty, while the *Boy's Own Paper* was second only to the *Girl's Own Paper* in a list of magazines or papers on which 'the young ladies bestow the badge of merit' in Edward Salmon's 1888 survey of juvenile literature (other esteemed titles included Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide World* (1850) and Charles Kingsley's naval story *Westward Ho!* (1855)).[35] In fact Salmon approved of girls' omnivorous reading tendencies and their desire to seek out 'a stirring plot and lively movement' from 'boys' stories', adding that it 'ought to impart vigour and breadth to a girl's nature' (although he tempered this statement by adding that this reading might also give 'sisters a sympathetic knowledge of the scenes wherein their brothers live and work').[36] A young female reader who counted the adventure novels of Jules Verne and R.M. Ballantyne among her favourites, insisted to Salmon that,

> Girls as a rule don't care for Sunday-school twaddle; they like a good stirring story, with a plot and some incident and adventures. … People try to make boys' books as exciting and amusing as possible, while we girls, who are much quicker and more imaginative, are very often supposed to read milk-and-watery sorts of stories that we could generally write better ourselves.[37]

Girls' reading habits and roving appetite for diverse material beyond 'milk-and-watery' narratives led them not only to imbibe the contents of their brothers' libraries, but also to help themselves to their father's stock of books.[38] Thus when the editor and journalist W.T. Stead undertook a survey of reading habits at the start of the twentieth century, he quoted a female respondent who told him: 'I didn't want a good book for girls,

I wanted to read the books my daddy read.'[39] Such sentiments were also recorded in girls' memoirs, in recollections that highlight the domestic setting within which such stories were consumed. Marianne Farningham, whose ancestors were seafarers, recalled rocking her baby brother in his cradle while perusing a copy of *The Sailors' Magazine*.[40] Marjory Todd, a sailor's daughter and avid reader (whose memoir is discussed in more detail later in this chapter) pored over tales in her father's copies of the *Strand Magazine* and the *Wide World Magazine* that he brought home with him from his voyages as a ship's stoker. It was Todd's mother who read *Robinson Crusoe* out loud to her in the intimacy of the home, and she found that the 'whole world' opened up for her through the pages of Captain Marryat's *Poor Jack* (1840): 'I read it when I was eight, in an old paper copy with some of its pages missing, read it on a summer's night standing on the window-sill in my nightdress until my eyes could see the print no more.'[41] Another sailor's daughter, Betty Anderson, born in 1903 in Merseyside, ploughed through 'morbid books' that reduced her to tears, including the bestselling Liverpool waif tale *Her Benny* (1879), alongside copies of her father's *Strand Magazine*, which she enjoyed reading as she dried her long hair by the fire.[42] In these images from the autobiographies, the domestic interior and imaginary geographies coalesce; as shown in the next section, that paradoxical trope of the girl's bounded escapism was itself a feature of children's fiction.

Sailors' Daughters in Victorian Juvenile Fiction

Before the last decades of the nineteenth century, girls absorbed in adventure fiction would primarily have encountered male protagonists in their reading. When girls featured in the stories, it was usually as a familial relation, as was the case with the fictional sailor's daughter. Indeed, a survey of the literary sailor's daughter demonstrates that even when a female character's life was deemed to be shaped by maritime activity, she was geographically bound by a law of fiction that did not permit her to transgress beyond the watery border of the port or coastline. One such fictional girl features in Hayward's popular story *Tom Holt's Log*, a nautical adventure tale for children (discussed in Chapter 2). In this novel, the eponymous orphan Tom Holt is taken in by a retired, eccentric mariner whose home consists of a ship shored into the earth, where Tom is introduced to the Captain's other surrogate child, Polly, who is a 'tomboy', and daughter of a sailor killed by pirates. The gendered codes of maritime life, even in the context of a pseudo-dry dock, are clear from the first encounter:

> 'That's my cabin-boy,' said my uncle, as he led the way across the turf, towards a high box hedge.
>
> 'Boy, uncle! it's a girl, isn't it?' I said, doubtfully.
>
> 'Girl, nonsense! no girls aboard my ship, nor women either, except passengers and visitors, and I seldom have either of that sort o' craft. Polly's my cabin-boy, and boy I call her, though, for the matter of that,' he added reflectively, 'I suppose she is a girl by rights.'[43]

Adopted by her benevolent uncle, Polly enjoys life on board a ship ('It's ever so much better than a dull stupid house') and acquires a detailed nautical education, which she uses to instruct the ignorant Tom.[44] Indeed Polly occupies the paradoxical position of being 'quite a little sailor', despite never having stepped off land. Impressed by her nautical know-how, Tom Holt admits:

> I was immensely amused at her pretty prattle, so innocent and artless. Brought up, as she had been, under the fostering wing of the old sailor, she had imbibed quite a contempt for all landsmen, and looked upon sailors as the only people in the world really worth anything. To hear her rattle out nautical words and phrases in the most quiet and self-possessed manner, was to me a matter of both astonishment and amusement.[45]

Yet Polly's function in the story, beyond her role as a feminine 'cabin-boy', is to be a helpmate and aid to Tom's oceanic adventures. Her stories incite his passion for the ship-life, and it is Polly, 'quick as a fairy at her needle', who rigs him out in seafaring garb when it is his turn to take up his place as a 'waif on the ocean'.[46] When Tom sets sail on board the *Phantom* bound for Calcutta, he promises to bring back his landlocked friend 'a crape shawl and a silk dress from the East Indies'.[47] But as Tom proceeds to the rites of passage of nautical adventure, Polly's narrative fate is no more than the erasure of her juvenile tomboyish traits. Thus by the end of the novel, she is recuperated into the codes of conventional femininity and the formalities of the marriage plot. Polly appears to Tom as a dreamy vision in dress and veil when he is lost at sea, before taking up her role as a 'smiling and blushing' fiancée clad in white muslin and a pink scarf and ribbons, as the two sign their intention to marry in the ship's log at the story's conclusion.[48]

Not an adventure story, but a contemporaneous 'waif novel', Hesba Stretton's perennially popular *Little Meg's Children* (1868), also featured a landlocked sailor's daughter. As the title suggests, Meg is a classic example of the Victorian 'little mother', holding together her destitute family in an East End attic slum room, as they await the return of the sailor-father from his voyage on the *Ocean King* (Figure 4.2). Meg's father's prolonged

Figure 4.2 'Looking Out for Father'. Illustration by Harold Copping, in Hesba Stretton, *Little Meg's Children* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1905).

absence at sea is presented as a source of financial calamity for the family, propelling Meg's mother to her death, followed shortly afterwards by a younger sibling to whom Meg had acted as surrogate parent. In contrast to the perennial youthfulness of the male protagonist of adventure fiction,[49] Meg is old before her time: 'a small, spare, stunted girl of London growth, whose age could not be more than 10 years, though she wore the shrewd, anxious air of a woman upon her face, with deep lines wrinkling her forehead and puckering about her keen eyes'.[50] Not only is she a surrogate mother to her younger siblings, she also functions as a surrogate wife; for like an apologetic spouse Meg is a guardian of her father's reputation, compelled at one point to defend him against insinuations of alcoholism ('It was already a point of honour with little Meg to throw a cloak over her father's faults').[51] While holding the family together, Meg is constantly drawn towards the watery edge of the city and the docks as she hopes to catch a glimpse of the return of her father's ship, finally resorting to the Victorian woman's venerable practice of pawning the family's little pile of 'faded finery' to get by, including her mother's 'bright-coloured shawl, and

showy dress, and velvet bonnet, which she used to put on when she went to meet her husband on his return from sea'.[52] Conforming to the conventions of one strand of Christian philanthropic literature, in the form of watered-down slum fiction, the waif-girl faces the implied twin threats of the workhouse and sexual risk posed by the 'bad crew' of her neighbours and her friendship with a fallen girl named Kitty.[53] When Meg's father eventually does return from the sea, to rescue the diminished, makeshift family, he appears 'in worn and shabby sailor's clothing' with a 'brown and weather-beaten' face.[54] The reformed, penitent, and crucially now abstinent sailor-father rescues Meg, and leads the reconstituted family out of the slum court with its 'brawling and quarrelling' to an outward bound emigrant journey across the sea.[55]

In Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton* (1848), Mary remarks to her childhood friend, the sailor Will Wilson: 'I wish I were a boy, I'd go to sea with you.'[56] But as the century progressed – and in line with developments encompassing the expansion of education and literacy, the onset of the 'new imperialism' and the rise of the figure of the New Woman, and her counterpart, the 'new girl' – one branch of adventure fiction finally transported the figure of the maritime girl to the high seas as 'stories of school life and robust adventure in outposts of empire were taking over from hearth and home'.[57] Recent scholarship focussing on girls' imperial adventure fiction from the 1880s onwards has thus presented a challenge to Martin Green's earlier schematic formulation of the genre as based on 'a series of events, partly but not wholly accidental, in settings remote from the domestic and probably from the civilised'.[58] Thomas Fair's rich exploration of the nineteenth-century female *Robinsonades* (the castaway genre), for example, makes the claim that these texts 'reposition the domestic component from a marginal concern to a central and significant role within the popular, imperialistic adventure narrative'.[59] One of the most popular of the female *Robinsonades* was Elizabeth Whittaker's 'Robina Crusoe, and Her Lonely Island Home', serialised in the *Girl's Own Paper* from 1882 to 1883, which presented a female Crusoe who embodied what Fair describes as 'a new female identity as an amalgam of the traditional Angel of the House and the New Woman'.[60] Narrated by a self-professed female descendent of Robinson Crusoe, the story conformed to the stock features of the venerable genre, including the desert island setting and the castaway's development of self-reliance.

The juxtaposition of domestic and oceanic scenes is evocatively rendered in the image that featured on the title page of the story's serialisation, featuring Robina at her writing desk against the backdrop of a wreck

Figure 4.3 Illustration from Elizabeth Whittaker, 'Robina Crusoe, and Her Lonely Island Home', *Girl's Own Paper*, 23 December 1882, p. 184.

at sea (Figure 4.3). At the start of the story, Robina reflects on the gendered nature of her pedigree as a descendent of Crusoe: 'I had, at a very early age, read the history of my renowned ancestor; and deeply I regretted that my sex precluded me from a seafaring life, which I regarded as the only one likely to gratify the love of adventure, seemingly inborn with me.'[61] Unlike Polly of the earlier *Tom Holt's Log*, however, Robina is propelled from the compensatory pastime of 'forming an imaginary island' in the grounds of her home, to establishing herself as the self-reliant mistress and active defender of a tropical island for twenty years after the ship carrying her to England (on a brief trip away from her father's new colonial appointment) is shipwrecked in a storm.[62]

The best-selling author, Bessie Marchant, similarly capitalised on the boom for girls' adventure fiction, earning herself the moniker 'the girls' Henty', while penning around 150 novels throughout her career that centred on girl protagonists.[63] Like Augusta Marryat, Marchant wrote stories of far-flung places of which she had no first-hand knowledge; never having travelled away from England, she resourcefully drew on her reading of the *Geographical Magazine* and epistolary exchanges with overseas acquaintances to conjure her globe-trotting fictions.[64] Marchant used the sailor's

daughter as a stock character for several novels, including her turn-of-the-century tale *Cicely Frome: The Captain's Daughter* (1900). In this imperial adventure story, the eponymous heroine is another tomboy whose life revolves around her father's intermittent visits:

> She was a big girl of ten, with a shock of rough hair, a plain face, and grey eyes; a very ordinary sort of girl to look at, it was only when you came to know her that you discovered any difference in Cicely Frome. … Her father she only saw at rare intervals, when he had time for a few days of rest and holiday between his voyages; for he was captain of a big ocean liner, and his work was hard and anxious, his playing spells being few and far between.[65]

Despite his absence, Cicely is a doting daughter who loves her father during his punctuated visits 'with all the warm devotion of her impulsive, affectionate heart, and deemed him the wisest, handsomest man, and the bravest sailor the world had ever seen'.[66] And like the earlier figures of Polly and Robina, Cicely is a tomboy who chafes against the limits of feminine girlhood in anticipation of the emergence of the 'new girl': she tears her frocks, dirties her pinafores, and rejects indoor lessons with mother for the opportunity to explore the outside world.[67] Cicely craves the mobility and excitement of her father's life from which she is excluded:

> And he could tell such wonderful stories of his life and adventures at sea, until she cried herself to sleep in hopeless despair, night after night, because she was not a boy who could develop into a sailor later on. But she was comforted eventually by remembering that she could ship herself as a stewardess, by and by, when she had arrived at years of discretion.[68]

Following her father's purported drowning at sea, and her mother's death from the shock of this loss, the orphaned 15-year-old Cicely leaves her boarding-school and sets out to join her half-brother in Ceylon, making herself quickly 'at home on board ship' while 'memories of her sailor-father stirred restlessly, called forth by the briny odours of the ocean, and the nautical sayings and doings all around her'.[69] As in so many of Marchant's tales, adventure is pitted against domestic space and in opposition to the figure of maternity (the mother's death serves structurally as the opportunity for Cicely's global wanderings in an inversion of a fictional narrative trope by which women need to die in order to release male characters into a world of adventure).[70] A convoluted sequence of events results in Cicely being rescued from a watery 'death-hole' by a courageous ferryman with a reputation for saving the lives of those who cross the river; in a fateful twist so familiar to this genre, he turns out to be her 'sailor-father'. In the sentimental denouement of the story, reminiscent of Little Meg's fortunes,

the sailor-father functions as a redeemed, quasi-resurrected, heroic figure who rescues his daughter. Despite the plot's conservative resolution, *Cicely Frome*, like other adventure tales by Marchant, mapped out new spaces for the girl reader; in doing so they gave expression to 'the frustrations of being a female in a world that privileges the male. … The girls in these novels get to live out what Sally Mitchell calls the "boy dream."'[71] The gender politics of these stories thus offered the girl reader a curious mixture of transgression and social conservatism, though one that ultimately traversed familiar ideological ground.

Daughters' Reflections on Seafaring Fathers in Working-Class Autobiographies

The sailor's daughter was a relatively minor figure in Victorian fiction and served to present writers with an opportunity to explore the self-sufficient girl protagonist within narrative structures that mainly reinforced conventional gendered codes. But beyond depictions of the symbolic role of the sailor's daughter in fiction, oscillating between tomboyishness and femininity, adventurism and domesticity, there are other texts that articulate the lived experience of historical working sailors' daughters. Their stories, as expressed through first-person autobiography and memoir, offer insights into the complicated and entangled maritime relations between working men, whose labour fuelled the demands of global and imperial industrialisation, and their stay-at-home daughters who took up the pen to write about those family relationships, beyond the stock fictions of the waif novel or adventure tale. Though written in adulthood, these texts are valuable for the emphasis they place on the child's point of view, a perspective that has the potential to supplement the historical record and to open up new imaginative landscapes. Their accounts are a reminder, as Mary Jo Maynes simply puts it, that 'girls do make history'.[72] It should be reiterated here, that as stated in Chapter 1, my aim is not to draw up schematic differences between tales of family in myth and reality, fact or fiction, but to trace the broader intersections and entanglements of those cultural narratives. The following readings of the working sailor's daughter's tale derive from a relatively small but unique corpus of memoirs that I have identified as being penned by seafarers' daughters of working-class backgrounds born before 1915.[73]

As also noted in the first chapter, the sailor's return formed an important part of Victorian cultural imagery, although it tended to emphasise the mariner's role as a son returning to the family hearth, or presented him

Figure 4.4 '"The Sailor's Home-Coming" – By Klinkenberg', *Illustrated London News*, 17 September 1892.

as a much-missed husband or lover. As a stock cultural image, it reinforced a gender binary, as Eric J. Leed notes:

> The erotics of arrival are predicated on certain realities in the history of travel: the sessility of women; the mobility of men …. Historically, men have traveled and women have not, or have traveled only under the aegis of men, an arrangement that has defined the sexual relations in arrivals as the absorption of the stranger – often young, often male – within a nativizing female ground.[74]

Less usual in visual culture are representations of the sailor returning as a father, although one such image, from the 1892 edition of the *Illustrated London News*, shows a sailor's daughter's evident delight as her father presents her with a gift of a wooden doll from his sea bag (Figure 4.4).

But while sailors occupied a significant mythic status in the cultural imagination as workers, voyagers, sons, and husbands, their role as parent was less assured. Thus in her collection of essays on working-class families published at the start of the twentieth century, the district nurse,

M. Loane commented that '[s]ailors, although from certain points of view good fathers, are on the whole cool and indifferent to their children, intensely critical, and inclined to be extremely jealous of them'.[75] Indeed, Loane interviewed one such individual who admitted he barely knew his children: 'Often for three years at a stretch I haven't seen mine by any kind of light at all.'[76] The testimony of autobiographies by sailors' daughters also signals their sense of estrangement towards fathers, as, for example, in the recollection of Amy Langley, the daughter of a Royal Marine Artillery seafarer whom she described as 'often away, sometimes for as long as two years and when he did come home, we children did not know him'. She acknowledged in her memoir that the father's returns 'upset the ordered routine of the home', and left him feeling 'puzzled, if not hurt, by the reception he received from his children'.[77] Another Portsmouth sailor's daughter, Dora Hannan (nee King, born 1909), stated plainly on the first page of her memoir: 'My father was in the Royal Navy, and almost a complete stranger to my brothers and me.'[78] Autobiographer Kay Pearson (born 1896), who grew up in a large working-class family in Hull, registered the relationship with her father in minimalist terms: 'You may question that I do not mention my father, he was a seaman engaged in quite lengthy trips so little was seen of him, mother courageously taking the roll [sic] of father and mother.'[79] Another sailor's daughter invoked a form of separate spheres as she reflected on her absent father, admitting that 'somehow I only connected him with the boat not with ourselves at home'.[80] And Marjory Todd, a contemporary of Pearson, raised in Gateshead, had little to say about her early memories of her father, a ship's boilermaker, noting ambivalently: 'We hardly knew him in infancy – he was nearly always at sea. Perhaps this was a good thing, perhaps not; I cannot know.'[81]

The sense of the unknown quality of seafaring fathers, or their uncanny presence as familiar strangers, echoes throughout the autobiographical record. In some respects, it conformed to, if not intensified, what John Tosh identifies as a model of 'absent fatherhood' that had developed across the course of the nineteenth century, whereby fathers were increasingly absent due to both work and leisure pursuits that set them apart from the 'emotional cross-currents of family life'.[82] The following section addresses the articulation of these sentiments through a close reading of the memoirs of two particular sisters, tracing the relationship between the travelling seafarer and his land-bound daughters, and paying attention to the ways in which the interplay of gender and the specificities of class shaped and complicated this bond within families that were at once rooted in the local and global.[83]

The Cowper Sisters: Reminiscences of a Late-Victorian Seafaring Family

The ambivalence of daughters' relationship towards a frequently absent seafaring father, and the material ways in which his paternal vocation shaped the fortunes of the family, are apparent in what we might call 'twin' memoirs by two Liverpool sisters born in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Agnes and Daisy Cowper were the only daughters among what one described as a 'quiverful' of siblings, born sixteen years apart to Agnes Cowper and Captain Matthew Cowper who, by the age of 28, was master of a tea clipper and a commander in the Royal Naval Reserve.[84] Sixteen years and six brothers separated Agnes and Daisy, yet the sisters remained close throughout their lives. The eldest daughter, Agnes, published her memoir in 1948 with a local Merseyside publisher, after she took retirement from her job as librarian at the Lever Free Library for Port Sunlight Workers; her younger sister, Dorothy (known as Daisy), wrote her own unpublished 55,000-word memoir, titled 'De Nobis' (1964), at the behest of her children.

Autobiographical accounts written by siblings are a rare but valuable source, rarer still in the context of working-class writing. The fact that they offer points of both connection and significant divergence serves as a useful reminder – if needed – of the subjective, kaleidoscopic, and intricate nature of family stories. Taken together, and inviting a dialogic and comparative reading, these texts emblematise the 'relational' nature of all life writing.[85] Considering memoirs in a paired form also brings to the fore the importance of sibling relations within family stories, a consanguineous tie that has been overshadowed by a dominant focus on parent–child relations. For as Leonore Davidoff has shown, '[i]n their relationships, brothers and sisters are thought to contain quintessential attributes of both *sameness* and *difference*', a unique dyadic quality that has animated myths that tell of deep sorority as well as sibling rivalry (emphasis in original).[86] Indeed, it is precisely the qualities of 'sameness and difference' that are so striking when sibling autobiographies are read alongside each other, from the different context of their modes of production, to the details of family life that overlap and deviate in significant ways. Together, therefore, the Cowper memoirs offer a nuanced exploration of the Victorian sailor's daughter's tale and the fortunes of a late nineteenth-century family that was shaped by the uncertain vicissitudes of maritime labour.

It is an ironic and revealing feature of the Cowper sister memoirs that both professed to pin their life stories on the narrative hooks of the male

members of their family, including their father, Captain Matthew Cowper, and their brothers, several of whom went on to join maritime professions. In her preface, Agnes apologised for what she warned would be frequent allusions to her 'rather numerous brood of brothers', adding that this was necessary to drive forward the narrative: 'Such references have been very largely necessary to provide the requisite pegs upon which to hang the story of those incidents of general interest.'[87] It is testament to the tenacity of patriarchal ideology and conceptions of boyhood that even women's self-penned life stories attempted to centre the activities of the men in their families.

But memoirists do not always follow through on their own edicts, and, read against the grain of the Cowper sisters' superficial directive, it is possible to trace a determinedly matrilineal narrative that runs through the accounts. Indeed, the sisters' versions of the vicissitudes of maritime family fortunes highlight the bonds of sorority emerging from the 'gender-group solidarity',[88] forged within the private sphere of the Victorian home. Thus in Agnes's account, the eldest daughter's memoir, the story of a maritime family at sea begins not with the captain's logbook, but with fragments of her mother's own diary kept at sea. Agnes titled her opening chapter 'Leaves from an Old Diary', and transcribed passages that the captain's wife, pregnant with her first child, had kept aboard the *Truce*, a vessel carrying cotton from New Orleans to Liverpool in 1874. The Cowpers had been married three years by this point, Matthew Cowper first attracting his wife in proverbial fashion as a sailor whose 'admiration was genuine, his position good, his stories fascinating, and there was his promise to take her to see all the world's wonders in his good care'.[89] The mother's diary contains details of a terrifying storm at sea, from which the captain's wife returned to Liverpool to give birth to Agnes, her second child and first daughter. 'My mother has since told me how extremely disappointed she felt when told that her second baby was a daughter', Agnes writes, repeating a sentiment found in so many memoirs by nineteenth-century daughters, including those who remained unequivocal about the affection they held for their mother.[90]

In fact, despite the mother's desire for boys (a wish granted as she bore six in quick succession), Agnes's profound identification with her mother lies at the root of the memoir. In Agnes's eyes, a consequence of being a seafarer's daughter meant the development of a close attachment to her mother, and memories of her father are seen through the lens of this intense primary relationship.[91] It is in this context that Agnes recalled her father's intermittent homecoming, and in a chapter titled 'Early Recollections

of a Sailor-father' she recounted the apocryphal sailor's return from the unusual position of the girl's point of view:

> My earliest recollections of infancy having passed, my next recollections include one of a bear-like creature coming into our home and monopolising my mother's attentions. I deeply resented removal from my mother's bedroom and having my place taken by this strange creature. Up to this time, when I was three years of age, I had rarely come into contact with grown men for, during my father's absence, my mother led a very secluded life.[92]

Described in these terms, the 'sailor-father' (to adopt Agnes's compound term) was perceived as the embodiment of an uncanny bogeyman and interloper, associated with a beast from a fairy-tale as he made his apparently unearned and unwelcome way into the house to usurp the affections of the mother. Bypassing the currents of the Oedipal and Electra complex, the triangular relation here was one in which both father and daughter appeared as rivals for the mother's affections – a rivalry which centred, no less, on each member's sense of entitlement to the shared marital bed.[93] Tosh claims that 'the rituals which most accurately reflected the real standing of Victorian fatherhood were those of return, recognizing the respect and welcome due to the breadwinner on his release from work'.[94] Yet the sailor's daughter's perspective here provides a challenge to the status of the *paterfamilias* and romantic seafarer: rather than assuming his place at the centre of the family, or laying claim to the role of the valued breadwinner, in Agnes's eyes, he was an imposter and intruder, encroaching upon the intimacy of a family circle that had been tightly reformed in his absence.[95] This sentiment was echoed by one of the Cowper brothers; after being summoned to formally greet the head of the house whose return had disrupted domestic routines, he simply asked his mother, 'Ma, when is Pa going away again?'[96] This characterisation recalls the district nurse Loane's sense of pity felt towards the sailor-father who was 'commonly regarded as an intruder': 'I remember a little girl of five years old going to a favourite aunt the day after her father's return from foreign service with the fretful complaint: "That cwoth old man has come to my howth again!"'[97] Naval sailor's daughter, Hannan, also recalled how her younger brother had greeted his returned father by taking refuge behind his mother's skirts and asking loudly, 'Mummy, who is that man in our house, and when is he going away?'[98]

Against the view of a general waning of paternal authoritarianism within the middle-class home in the late Victorian period, Agnes observed how her father's return from service resulted in a more stringent code of discipline

at home, including formal inspections of the children's appearance before school and the expectation that they would eat separately from their father and only after he had completed his meal.[99] According to Agnes's interpretation, and in line with Loane's assessment of the maritime father's sense of jealousy, father and children were rivals for the affections of the wife/mother. As the memoirist goes on to note: 'Until [my father] met my mother, who was fourteen years his junior, his life had been entirely devoid of affection. I often think he grudged, no doubt unconsciously, the love and affection my mother bestowed upon her family.'[100] This was exacerbated, in Agnes's view, by his own fractured childhood as a paradigmatic ocean waif:

> I am convinced that my father had no understanding of children, probably due to his having had but little experience of home life and family affections, for when very young he had lost his father at sea, a loss followed shortly after by the death of his mother. Thus he was completely orphaned at the tender age of eight years, and only a few years later was voyaging in that hardest of hard schools of tough work and discipline, an American sailing ship of the eighteen-forties.[101]

The disruption of the norms of family life, brought about by maritime routines and Captain Cowper's intermittent absences and returns, also laid bare economic truths about family life. As Agnes's narrative implies, the Cowpers were bound by kin but they were also competitors for limited material resources (including food, educational opportunity, social privileges) and what seemed to be restricted reserves of emotional care. This aligns with Griffin's broader pronouncement on the economics of the Victorian family: 'Father, mother, son, daughter: these are not simple descriptors delineating biological relationships. They are social categories used to determine who gets what.'[102]

Yet although both Cowper sisters were critical of their father in their accounts, they remained alert to what they recognised as his complicated and conflictual nature. Agnes in particular acknowledged that she felt resentful and fearful in his presence, but was careful to pay tribute to his positive attributes. She described how her father could adopt the role of the 'jolly playmate known as "Papa"', particularly when the children were young, while professing admiration for his singing voice. Like the vagrant sailor's daughter interviewed by Mayhew, whose account is explored in the Introduction to this book, Agnes celebrated her sailor-father's qualities; she praised his polyglot abilities in speaking Spanish, Portuguese, German, and French, and professed admiration for this orphaned sailor's

son and autodidact who could quote Shakespeare and Scott.[103] Cowper thus provided an intensified version of the middle-class Victorian father: aloof and distant because of the demands of work that took him outside of the home, yet appreciated by his children as the 'giver of gifts', who could produce the colourful and tangible fruits of his labour. In this sense, as Tosh has noted, from the 1870s onwards images of the father coalesced with the modern version of Father Christmas, imported from the United States, which reinforced the idea of the 'father as the source of material largesse'. He adds that 'like other forms of paternal gift-giving, it suggested that the mundane business of earning the family crust might in a moment be transformed into plenty, surprise and delight'.[104] Tosh is making a point about middle-class Victorian fathers here, but his characterisation extends to the maritime father, with his long periods of absence and sudden returns, the invisible nature of the labour he performed, and his ability to conjure exotic treats from the magical depths of a sea-bag or trunk.[105] Agnes recalled in her memoir how the family would receive such gifts in their father's absence:

> What joy it gave me when a sailor delivered at our home a small chair, a beautiful specimen of Chinese art, and to find a label addressed to myself bearing the words, 'A gift to my little daughter on her fifth birthday, from Papa.' Shortly afterwards Papa returned, bringing many interesting articles of Chinese workmanship, a case of Chinese preserved ginger; another of oranges in syrup, and quantities of tea. Little wonder, then, that we children looked upon him as a conjurer of good things.[106]

The practice of gift-giving would later pass on to the Cowper brothers who entered the merchant navy. Their brother Harry, for example, returned from his work at sea with a chest laden with a heap of 'treasures' from around the world: '[c]arved elephants from Colombo, butterfly wing trays from Rio, carvings from China and Bali, embroidered silks from Japan and many other beautiful and interesting mementoes of his voyage. How his face beamed with pleasure as he handled the goods with, "Here; this is for you; and this"'.[107] Another brother, William, freshly arrived from an eight-month voyage, gifted the family a brightly coloured tea service along with 'a small Indian monkey from Chittagong, about the size of a cat, who answered to the name of Toby' and was fondly remembered as 'the pet and plaything of the family'.[108]

The figuration of seafaring members of the family as givers of gifts is a familiar image with important cultural resonance.[109] Yet, as noted, gift-giving could be a performative display of munificence that glossed over complicated family dynamics. In Daisy's memoir, the unpublished

companion piece to Agnes's recollections, the younger sister threw a different light on the role played by the brothers within the family. While Daisy also fondly recalled her brothers following in their father's footsteps as gift-givers on sojourns from the sea, she noted with disapprobation her brothers' gradual estrangement from the family, and what she construed as their failure to provide regular financial assistance to their widowed mother. Indeed, Daisy's account barely conceals the resentment that brothers who had been treated so favourably by their mother, would channel their economic rewards towards their new wives, a feeling also articulated by other autobiographers who, as 'companions and competitors' within the family unit 'were not oblivious to the competition for scarce resources that existed between themselves and their siblings'.[110]

Furthermore, the cosmopolitanism connoted by the sailors' gifts and stories belied the more standard and conventional sexual division of labour underpinning the domestic household. Thus while several of the Cowper brothers continued their education and assumed their roles in the merchant service, Agnes was expected to serve in the role of the family's little mother, particularly during her father's prolonged absences. She recalled how, at the age of 14, she had been keen to 'go to business' as a trainee in a local dress shop; yet while one of her brothers would take up an apprenticeship with a Liverpool sailing-ship company at the same age, Agnes was barred from undertaking this work as her 'place was in the home helping mother with the children and with household duties'. Thus she duly settled instead into looking after 'seven tantalising, tiresome but lovable brothers, and a sweet baby sister'.[111] That 'sweet baby sister' and ally, Daisy, would corroborate this account in her own memoir, noting that 'another strange feature' of her father was his reluctance to allow his daughters any semblance of financial independence: 'Of course, Agnes he regarded simply as a nursemaid to help her mother in looking after his progeny, and to be dishwasher, etc., etc.,' she noted caustically. Daisy reiterated her sister's account of her attempt to move out of her unpaid role as nursemaid to her siblings by securing an opportunity to gain employment. Captain Cowper, however, put a stop to this arrangement declaring with no apparent sense of irony: 'No-one is having the services of a child of mine without paying for them.' Daisy's memoir goes on to provide a supplementary coda to this story of Agnes's aborted attempt to find paid work, revealing the shameful family secret that her father had thus enlisted the labour of 'poor seventeen-year-old Agnes, who was instinctively ladylike and dignified' to work in a South Liverpool dockland chandler's shop selling straw beds 'late in the evening, to the sailors from her father's ship'.[112]

In 1895 Captain Cowper assumed his tragic place as the third generation of men in his family to be drowned at sea. As Agnes wrote, the family left behind in Liverpool would follow the pattern of other 'big families in which, if deprived of their breadwinner … had either to learn to fend for themselves or go to the wall'.[113] As the eldest daughter, Agnes took on the largest share of responsibility for looking after her younger siblings. In relating the story of his death, Agnes recalled a moment that had occurred a few years earlier when the Captain summoned each of his sons to a solemn discussion in which he asked them to look after their mother if anything should befall him at sea. 'I wanted to be in this,' Agnes confesses, 'for I felt that I was truly a "woman of no importance," so, opening the door of the room, asked father if I was wanted, too. "No," was his reply, "you and your mother are practically one, and the cautionary word I have to express is essentially one for your brothers."'[114] In Agnes's memoir, the sting of this symbolic exclusion is followed immediately by her recollection of a strange premonition of her father's watery death:

> For the first time in my life I dreamed of my father. It was an extraordinary dream. In it I was walking on the shore at Waterloo, looking across the mouth of the river, when a steamer suddenly appeared bearing the name of my father's ship. Suddenly she commenced to sink, and as she disappeared beneath the waters I knew that my father was on board. With a cry I wakened my mother, with whom I was sleeping, and told her of the horror of my dream. She dismissed it as a nightmare …. But I could not rid myself of the horror and lay awake until it was time to rise for the day.[115]

Two days after the dream, according to Agnes's memoir, the family received the news that her father's ship, the Liverpool steamer *Marie*, had sunk in dense fog at the Manacles off the Cornish coast. The visceral and disturbing sense of the disappearance of a family member at sea – traced in Chapter 1 of this book – is evoked again through Agnes's description: 'Later a number of bodies were washed ashore at various points along the coast, but not that of my father. There were no survivors, and thus my father passed on in the same way, and in similar circumstances, as his father and grandfather, completing a sequence of three generations whom the sea had claimed.'[116]

In her own narrative, Daisy unflinchingly portrayed her peripatetic sailor-father as a rival for her mother's affections. Recalling how she came home from school to be told 'that pa's ship had been wrecked and he wouldn't be coming home any more', she attempted to convey the blunt egotism of the 5-year-old self:

> I felt happy to think that that place in the big bed was mine for good, now, but sorry about the little ship. … So I hurried along cheerfully, but finding mother in tears, I, too, wept copiously, but it was sympathy for mother's tears, not grief for a lost parent.[117]

The boys, too, 'were not downcast, any of the six of them … at the absence of a father who was always strict, and latterly, of uncertain temper'. Daisy reassured herself that this restrained reaction to the news extended to her mother, who 'must surely have been relieved to know that child-bearing was over, and that for the future, her devotion to her children need cause her no uneasiness'.[118]

If the daughters' emotions were decidedly ambivalent in reaction to their father's death, the effect on the family economy was brutal and swift. As Agnes put it plainly, '[l]ike many families of which the breadwinner had been taken, there remained only indigence and bitter anxiety'.[119] The financial implications of the loss of Captain Cowper's salary were immediate; he was only 'paid up to the hour of his death' and the remaining family of ten received a supplemental £10 donation from the Shipwrecked Mariners' Benevolent Society.[120] The loss of Captain Cowper's earnings, in addition to the discovery of his 'most injudicious' financial investments after his death, led to the disbanding of the tight family unit in a bid to survive.[121] One of the Cowper sons set out immediately to seek his second mate's certificate, while another was admitted to the Liverpool Seamen's Orphan Institution in Newsham Park for four years, his sisters making the seven mile round trip by foot every week to see him at chapel on Sundays. Young Harry Cowper's entry into the orphanage serves as an example of the way in which families used such institutions as one of a 'range of tactics' in the 'economy of makeshifts' and survival.[122] Indeed, the family seem to have reconciled themselves to the social implications of Harry's entry into the orphanage, declaring themselves proud to see him in his smart nautical uniform and recalling his assertion to them: 'I am quite as proud of being brought up in the Liverpool Seamen's Orphanage as I would had I been sent to one of the great public schools.'[123] Previously barred by her father from working outside the home, Agnes attempted to find paid work in the city, eventually gaining employment as a shop assistant and thereby disobeying her father's earlier prohibition.

Daisy Cowper's autobiographical tale serves to corroborate her elder sister's account, while also highlighting new facets of the Cowper family saga. Like many other amateur women memoirists, Daisy wrote explicitly for her own family members, seemingly at the behest of her 'loving children' in order to set out what she called her 'kaleidoscope of recollections of

family life'.[124] Her autobiography is simultaneously more nostalgic in its depiction of childhood and critical in its portrait of Captain Cowper (who died when Daisy was five). Like Agnes, Daisy anchored her story around the figure of her mother, emphasising the importance of the way in which the family tale had been passed down the matrilineal line. Daisy was unequivocal in her devotion to her mother:

> I cannot express how I loved her, deeply and unwaveringly, from my earliest recollection …. She gave all her children love in fullest measure, though, perhaps, to me, her youngest and a little girl, she was even more demonstrative. Just to be with her was to sense warmth and safety, and she was always interesting.[125]

Furthermore, Daisy's memoir satisfyingly reveals Agnes to be the hero of the family story: having brought up the young siblings and supported the family economy, Daisy reveals that for years Agnes had also put aside a shilling of her weekly wages selling hats into a saving fund for her younger sister, and left her an inheritance. And in contrast to Agnes, Daisy felt no obligation to defend her father or uphold the veneer of prestige that had formerly attached to him as a Liverpudlian merchant captain. In her more revisionist memoir she mentioned the decline that was taking place in his professional status well before his death, adding that his 'last ship was a very poor affair for a man who had set out with such high promise'. Daisy sketched out an illuminating backstory to her father's career as one marked by downward mobility, fuelled by poor financial decisions and extended alcoholism: 'As years passed, the intervals of his home-staying before seeking another command grew longer, and the successive commands smaller: the cash saved during one long voyage would all be drawn from the bank before he went off again, always leaving our mother struggling with little money and an over-growing family.'[126] Like Agnes, Daisy drew on the documentary evidence of her mother's shipboard diary as she pieced together her family story; but her selections painted a more visceral version of the life of a captain's wife where she was exposed to his alcoholic rages at sea:

> It greatly troubled Mother on the voyages she took with him in the early married days, to see the quantity he consumed, and how these bouts were always followed by rows with the crew. 'It was like the devil in him,' she would say. She used to tell me, when I was grown-up, of how she emptied the stuff away, surreptitiously – and how terrified she was, seeing an attack coming on.[127]

In her published memoir, Agnes professed herself too modest to write a 'family saga', but Daisy used precisely the suggestive term *saga*, as suggested

to her by one of her own family, when she came to pen her own account.[128] This raises an important point about the links between fictional and non-fictional accounts of the seafaring family, particularly in relation to its female members. For the Cowpers' memoirs – female-centred narratives of family life across generations and of girls struggling for economic survival and independence in northern seaports – prefigure and even anticipate the formula of the bestselling 'family saga' genre that would make household names of other working-class women novelists-turned-memoirists such as Catherine Cookson and Helen Forrester.[129] The Cowper sisters' memoirs were limited to a local and family readership, and their stories are considerably more complex and unpredictable than those of their literary descendants in fiction; yet the evidence of these twin autobiographies (despite their modest disclaimers) also suggest both sisters' conviction that they had a good story to tell.

At Home with the Sailor-Father: Twentieth-Century Autobiographical Recollections

As Tabili notes, seafaring was often a transitional occupation and a 'temporary stage in a working man's life; many undertook a transition from sojourner to resident, from mariner to landlubber, lone stranger to patriarch of a local family'.[130] It is therefore unsurprising that a leitmotif in sailors' daughters' memoirs is precisely recollections of their fathers' uneasy and uncertain presence and status within the family home either on leave or once they were cut adrift onshore at the end of a seafaring career. As Agnes Cowper's account so vividly shows, in her rendition of the reassimilated father to the family bed as a 'beast', children were sensitive to what they experienced as uneasiness at the sudden incursion of a male presence within the home.[131]

In similar vein, self-professed 'mariner's daughter' Amy Langley, born in 1896 in Portsmouth and writing her memoirs at the age of 82, conceived of her father's return from abroad as a disruption to an idealised prelapsarian existence: 'These happy, innocent days of childhood were now to change. Father's time in the Marines was coming to an end. No more would we suffer, as children do suffer, when Father suddenly appeared after two years away from home.'[132] Indeed Langley used her own experience to make a broader claim as she asserted that the 'change in the home when this strange man takes possession of Mother, often disturbs children a great deal and Service men's families of nine [children] have much adjustment to make in a new life with Father always there'.[133] Edith Evans's story, related in her memoir *Rough Diamonds* (1982), adds further

testimony in this regard. Born in 1910 into an East End home comprising three sublet rooms in a house rented by her grandparents, she dismissed her unemployed father as a 'pint-sized Cockney', but was fearful of him too; she thought of him as an 'ogre', a figure who drank heavily and subjected her to what she called a form of 'mental battering' at home.[134] His absence as a seafarer, she wrote, 'suited me very well as I was always nervously uneasy when he was at home'.[135] Yet as with Daisy Cowper, the father's eventual return to the family homestead necessitated a swift and jolting readjustment, the five daughters being 'whisked away upstairs to Gran's' for the sojourn as he 'didn't like grizzling kids and Mother knew better than to annoy him in this way'.[136] She recalled her father's jealousy towards his children, for the attention they claimed from his wife; he barred them from the marital bedroom while on leave and refused to tolerate them crying in his presence. During the outbreak of the war in 1914, when it was assumed that Evans senior's ship had been torpedoed, Edith Evans reports that her mother had felt a 'wave of relief' at this news.[137] It turned out to be a false alarm; her husband returned home on leave and she became pregnant with a sixth child. D.M. Ponton (born 1909), the daughter of a naval sailor who narrated her life story in an autobiographical letter to historian John Burnett, also recalled feelings of deep ambivalence with regard to her father's return to the impoverished Southwark home. The eldest of four remaining siblings (seven had 'died of wasting'), and another self-professed tomboy, she served as a standard little mother for each baby 'as they came along'.[138] Unlike other sailors' daughters surveyed in this chapter, however, she was emotionally estranged from both parents: 'My relationship with my mother was obedience', she confessed to Burnett, while with her father it was 'one of love when he wasn't the worse for drink, which he was every weekend that he was on leave, & fear when he was the worse for drink'.[139]

Many twentieth-century female memoirists were hardly reticent in noting that the father's return to the household entailed emotional and sexual demands on the mother (indeed their frankness about sex more generally is an overlooked aspect of the genre). Some of the autobiographies articulate the daughters' implicit or explicit association of their seafaring fathers' return from sea with the shock or discomfort at the discovery of sexual knowledge. Hannan, for instance, was forthright in expressing her sense of unease at her father's intrusion into a female-centred household in which the mother was at the heart of domestic life. Importantly, her father's retirement to the home from his job as a stoker in the Royal Navy seems to have coincided with her understanding of sex: 'So when I heard

the true facts of the matter, I felt disgusted and horrified, sick, would be a more apt description. I just could not associate my dear, lovely Mum with what seemed to me an absolutely degrading act, so I blamed my father, and saw him in an entirely new and very unattractive light'.[140] These emotions significantly combined an anxiety about sexual knowledge with concern about money; they intensified, in her case, on learning at the age of 11 that her mother was pregnant with another baby: 'I really hated and resented his coming now that I knew the facts behind it. For another thing, it meant yet another mouth to feed and body to be clothed.'[141] The baby boy would go on to become a firm favourite with her father, who was even spared her father's habit of smacking his children for disobedience. Hannan subsequently developed a strong antipathy towards this baby brother, as sibling rivalry was exacerbated by the father's gendered preferences.

Hannan's account echoes Langley's formulation of a 'fall' into knowledge away from the 'happy highways' of childhood innocence that predated her father's return from the sea: 'The happy life we had known when Dad was in the Navy and only a casual visitor, gradually changed.' In contrast to the sailor's 'know-how' at sea, Hannan, like other daughters, observed her father's apparent haplessness in the temporary and unstable job market of the shore-world:

> He became frustrated and bitter about his job which was hard and took him out in all weathers, and apparently he had to endure snicks [sic] and sneers of resentment from his fellow workers because he received a Naval pension. He was increasingly irritable and short tempered and difficult to live with.[142]

Hannan was particularly humiliated when the inner tensions of the family were exposed to a friend from school who had made an unexpected call at the house, to the fury of her father who rebuked her loudly in front of the visitor before slamming the door in her face.

> Never had I before felt, or been, so humiliated and upset, and in front of that particular girl of all people! To this day, well over half a century later, I can still feel the shame he made me experience every time I saw Letty Brock, and I imagined her standing in the middle of a group of her cronies, telling them about the rude uncouth man who was my father.[143]

Like other memoirs, Hannan's account is sensitively attuned to what she perceived as her father's loss of personal and professional status after being pensioned off from the Navy after twenty-two years of service spent in the 'far flung outposts of the British Empire as the West Indies, the Cape, Seychelles … patrolling the vast and varied oceans for as long as two and a half to three years at a time'.[144] He returned to unemployment before

finally getting a job, which was 'rather menial and quite a come down from his position in the Navy'. 'Life now took on a different pattern, with Dad at work all day, but home every evening, Saturday afternoons and all day Sundays,' she recalled.[145] Daughters such as Hannan observed the paradoxical behaviour of former seafarers, who had acquired the skills of domestic self-sufficiency during their sea career, yet exerted traditional patriarchal demands at home (her father was provided with a sit down meal every day at five o'clock), while also struggling with their perceived emasculation and the frustration of their new shore- and home-based lives.[146] Hannan, also a self-professed tomboy (who thought this made her a 'great disappointment' to her parents), ended her memoir by tracing the divergent fortunes of the siblings.[147] Two brothers joined the Navy, one gaining admission through the Greenwich Pensioner school for seafarers' sons, whereas she was forced to leave school at the age of 14 as there was no money to pay the fees. 'Naturally,' she commented,

> I was very disappointed as I saw my ambition to become a teacher shattered, and I felt that the money already spent on fees, books, uniform etc had really been wasted. Also, all the hours of effort, homework, swotting to pass exams: of learning subjects which were to be of no use whatsoever to me in my future life, had all been of no avail.

She concluded her life story on an unequivocal note of a path not taken: 'So ended my childhood as I took my first tentative steps into the sad disillusionment of the adult world', taking up a job as a junior assistant in a shop – the only satisfaction being the small wage she was 'proud to give Mum to help with the family budget'.[148]

A similar unease regarding the presence of a seafaring father at home is articulated in Rose Gamble's autobiography of a working-class girlhood, *Chelsea Child* (1982). Born c. 1915, the daughter of a cleaning woman and an irregularly employed seafarer, Gamble's memories of her father were of a man who was past his prime, having been a 'seaman in sail' when he met his wife and now reduced to '[hanging] about on the fringe of the wharfing and shipping world' at a time of unemployment.[149] Like a number of other sailors' daughters whose accounts are examined in this chapter (and, indeed, in line with working-class memoirists more generally), Gamble's account upheld a sympathetic family mythology centring on her father's impoverished origins and obscurity, while also presenting him ambivalently as a source of pity and fear:

> Dad was a thin, wiry man, with a heavily-lined strong face. We knew nothing at all about his family or where he came from, and we never asked.

> In fact, we never spoke to him spontaneously about anything, because we were all afraid of him, kept out of his way as much as we could. He brought us up by the force of his authority and he completely dominated Mum by his overbearing personality and physical strength. He had no friends that we knew of, and apart from an abrupt and decidedly upper-class politeness to neighbours, which he used to keep them at their distance, he was never familiar with anyone in the street. There was a distinct air of superiority about him, in spite of his shabby appearance.[150]

Presumably from a desire to replicate the order and routines of shipboard life, Gamble's father (like Captain Cowper) brought maritime habits into his domesticated rehabilitation of the family terraced home:

> Our room had to be kept ship-shape and everything put in its appointed place. Our worn washing line ran through a block and the ends were spliced. The mop, broom, poker, and chopper all sported Turk's heads and dad made the sennit mat in front of the hearth from rope ends. Cupboards were lockers, bed were bunks, and if we messed up a job we made 'heavy weather' of it, and if the sugar pot or the coke bucket or any other container was empty, we said 'there's a southerly wind in the bread barge'. We jumped to it at his command and a strict routine for living was laid down. He called us 'guttersnipes' and allowed none of the free and easy ways of the streets. Slang was forbidden, and we were made to repeat 'I beg your pardon' instead of a casual 'sorry'. We did not bang the door nor speak during mealtimes, sketchy though they were. Chores were done over again until they were done thoroughly, and we all learned the meaning of punctuality.[151]

In Gamble's eyes, her father occupied an uneasy transitional role between the old and the new, which affected how he related to his daughters: 'His attitude to the new freedoms of life in the nineteen-twenties was utterly Victorian, and he disapproved of women with short hair, short skirts and make-up. … "Thank God," he used to say, "that I am old-fashioned."'[152] The children, however, learned how to adapt to his presence, even if it took skills of dissimulation: 'We grew up leading a double life, one with Dad and the other without him. We could switch from wary obedience to boisterous cheerfulness at the banging of a door.'[153]

Yet Gamble's account is sensitive to her father's predicament, apparent even from the limited perspective of the child observer who registered her parents' behaviour through glimpses. She recalled, for instance, the humiliations and desperation he experienced in his struggle to find employment in the world beyond the home: 'He had neither the appearance nor the contacts to get the kind of job he wanted. … Dad hated poverty and despised everything about the way we lived, but he was hopelessly enmeshed in both and it made him angry, all the time.'[154] With minimal

information about how he spent his days, including the rebuttals and indignities he may have experienced in the public world of work and sociality, the children registered only the emotional aftermath that played out within the domestic interior: 'When something had gone wrong outside, we always knew, for he came home with an air of suppressed fury about him. His face was white and he muttered to himself.'[155] When Gamble's mother eventually took it upon herself to visit the Board of Guardians in order to ask for rent assistance, she would face directly the 'tricky' questions regarding his trade and profession, and the thorny issue to do with the regularity of his employment.[156] Noting her response that he 'was in the shipping line of things' and looking for a position, Gamble saw how her mother was unable to articulate the intricacies of her husband's unstable and obscure professional status: 'How could Mum put into a few words the complex pattern of Dad's character, and in front of strangers? Dad and his affairs did not fit into the ideas held by the Board of the typical working man.' In fact, Gamble wrote incisively, '[t]here was nothing typical about Dad'.[157]

Gamble makes clear that there were rare moments of shared closeness with her father, and, in the manner of other working-class autobiographers who sought to write about a difficult relationship with a parent, one example centres on a remembered act of gift-giving. Accordingly, she describes a period of convalescence at home following a childhood illness, which prompted a rare father-daughter outing on a 'raw and foggy' afternoon; the occasion was a trip to Woolworths on the North End Road to buy a piece of leather which her father intended to use to fix his wife's shoes.[158] Watchful, she observed how her father, the former sailor-craftsman, had carefully measured out a piece of leather with his 'clumsy stiff hands' under the careful surveillance of the stall owner.[159] While in the shop, Gamble was attracted by the distinctly non-utilitarian, gleaming items sold in the store: 'piles of brilliant Christmas tree decorations, crimson balls and golden stars, strings of tinsel and tiny celluloid dolls with silver crowns'.[160] Her child's eye was particularly drawn to a small blue tin candle holder, a sea-coloured object of desire: 'The blue was rich and metallic and silvery all at the same time, and the colour went straight to my heart.'[161] To her surprise, her father wordlessly picked it up and bought it for a penny, cutting a piece of candle for the holder on their return home. It would take up its pride of place on the mantelpiece at Christmas, a domestic fixture in the family room that was nonetheless deemed to have 'belonged to Dad and was out of bounds to us'.[162] Gamble summarised the story in a suitably ambivalent note: 'Dad never bought another present for anyone else, not

even for Mum. He never seemed to have any money. Perhaps that was one of the reasons why he was always angry.'[163]

The difficult reality of daughters living with a landlocked maritime father are also laid bare in Marjory Todd's neglected memoir *Snakes and Ladders* (1960). As a child growing up in Gateshead at the start of the twentieth century, Todd also had to contend with the fraught and unsettling effects of living with the aftermath of her father's seafaring career as a ship's stoker. In an echo of the Cowper sisters' attempts to understand their father's character in the context of his own orphanhood, Todd seemed aware of her father's difficult childhood living in abject poverty in a 'Scottish room-and-kitchen' in Ayrshire, the son of a seafarer who died at sea and a mother who worked as a servant.[164] As a consequence, her father and his siblings all finished their schooling at the age of 11 'and took whatever jobs they could', which for most of them meant going to sea or emigrating.[165] Todd's father, who had trained as a boilermaker, would eventually follow in their wake after losing an eye in an accident that put an end to his work in a Clyde shipyard. Serving as a stoker on merchant vessels for twenty years until 1914, his disability would be a constant source of shame and fear: 'Always there was this insecurity; the foreman might think him unfit for his work and he might have to go.'[166] Like other seafarer's daughters, Todd's early memories were of an absent figure, 'a presence in the house for a day or two every seven weeks all our lives', although she too would remember how her father's infrequent returns were punctuated by the magic apparition of exotic gifts:

> There were sometimes presents for us, because he and his mates filled in some of their long off-duty hours at sea by making things of brass and wood. We had hobby-horses and wooden buggies, and a doll's push-chair. I had a cradle, and my eldest brother and I had brass money-boxes.[167]

Like the Cowpers, the father's absence from the home resulted in Marjory and her sister forming a close attachment to their mother (again, in spite of what seems to have been a professed maternal preference for sons): 'How much we gained – and how much my father lost – because we were sailor's children! Mother had no adult company, so she talked to us.'[168] The consequence of his impoverished upbringing and disabilities, Todd's father's mantra, repeated *ad infinitum* to his children, was the 'mournful refrain': 'Things is very *precorious*….'[169] Todd's father's maxim would prove to be true after the early death of his wife from breast cancer when Marjory was 12. Retiring from the sea and taking up work at the Gateshead docks, Todd's father found himself propelled from a known world of

homosociality to that of a single male parent, aided by a succession of live-in housekeepers, including extended family members, before relying entirely on the domestic labour of his daughters.

For Marjory Todd, the home itself would become a 'preocorious' space; the site for her father's frustrations and frequently drunken rages, and a place that threatened to disappear. 'I'll have to sell this house and go into lodgin's and all you children will have to go into a Home', Todd senior liked to warn his children, indulging in what was perhaps his own fear, fostered in childhood, of the potential evanescence of home.[170] Having lost their mother, the Todd children were obliged to forge a home life alongside their violent and contradictory father. A sense of loyalty to their lost mother underlay the fraught alliance: 'We covered up our feelings and, over the years, grew a hard shell of what looked like scorn. The implication he read into our silences was that we disowned him – owed allegiance only to our mother.'[171] Like other sailor-fathers depicted in the memoirs, Todd the patriarch embodied a strange combination of domestic habits and tyrannical authoritarianism at home.[172] In spite of the macho rages, seascapes adorned the wall of the living room, the family kitchen was kept tidy, he was handy with domestic repairs and paced the rooms and small yard as if on board a ship. His standards of food, cultivated in the engineer's mess, were elevated too: 'That's the sort of meals your auld Daddy's been used with. You children have no idea.'[173]

Even her father's power of storytelling is rendered by Marjory Todd as an attempt to impose, intimidate, and dominate. Indeed, one of the most important aspects of the memoir is the desire to counter the sway of her father's versions of family and self, including his boasts to workmates that he was a good father and solid provider (he knowingly styled himself as a 'rough diamond', the 'Auld Scots Daddy').[174] As Todd comments, at her father's funeral, people told the children how

> proud he had been of all his children, the wonderful education he had given us all. Most of this was sheer fantasy. It came from that part of his mind which showed him to himself as the hardworking Scottish father, making tremendous sacrifices for his children's sake. We'd heard much of this through our lives – the detail and the degree of truth varying according to his mood.[175]

The romantic myth of the yarning seafarer is brutally cut down to size as Todd reflects: 'But he could never tell a story *straight*, and it was the gloss he put on things that stuck in our throats.'[176] In her memoir Todd proves herself to be fiercely resistant to her father's attempt to appropriate stories

that belonged properly to herself and her mother, as in a family tale about a trip to Maidstone, Kent:

> This historic journey of which we heard so much was made by my mother and five children when he was at sea and I was six, and I remembered it well. But his version suddenly after several years began to include him too. When each story appeared in its turn in his revised version we would be startled into silence. These were the sudden gaps in the screen he kept between reality and the fantasies he detailed for his mates at work. Momentarily the curtain would go up a fraction of an inch, and we would be speechless at its unpredictable disclosures.[177]

Todd's memoir is, in one sense, a move in the daughter's struggle against her father's power to determine the family narrative. Although it is either testimony to her father's dominance (or evidence of Todd's ability to capture character in her writing) that a contemporary reviewer should note that 'so vividly has [the father] been projected out of his daughter's inner world that he nearly steals the book'.[178]

Todd's father's occupational experience gave the family uncertain economic stability, but it may also have propelled his daughters to seek out financial autonomy in their professional lives. This was in spite of the father's limited ambitions for his children, which revolved on 'one idea and one only – quick returns. … We were all to get out quick into blind-alley jobs and bring home wage packets'.[179] Todd's grammar school career came to an abrupt end after she deemed herself unable to return due to her shabby clothes and the headmistress's humiliatingly public remonstrance ('This isn't a *Ragged* School, you know?').[180] Yet in spite of this setback Todd went on to complete her education through Workers' Educational Association classes and courses at Toynbee Hall before working at the BBC and becoming a probation officer.

Todd's memoir is finally an act of defiance against her father's prescriptions as well as broader conventions of class and gender. Like many other young girls, the memoirist had read *Little Meg's Children*, a tale of a sailor's poor children, though she was scathing of what she called 'pious and maudlin fiction of the Sunday school library' that taught 'morbid resignation' to a generation of children. Children from happy homes, she remarked, might have been equipped to handle that 'debilitating sentiment' of female self-sacrifice and hope in the afterlife without harm. But in a caustic line, she despatched the notion that girls imbibed the fictions they read uncritically: 'We sharpened out teeth on this stuff and then went on to greater satisfaction elsewhere.'[181] In line with the archetypal figure of social mobility in the twentieth century, the scholarship girl, Todd renders

the narrative of her educational trajectory as both liberating and painful.[182] For one thing, it permitted her to evaluate and judge her father for what she perceived to be his limited education and broader ignorance. In a brutal reflection, after passing the eleven plus exam that afforded entrance to the grammar school, she comments:

> It was about this time that I began to realise that he did not know and never would be able to grasp what our lives were about. … He talked about the importance of education, of 'getting on in the world', but he could not back this up with any knowledge, intuitive or real.[183]

Here the sailor's daughter challenges the father's incantation of 'getting on in the world' on the basis that despite his global travels, he lacked know-how and worldliness.

Todd's deep ambivalence is encapsulated in a story passed on to her by her sister. Towards the end of his life, their father seems to have retreated to living alone in the little kitchen of their childhood, treating it 'as though it were a ship's cabin, tidily and bleakly arranged'.[184] Relating her sister's anecdote, Todd writes:

> She came home after dark and put her bicycle away in the shed. The curtain of the kitchen window was not drawn and, alone in the kitchen, sitting in his familiar chair, my father was holding a book and reading it out loud to himself. On the arm of the chair was the big dictionary he had had years ago in his cabin at sea; he had covered it strongly in sail-cloth when he was a young man. The book he was reading was the *Autobiography* of John Stuart Mill, which one of us had left lying around.[185]

Todd's gloss on this pathetic scene is that,

> This picture was, for me, to be one more poignant illustration of his struggles within his ambivalent self. He could have shown affection to his children and he could have had affection in return. He was proud in his own way if any of us attained something which was beyond his reach. But at the same time he hated us when we did so. If any of us sat in the kitchen with him we could never be certain of when or how he would attack ….
>
> And so he spent his lonely evenings when he could have had his children around him, and he sat angrily trying to read John Stuart Mill – which sounded like a Scottish name – not to have something in common with his children, but merely to get even with all these 'damped scribs' ['damned scribes'].[186]

This image encapsulates the tensions and alienation of this particular father–daughter relationship, as the father is shown attempting to decode, with the help of a sail-cloth-wrapped dictionary, the autobiographical

words of the great nineteenth-century philosopher of the doctrine of liberty and author of 'The Subjection of Women' (1869). While Todd acknowledged her father's 'powers of oral expression' and 'gift of phrase', she judged that these were used merely in 'mockery and anger'; he had the gift of speech, she concluded, but he 'could not use it well, couldn't have composed a narrative'.[187] Todd's memoir thus stands in and of itself as an act of filial rebellion, one in which the daughter uses her skills of literacy in order to produce a progressive narrative of professional ascent, evading the snakes to climb the ladder of social mobility.

The tropes of voyaging and mobility are key and yet unstable terms in representations of the maritime proletariat of the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. For as Ken Worpole notes in his study of working-class writing, including the work of the Liverpool triumvirate Hanley, Phelan, and Garrett addressed in Chapter 3 of this book, Walter Benjamin's structuring themes of place and voyaging formed the twin dominant features of this literary output.[188] But as Rebecca O'Rourke has asked of interwar working-class women's writing, in relation to this point: 'What is women's place, what is their locality and rootedness made up of, where do you find it? And what of their voyaging: where could they possibly go, and at what cost.'[189] Even the deployment of the phrase 'to go out into the world' had gendered implications from the nineteenth century through into the early twentieth century. While the idea of 'seeing the world' is a commonplace – if not a cliché – in the memoirs of young boys who took to sea, as noted in Chapter 1, the phrase in the memoirs of women could refer, not to seaborne travel, but to the entrance into domestic service. For example, when autobiographer Grace Martin described herself at the age of 13 in 1920 as 'eager to launch out into the wider world', she was referring to the prospect of becoming a kitchen maid for her mother's friend.[190]

O'Rourke goes on to suggest that women of the interwar period, circumscribed by the 'place' of home, nevertheless went on to forge different paths of mobility for themselves. 'Where [the structuring theme of] voyage does have an application to women', she writes, 'it is, in direct contrast to the men, as something which dislocates their class belonging. The voyages writing working class women make are those of class mobility. Not for them the ships: with their archetypal labouring men in stoke-holds, their movement into other lives and countries.'[191] The 'adventurous girls' of the twentieth century discussed in this chapter may not have taken it upon themselves to cross seas or explore lands, but many broached new territory through their entry into paid professions and through forms of social

mobility. Like a good number of other twentieth-century working-class women, they also broke new ground by writing their life stories, assuming the role of chronicler of the family story through the flexible, adaptive, and radically accessible mode of autobiography.[192]

Conclusion: Intergenerational Narratives of Family, Class, and Gender

This chapter has charted the figure of the sailor's daughter through a number of visual and textual forms as a means of exploring how representations of a particular mode of Victorian and early twentieth-century family life were shaped by the sea, mobility, and the effects of precarious labour. The analysis has moved from an examination of configurations of literary girls related to the seas and sailors' daughters, to the first-person narratives contained in memoir. With regard to the autobiographies, it would of course be remiss to draw broad generalisations from what is a relatively limited, and necessarily highly subjective, pool of texts. The autobiographies evidently contain unresolved tensions and contradictions in the way in which they represent the social environment and psychodynamics of maritime families of the ordinary class. Yet the multiplicity of meaning in these memoirs is also an asset, allowing nuanced, voiced portraits to emerge from the complicated lattice of recollected family relations.[193] The richness of autobiography is, after all, to provide amply what Gillian Whitlock calls 'the multiplicity of histories, the ground "in between" when differences complicate, both across and within individual subjects'.[194]

Affectionate tributes to seafaring fathers exist, of course, and can be located more widely in memoirs by sons (such as the tender portrait by Jack Lawson discussed in Chapter 1), while memorable examples of loving working-class fathers burnish the Victorian novel.[195] In addition, a significant body of scholarship has attended to expanding and refining constructions of Victorian fathers and fatherhood away from the dominant motif of the stern, aloof *paterfamilias*, and fragments from the historical record have the capacity to disturb any attempt to provide sweeping categorisations in this regard.[196] For example, one Victorian ex-sailor's devotion to family resonated in his short interview with Mayhew, in which he declared that he now worked as dock lumper as he did not want to be away at sea for long periods of time: 'We're mostly married men with families; most poor men is married, I think. Poor as I am, a wife and family's something to cling to like.'[197] And although she did not leave a written

memoir, the Liverpool-born daughter of a Bermudan Victorian sailor, Edward James recalled a father who was lovingly admired and cherished.[198] In this regard, it is worth heeding Jose Harris's point that '[p]atterns of male authority within different households … varied widely, and, as with many other aspects of family life in this period, there is scattered evidence of movement in quite contrary directions'.[199] The figure of the 'Victorian father', as Claudia Nelson adds, is a shorthand, and the specific circumstances of family life provide as much variation as they do consistency.[200]

And yet, in their strange echoes and repetitions, the evidence taken from a relatively small pool of autobiographies hints at the deep ambivalence that could lie at the heart of the relationship between the proletarian seafarer and his daughter and indicates the broader ramifications of the way in which gender roles shaped the working-class family. In this sense these memoirs by daughters conform to what Griffin observes in her 'intimate history' of the economics of Victorian family life: an aggregation of examples of working-class fathers, who were judged by their children as inadequate providers in terms of both economic and emotional succour. Yet Griffin adds a further note of caution:

> Dividing fathers into 'good' and 'bad' providers of course imposes a degree of simplification over family lives that were often anything but simple and we should be aware that providing could intersect with other aspects of fathering in complex and unexpected ways. A web of emotions overlay all questions of provision and family relationships. Poor providers could be companionate, kind and loving.[201]

Of course, as Griffin explains, the memoir provides a fitting vehicle for articulating precisely the contradictory notes of family relations: 'Some writers loved their fathers dearly, some evinced a visceral hatred and there was a kaleidoscope of every imaginable emotion between these two extremes. Families are messy, and so too are emotions.'[202]

Nevertheless, despite these caveats, the recollections contained in the memoirs discussed in this chapter stand as significant representations of the lives of Victorian and Edwardian working-class girls in maritime families that go beyond familiar or conventional images. As the analysis has shown, these texts contain layered and distinctive voices penned by non-professional women writers who intuited that they had a story to tell. Their narratives run against the grain of a long tradition of reductive representations of images of girls in popular culture and fiction, including the imperial adventure fiction outlined in the opening sections of this chapter. For if it is the case that 'the idea of sacrifice is central to

definitions of girlhood in girls' texts' in early twentieth-century fiction, then it is evident that this is not the whole story.[203] It may be that the dominant tale demands that 'female protagonists are often asked to forgo their desires for the benefit of the family'.[204] But in the memoirs analysed in this chapter, the writers were clear about the internal price paid for these forms of sacrifice, including resentment, anger, insubordinacy, ambition, and determination.

The daughters' narratives, as shown in this chapter, were often unflinching in their criticism of seafaring fathers who were alternately experienced as familiar strangers and at worst abusive bullies. In their memoirs they produced portraits of the father through recollections of the child's subjective perspective – one that could be knowingly partial and uncomprehending, irrational, and self-centred – and in doing so viewed their fathers against the grain of hegemonic images of fatherhood and patriarchal authority. Yet these autobiographies are also illuminating for what they reveal about the contradictions and mystifications of forms of masculinity. For while their fathers could appear unfathomable, the daughters attempted to read their characters in line with what they understood of their social context. For example, daughters recalled fathers who appeared as deracinated and detached from their imagined community at sea among other seafaring men. Consequently, they observed the difficulties their fathers experienced fitting into land-based communities where work was irregular or scarce, and remarked on their fathers' social isolation where they had less recourse to deep-rooted connections with family or the local community.[205] While their gaze was limited from within the interior, daughters often drew multifaceted portraits of loners, drinkers, and drifters: men who were dissatisfied with circumstances of economic penury and a disorienting domesticity. Daughters took note of their fathers' attempts to reintegrate into family life – unsuccessful or misjudged as it could be – through acts of workmanship, the creation of domestic routines, or occasional acts of gift-giving.

Thus while the autobiographers examined here deviate from the good daughters of Dickens's novels, offering little redemption for the figure of the father, some do provide filial portraits that are multidimensional and engaged in crucial acts of demystification.[206] Critical as daughters could be of their fathers, these memoirs offer important insights into the frailties and burdens of working-class masculinity within the unpredictable and fluctuating economic landscape of maritime labour in the late-Victorian period through into the first decades of the twentieth century. The partiality of the daughters' accounts – in which fathers drift in and out of

the home as itinerant dwellers, or are only fully viewed once disbanded or retired from their profession – paradoxically provide an enabling perspective. Occupying a position at the edges of the perceived borders of the public world of men and work, daughters were well-positioned to glimpse the frailty and inconsistency of broader national and cultural mythologies of both fathers and sailors.[207] In this regard, as Carolyn Steedman explains, the value of individual personal pasts can be 'to raise the question of what happens to theories of patriarchy in households where a father's position is not confirmed by the social world outside the front door'.[208]

Against celebratory and idealising narratives of maritime men, daughters offered materialist and emotional accounts as they evaluated and even judged their fathers in their roles as family providers or good parents. Their writing consistently highlights the insight shared by historians of the family that kinship relations are also economic relations. For unlike Woolf, or the daughters of famous politicians or celebrated personalities, the memoirists were aware that they were composing biographical sketches of 'obscure' and economically marginalised men, who, by the end of the First World War at least, had inherited the crumbling edifice of narratives of maritime or military heroism.[209] Together these accounts anticipate in a significant way Steedman's subtle portrait of her own working-class father as a 'relatively unimportant and powerless man', whose vulnerabilities she witnessed, and whose interactions in the social world clearly revealed that he did not possess what Simone de Beauvoir called the 'mysterious prestige' of hegemonic patriarchy.[210] Thus while the daughters' accounts are partial, they are also illuminating, allowing for glimpses of alternative forms of working-class masculinities from the late nineteenth century through into the modern period that evade or are resistant of more dominant ideas about hegemonic, imperialist masculinity, as well as highlighting the emotional toll that these social narratives placed on both men and their families. As Tosh acknowledges, 'bourgeois masculinity' with its emphasis on manliness may have been hegemonic between 1800 and 1914, but this does not mean it 'amounted to a norm for society as a whole or that any variation from it was deviance'.[211] Indeed as the analysis in this chapter has shown, the complexly constructed masculinity of the urban poor – including the urban-maritime poor – remains to be more fully uncovered.

It is finally worth emphasising that these accounts of late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century fathers and girlhood were retrospective, and arguably retroactive, constructions.[212] If Tosh views the late Victorian period as a time in which 'the standing of children and childhood was rising, as that of fathers and fatherhood was falling', then that

process was well under way by the time these memoirists put pen to paper, often in older age.[213] As autobiographers, they looked back to childhoods that took place before or in the aftermath of two world wars, before the rise of a 'family-orientated masculinity' and profound shifts in cultural constructions of fatherhood and working-class representation.[214] These writers were, after all, to different degrees, beneficiaries of the twentieth-century extension of the franchise, the expansion of secondary education, the professionalisation of women in the workforce, and the development of feminism. Writers who looked back to late nineteenth-century and early twentieth-century childhoods using the first-person form of the memoir were influenced by the ideologies and attendant social expectations of the twentieth century, not least in ways of thinking about and conceptualising family relations brought about by the insights of psychoanalysis and theories of child development. In terms of literary history, it is the writerly daughter's insurgent narrative that carries the family story of maritime relations into the twentieth century.