Introduction

The sea is another story

Adrienne Rich, 'Diving into the Wreck'

Blue Victorians

In April 1850, the journalist Henry Mayhew ascended to the dome of St Paul's Cathedral to survey the metropolis, in a stance that would be adopted by generations of city writers after him. The view on that day, however, was 'smudgy and smeared with smoke' and the city appeared partially obscured.[1] As he looked eastwards beyond London bridge, Mayhew noted that 'nothing was visible; a thick veil of haze and fog hung before the shipping, so that not one solitary mast was to be seen marking the far-famed port of London'. Advancing his quest for a panoramic view, he made his way to another fine Wren building: the city's Custom House located on the north bank of the Thames. Here, beyond the mingling of church steeples, warehouses, smoking chimneys, and the white steam of the railways, he finally glimpsed the 'silent highway' of the Thames, '[bristling] with a thousand masts', the fluid commercial conduit between city and sea.[2] From Mayhew's elevated spot, atop the building that served as a gateway for people and goods entering the port, the seafarer turned journalist conjured a view that was both materialist and aesthetic.[3] He was surveying a working waterscape, populated by fleets of international merchant ships, including clumps of Irish vessels, Dutch eel boats, Russian brigs, and a schooner from Spain. But the effect of sunlight hitting the water altered the reality effect and 'as its broken beams played upon the surface, [the river] fluttered and sparkled like a swarm of fire-flies'. Through this lens other manufactured objects turned into quasi-natural images, as Mayhew described 'barges tide-borne floated sideways, with their long thin idle oars projecting from their sides, like fins', and

other boats that 'went by with men standing up in the stern and working a scull behind, like a fish's tail'.[4] In a word picture evocative of a Turner painting, Mayhew captured the multivalent aspects of the city's watery modernity:

> Look or listen which way you would, the many sights and sounds that fitted the eye and ear told each its different tale of busy trade and boundless capital. In the many bright-coloured flags that fluttered over the port, you read how all corners of the earth had been ransacked, each for its peculiar produce. The massive warehouses at the water-side looked like the storehouses of the wealth of the world, while, in the tall mast-like chimneys, with their black flags of smoke steaming from them, you saw how all around were at work, fashioning the far-fetched produce into new fabrics.[5]

Gazing out from the top of the Custom House to the toil and glitter of the Thames, was one way of seeing the maritime cityscape. Back at street-level in the mid-Victorian city, however, Mayhew's survey for the *Morning Chronicle* showed how maritime relations shaped the lives of the city's inhabitants through his interviews with merchant sailors, marine-store dealers, dockers, dredgers, and other waterside labourers, many of whom offered the journalist potted accounts of their life and labour. Sometimes details of maritime relations seeped into the accounts of respondents apparently unaffiliated to seafaring trades. One example was the narrative presented by an 18-year-old 'vagrant'.[6] Unemployed and homeless, she revealed herself to be a mixed-heritage sailor's daughter, her father 'a mulatto from Philadelphia' who had travelled to England as a mariner. Her family story was partial and fragmented, marked by hearsay and uncertainty. She had not known her father, since her mother, a white woman, was not married to him and had taken refuge at the Poland Street Workhouse after becoming pregnant. The fractured family story was punctuated with caveats: 'I believe', 'I've heard', 'I know nothing more', 'I suppose so'. Despite this, she was proud of her polyglot sailor-father, telling Mayhew of his accomplishments and travels: 'At one time, my father used to live by teaching languages. He had been in Spain, and France, and Morocco. I've heard, at any rate, that he could speak the Moors' language, but I know nothing more.'[7] The last she knew, he had assumed a new profession, sailing to Boston as a missionary. Life had been hard for this sailor's daughter; her mother now lived with another man, whom she referred to as 'father', but the girl was subject to his beatings. As a vagrant, she moved through lodging-houses and streets in which, using the Victorian euphemism, she had been 'constantly insulted', before eventually turning to prostitution.[8] The nameless girl who spoke to Mayhew

offered a fragment of a life story, shaped and abraded by the sea. Partial and told on the margins, it gestured towards a larger narrative in which the filaments of globalisation, race, gender, emigration, maritime mobility, imperialism, and poverty were interlaced.[9]

These two sketches from Mayhew's survey – the panoramic view and the proximate street encounter – stand in contrast to the dominant romantic representations of the sea that existed within Victorian culture by the mid century. For as widely acknowledged, '[i]mages of the sea and of Britain's oceanic dominion were deeply woven into national self-consciousness', suffusing a range of cultural forms including 'history, poetry, music, and the idioms of everyday life'.[10] Thus Steve Mentz argues that 'Romantic sea fever followed European maritime empires around the globe during the nineteenth century', finding expression in the revitalised genre of the seascape that captured the sublime – and usually unpopulated – vastness of oceans.[11] In literature too, the ocean afforded a capacious and malleable metaphor for humanity, nationhood, military prowess, mortality, religious faith, and sexuality. Bernhard Klein, for instance, remarks that '19th-century representations of the sea frequently turn the ocean into a reflector of subjective consciousness or a metaphor of cultural *rites de passage*, often equating the sea-voyage with psychological catharsis or taking the form of a "moody, metaphysical brooding on the obvious analogue of voyage and life"'.[12] As industrialisation and urbanisation advanced, the cultural romance associated with the sea also flourished through terrestrial ornamental culture. Coral, shells, stuffed fish, scrimshaw, and fish tanks filled the parlours of the middle-class home.[13] Like flowers, seaweed was carefully gathered, pressed, preserved, and catalogued in Victorian scrapbook collections.[14] The shipping news and tales of shipwrecks absorbed the daily attention of a nation of newspaper readers.[15] By the end of the century, parents from across the social spectrum dressed their children in the fashionable attire of the sailor suit.[16]

Mayhew's mid-century accounts, with their long-range and close-up perspectives on the working terraqueous city and the small life stories of its inhabitants, offer a counterpoint to the more dominant representations of the sea in Victorian cultural life. Adapting Mayhew's perspectives, my book aims to offer both a distant and proximate view of what I term 'maritime relations', in the dual sense of social relations shaped by the sea (including those of family and broader kin) and the influence of watery worlds on the development of literature and writing in the period. Using what Anna Davin calls the 'zoom and wide angle lens' to locate the particular alongside the general, my study focuses on the social relations specific

to the places where the urban life of the land comes into contact with the sea.[17] Specifically, it offers a people-centred account of those terraqueous relations through an analysis of the narrative construction of life stories (real and imagined) shaped by the vagaries of maritime mercantile labour. Looking through a blue lens, this book offers a new look at familiar cultural and social categories of the period – including the working class, family, home, cities, gender roles, literary genre, and modes of authorship. The sea, to adopt Adrienne Rich's phrase, can help to tell 'another story'.

In its exploration of social and literary forms of maritime relations this book contributes to three key, intersecting areas of scholarship. First, the book signals the importance of the sailor and maritime labour for studies of the working class and its cultural representation. I argue that new facets of working-class labour and the proletarian family come into view when we take account of the distinctive, international, and dislocated lives of seafarers, and the forms of cultural representation associated with their lived experience. Second, my book brings new archival sources, methodologies, and voices to bear on the field of the blue humanities, through its finding and innovative interpretation of diverse modes of life writing from below. I show how those materials facilitate an interpretative shift away from a more conventional focus on sailors' work at sea, or their national significance, towards questions of family, kinship networks, the life course (including childhood and older age), and the history of emotions. Third, my analysis of maritime autobiography, and its intersection with other forms of literature, makes an intervention in the broader field of life writing studies and the literary history of the period. It signals the distinctiveness of maritime life writing as a relatively neglected subset of working-class life writing and argues that these texts demand literary as well as social historical interpretation. Tracing the interrelationship of life writing alongside what I show to be related modes of literature – including the novel, juvenile fiction, and popular journalism – my book charts a new watery literary history from below for the long nineteenth century. In the sections that follow, I set out each of these contributions in more detail and within the context of previous scholarship.

Ordinary Sailors? Seafarers and History from Below

This book focusses on maritime relations in the period 1850–1914 in the context of working sailors who formed part of the nineteenth-century merchant navy – the vast system of maritime employment that linked port cities across the globe and propelled the juggernaut of imperial and

commercial trade. 'Global capitalism is a seaborne phenomenon', Liam Campling and Alejandro Colás remind us, pointing to international maritime networks that conveyed a prodigious tonnage of cargo in the holds of vessels navigating networks of ports in this period.[18] The 'deep-sea proletariat' of seafarers and other hands that powered vessels across oceans, they continue, 'was among the largest and most prominent workforce in the era of commercial capitalism'.[19] While both the military and merchant navies were crucial to Britain's trade and imperial ambitions, from around the time of the Crimean War a sharper distinction was drawn between the Royal Navy, which provided Britain with its forces of naval warfare and was subject to its own regulatory codes, and the merchant navy, a term used to describe the fleet of commercial shipping vessels.[20] Despite its singular name, the merchant navy was by no means a monolithic entity. Commercial shipping ranged from large deepwater sea clippers owned by major trading companies, including the behemoth East India Company, to smaller vessels plying coastal routes.[21] Crews on merchant ships were predominantly drawn from the working class and might properly be described as 'motley', as boys and men originating from cities and countryside alike laboured alongside multinational crews in order to navigate vessels across national and international trading routes.[22] Even after the professionalisation of the merchant marine through a system of compulsory certification of masters and mates in the 1850s, and the transition of sailing ships into coal and diesel-powered steamships, aspiring sailors could join a merchant ship headed for a global port city with little formal qualification, and thus young boys could find themselves in the role of 'common sailor' circumnavigating the globe.[23] Seafaring thus offered a uniquely heady mix of adventure and opportunism within brutally exploitative labour conditions.

Yet despite the centrality of the sea and maritime labour to Britain's commercial power and self-image throughout the nineteenth century, and the overwhelmingly proletarian workforce of merchant ships, the maritime world has remained remarkably marginal to studies and treatments of the British working class. David M. Williams, for example, had cause to comment that '"[h]istories of the working class" or "studies of labour organisation" which contain nothing on seamen are very much the rule rather than the exception'.[24] Isaac Land reinforces this point, noting that the groundbreaking histories from below of E.P. Thompson and Jonathan Rose 'make little effort to tell the story of the "working men who got wet"'.[25] Even the 'Condition of England' novel of the Victorian period appeared to relegate the sea, as work-place, to the literary margins. John

Peck, for instance, observes that the Victorian novel of industrialisation contains surprisingly little description of maritime labour and commerce, or the lives of those touched by the working sea: 'Most novelists do not make a connection between the characters, society and values presented and the maritime economy that has helped bring such people, such a society and such values into existence. In other words, seafaring success might have fundamentally shaped British life, but readers of the majority of novels could remain quite unaware of this.'[26] In Victorian studies today, the seaport and the merchant ship have yet to rival the spaces of the provincial town and the city, the factory and mill, or the technology of the railway, as key sites of industrialisation that produced profound social and cultural transformations.

In line with this argument, Valerie Burton further notes that seafarers 'are one of those groups outside the ranks of highly skilled labour whose experience in industrial society is still improperly understood'. Yet, as she goes on to argue, the sailor's anomaly presents an opportunity, for while sailors are '[u]nlikely candidates at first for gender analysis, not easily located in the hierarchy of skill and in the social relations of class, these ambiguities make the seafarer one of the most challenging occupational groups, and also the most promising in terms of insight into processes of social change during the transition to industrial capitalism'.[27] Indeed, the figure of the ordinary British sailor occupied a peculiar role within the cultural imaginary of the nineteenth century. In an age of enthusiastic taxonomy and categorisation, there was a pronounced ambiguity in steadfastly fixing mobile 'working men who got wet'.[28] A number of reasons may account for the apparent ambiguity surrounding perceptions of the sailor's identity, not least their apparently paradoxical nature – the fact that sailors were deemed to embody oppositional qualities – a point that stimulated the interest of a range of contemporary commentators (and one that continues to this day).

In his early twentieth-century attempt to survey sailors 'in fact and fiction', Charles Robinson summed up sailors' exceptionalism with the simple pronouncement: 'Sailors have seen and done strange things, like to nothing that happens on shore.'[29] As Robinson sensed, seafarers were only 'ordinary' in the technical sense of that ambiguous maritime term. After all, they undertook work in places that were offshore and out of sight, and as sojourners on land they tended to reside in the geographical edge spaces of the city. Yet geographically peripheral as they may have been, they nonetheless occupied a central place in the national imaginary when figured as the 'brave' and 'loyal' Jack Tar. Sailors formed the workforce whose

Figure 0.1 'The Signal for an Engagement' (1838), in Charles Napier Robinson, *The British Tar in Fact and Fiction: The Poetry, Pathos, and Humour of the Sailor's Life* (London: Harper, 1911), p. 478.

exploited labour propelled the economy of nations such as nineteenth-century America and Great Britain, yet they were liable to be collectively imagined as embodiments of romantic freedom.[30] Conversely, alongside this tendency to romanticise the sailor, there was a parallel discourse that sought to excoriate this figure who was deemed to take some of those 'freedoms' too far. A dual caricature thus invitingly emerged: the brave Tar on the one hand, and his counterpart, foolhardy Jack, on the other; the worker and the libertine; the departing sailor and the beloved returnee. In visual iconography, this duality was represented through images that depicted 'Jack Ashore' and 'Jack Afloat' as adjacent, and by implication, binary, scenes (Figure 0.1).

Other paradoxes abounded in the characterisation of the working sailor. Celebrated for their know-how and craftsmanship, they could be castigated for what was deemed to be typical childlikeness and naivety. Feted as tellers of yarns who had a distinctive way with words, others doubted their very ability to read. Peculiarly local, they were global at the same time;

nicknamed on ships according to a specific place of origin, on return to land-based communities they might retain a perceived mystique linked to their cosmopolitan crossing of waters. Appearing to some 'inland dwellers' as a 'new race of men',[31] to others they were intimate familiars – fathers and husbands, black sheep, and prodigal sons, with attachments to localities that included port cities but also provincial towns and rural villages. In a period in which gender ideology impressed the idea of separate spheres, the itinerant Victorian seafarer who could sew and cook for himself within distinctly homosocial floating environments, thus evaded some of the more rigid boundaries of gender roles. Mythologised to the point of sentimentality through a decorative material culture that ranged from domestic crockery to children's toys,[32] the sailor also hovered as a figure of political radicalism, disreputability, sexual promiscuity, and, as the nineteenth century progressed, as the propagator of venereal disease.[33]

A nineteenth-century memoirist and former sailor reflected, in not wholly complimentary terms, that seafarers were 'amphibious creatures' with an ability to shift shape according to environment, and noted that a constant process of self-transformation was an essential part of the sailor's life.[34] For scholars today, however, it is perhaps precisely those 'amphibious' qualities that attract critical attention because of, rather than in spite of, their difficult assimilation to received Victorian categories. Neither explorers nor travellers, sailors also failed to fit the other types of globally-mobile Victorians, such as missionaries, soldiers, colonial administrators, emigrants or settlers, many of whom left a significant paper trail detailing travels and experiences.[35] Operating within a more extreme set of separate spheres spanning land and open sea, they participated within the homosocial society of the ship, and returned home or to port cities as family members and sojourners.

This ambiguity of identity continues to present complexities in terms of the critical categorisation of the seafarer. For example, merchant sailors were involved in the transport of commercial goods, albeit in conditions of exploited labour, and this made them complexly placed actors within British imperial relations. Their low status as working-class hands – the other to the *captain* (a word derived from the Latin *caput*, or 'head') – was relative to the marked racial hierarchies of merchant ships. For despite sailors' deep involvement in multinational and multiracial workplaces, and evidence of their close interaction with foreign co-workers and native populations in port cities as true cosmopolitans (in the literal sense of 'being of the world'), they were also bound up with, and sometimes purveyors of, racist tropes and ideologies fuelled by imperialism. The force of

such complex contradictions is captured in Paul Gilje's useful summation: sailors were 'a numerous and diverse body of people who shared a common identity'.[36] By turns specific and generic within an industrialising maritime environment, this book demonstrates the extent to which the term 'sailor' was at one and the same time both a simple term and complicated cultural signifier.

Maritime Relations in the Blue Humanities

Against the prevailing tendency to forget or turn away from the sea, the groundbreaking work of Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker applied E.P. Thompson's notion of a history from below to the transatlantic oceanic sphere, emphasising the significance of an Atlantic proletariat that had existed from the seventeenth century, and insisting on the role of the seas as social and historical sites of struggle and resistance.[37] The rise of the interdisciplinary blue humanities, and its associated fields of oceanic studies and coastal history, continue to reorient academic scholarship through a maritime lens, drawing attention to the terrestrial bias informing historical, literary, and cultural analysis, and situating oceans within a creative and political turn.[38] Scholarship in this field has identified a link between the cultural occlusion of oceans and a general invisibility of maritime labour within late modernity through an evocative nomenclature: from Philip Steinberg's charge of a 'postmodern attempt to annihilate the ocean' and Christopher Connery's description of a 'supersession' of the sea, to Allan Sekula's '"forgetting" of the sea' and Margaret Cohen's succinct diagnosis of 'hydrophasia'.[39] Centring oceans, the blue humanities envisages the sea as providing 'a new epistemology – a new dimension', based on paradigms of circulation rather than linearity, transnationalism in place of land-locked accounts of nationhood, and 'new forms of relationality'.[40] In literary studies, an oceanic history from below (deck) has been developed in the influential work of Hester Blum, highlighting sailors as writers with agency within the context of the American antebellum period.[41] Likewise, Cohen's work on the sea novel and adventure fiction has recast the dominant account of the rise of the novel, through dazzling distant readings of maritime literature.[42]

The imaginative and compelling work of Cohen and Blum has predominantly focussed on representations of mariners' work, reading and writing practices, and their forms of 'craft', particularly as developed on board vessels at sea.[43] By contrast, *Maritime Relations* marks a shift in its attention to depictions of seafarers' lives beyond the predominantly masculinist world

of the ship – including sailors' interpersonal relations with family and kin, their role at home and within shore-based communities, and the significance of maritime labour within the context of an individual's life course and across generations.

The sea, after all, was not a metaphor for Victorian working-class families; it was both a vital source of livelihood and a potentially 'deathful place'.[44] As Campling and Colás argue: 'If capital has historically approached the oceans as a site of both risk and opportunity, so have many groups and individuals who have under duress or voluntarily crossed the high seas.'[45] That 'risk and opportunity' was undertaken directly by the seafarer, but my study shows that these factors extended also to their family and kinship networks, including parents and siblings, wives and children, whose lives were shaped by the peculiarities of maritime work. Just as patterns of industrial labour in mines and factories affected the temporal routines and structures of working-class family and local communities, so the specific demands and risks of oceanic commerce imprinted themselves upon family relations in lived experience and in the narratives that represented them. Those peculiarities included the seafarer's extended excursions away from home and return as a 'familiar stranger', their residency in the homosocial all-male environment of the ship for long periods, their residence within port cities, the system of allotment payments, the risk of injury and death at sea, the possibility of desertion, and even the natural forces of the weather, all of which shaped the maritime working family in complex ways.

This study is thus as much about the social relations of family and identity in the long nineteenth century as it is about the sea. Thereby, it emphasises alternative family structures and more capacious models of kinship and personhood that contribute to a broader understanding of Victorian social structures. For as George Behlmer has argued, family provided one of 'the most basic of imagined communities' within what he calls 'that most famously domestic of cultures, Victorian England'.[46] Like many ideologies, the strength of images of 'family' and 'home' were not so much a reflection of the status quo, as a response to historical developments by which families were buffeted and reshaped through the acceleration of industrialisation and urbanisation. In using the example of the maritime family, my work thus contributes more broadly to studies that have emphasised the working-class family unit as flexibly (albeit not without difficulty) adapting itself to the shifts and constraints that marked the fortunes of family life under industrial capitalism.[47] One such adaptation to the contingencies of the sea – either by choice or compulsion – was through the development of kinship networks that exceeded those

of 'blood relations'. In this way, the maritime family offers an example of Victorian family structures that extend beyond the normative nuclear model. Indeed, as Kelly Hager and Talia Schaffer argue, to 'understand how the Victorians experienced family, we have to relinquish our assumption that the small nuclear family was normative. … Actual families were widely diverse, and literary families created the language to describe and justify that diversity.'[48] Indeed, as I discuss in Chapter 1, some scholars have used the trope of fluidity to convey the ways in which working-class families more generally adapted and fashioned themselves to the effects of industrial capitalism. Focussing on the more immediately 'fluid' family of maritime individuals, across the range of forms discussed in detail below, this book contributes to work that emphasises the intricate and complex nature of kinship in the nineteenth century, from families of choice, blended families, and those of 'fictive kin', a term which describes forms of social ties that might include friendship, work, co-residency, and other affiliations beyond the bonds of consanguinity.[49] Any study of maritime life begins with a focus on the figure of the predominantly male Victorian seafarer; yet in drawing on the insights of gender studies and feminist scholarship, my book extends its range outwards to encompass an examination of gender relations and other kin in the lives of maritime seafarers, including partners, siblings and children, boarding-house keepers, sailors' wives, and daughters.

Literary Relations: Literature, Life Writing, and Archives

As Robert Burroughs argues in his analysis of the representational mode of nautical melodrama, the majority of studies of maritime literature have often adhered to standard forms, namely 'a small, Romantic canon centred on coastal vigils and/or deep-sea voyages of isolated individuals: Byron, Coleridge, Tennyson, Melville, Conrad'. This tendency, Burroughs argues, is at the expense of an analysis of the role of 'littoral space' and an understanding of 'wider social groups than are contained by the ship'.[50] In line with this argument, my book suggests that an enquiry into lived and cultural representations of the porous and pliable maritime family necessitates looking beyond the nineteenth-century nautical novel or adventure fiction, the two dominant literary modes associated with seafaring life. For this reason, life writing forms a key source in the chapters that follow, as the genre and category that – in parallel with the novel – has chronicled the Victorian family in its varied, complex, and heterogeneous forms. Jane Humphries, who uses working-class autobiography both quantitatively

and qualitatively in her study of childhood in the industrial period, sums up the historical value of such sources in revealing '*families*, panning out to occupational groups, movements and classes as well as communities; their perspective is *longitudinal*, with families described over their life cycle and through changing economic circumstances; their perspective is that of a *participant*; and their focus is on *relationships*' [emphasis in original].[51] Indeed, if the novel has been recognised as the prime cultural artefact through which the construction and dissemination of the 'imagined community' of the Victorian family took place, autobiographies exist in a sidelong relationship with this genre – supporting, extending, and chafing against the more dominant and well-known fictions. Maritime memoirs may appear as a niche form even within broader life writing studies; nevertheless, my book suggests that sailors' life writings – from published accounts to archival notebooks – offer unique and revealing evidence of terraqueous, global, and proletarian lives that have hitherto been neglected.[52] *Maritime Relations* approaches these accounts as forms of literature in the broad sense of that term, as modes of writing that deserve literary analysis and that are entangled with other cultural forms, including, for instance, the *Bildungsroman* and popular adventure story.[53] My use of these sources centres the voices and idiom of the agents who form part of this literary history from below; as much as possible, this book draws from their words, ways of reading and modes of telling.

At this point a methodological note is necessary to clarify the range of sources that I broadly define as maritime life writing, the significant corpus of archival evidence on which I draw throughout this book. My starting point was relatively straightforward: to seek out and locate published memoirs by identifiably 'lower deck' sailors, predominantly within the merchant service (some of whose titles promised exciting tales of maritime adventure: *Nigh on Sixty Years at Sea*, *A Sailor-Boy's Log-Book*, *Worse Things Happen at Sea*). While many standard seafaring memoirs proved useful, and are referenced throughout this book, it also became clear that the explicitly maritime nature of the reminiscences, aimed at a readership with an interest in seafaring, precluded, or lightly skimmed over, details of parentage, childhood, family, or matters of private life pertaining to the shore. This led me to seek accounts of seafaring experience in the large and dispersed body of nineteenth- and twentieth-century working-class autobiography, mapped and rendered accessible by historians John Burnett, David Vincent, and David Mayall in *The Autobiography of the Working Class: An Annotated, Critical Bibliography* (1984–1989).[54] The *Bibliography* is an analogue record of around two-thousand texts written by working

people in the period 1790–1945, providing indispensable biographical summaries of the autobiographers alongside index entries relating to factors such as date and place of birth, occupation, parentage, education, marital status, and geographical movements. 'Never before in English history had so many people read so much', writes Richard Altick in relation to the Victorian era, and the *Bibliography* shows the extent to which working-class literacy produced a desire to write too.[55] Alongside its cataloguing of published autobiographies, the *Bibliography* crucially points to swathes of unpublished manuscript material, including 'amateur' memoirs by non-professional writers. Typed or handwritten, some of these memoirs were conserved as family papers before being deposited in local libraries and archives, including specialist archives such as the unique Burnett Archive of Working Class Autobiographies – the single largest collection in the UK of life writing from below.[56]

In addition to the *Bibliography*, digital methods, widely used in the research landscape today, allowed me to search online repositories of digitised published autobiographies.[57] Basic searches using maritime keywords ('sailor', 'mariner', 'seaman', 'seafarer', 'sea', 'ship') allowed for the possibility of minor or obscured stories of maritime relations to come into view within autobiographies that, at first glance, appeared to have little to do with oceans. Through this corpus of working-class autobiographies, a more diffuse set of proletarian maritime relations emerged. For example, the ordinary family legend of 'a sailor in the family' (the subject of Chapter 1 in this book) cropped up not just in autobiographies by seafarers, but laterally in the margins of working-class life stories by sailors' wives, sons, daughters, grandchildren, and further descendants. In addition, working-class autobiographies illuminated other important aspects of maritime labour that were not necessarily apparent in stock 'seafaring' memoirs, including the fact that seafaring was often one of a motley collection of occupational pursuits, or that it shaped the life course of families beyond the immediate experience of seafarers themselves. As this study ultimately goes on to show, the mundane ubiquity of tales of seafaring within working-class writing highlights a broader point: that 'maritime relations' could be found almost everywhere – from port cities to the provincial town – so central was the navy and merchant marine to British life in the nineteenth century.

This book further brings into the fold of the broader tradition of working-class autobiography a number of hand- or type-written memoirs by sailors that have been sequestered within maritime archives.[58] Here again this enterprise goes beyond simply adding new accounts to the record

(important as that endeavour may be), since my intention is to show that the use of archival, unpublished forms of memoir – interpreted through methodologies derived from literary and life writing studies – can enable new facets of maritime life to emerge. For it is the case that unpublished life stories, some written for family members and generally not intended for publication or payment, may often reveal more personal and unacknowledged facets of the Victorian sailor, including details of childhood, family, and private life. A traditional view holds that the humbler the autobiographer's origins, the more editorial intervention we might expect to find in the autobiographical text – yet this is an insight that is specific to *published* forms of working-class life writing. Amateur or 'family' memoirs, by contrast, are often filled with the self-reflexivity, hesitations, loose ends, and even contradictions of ordinary self-narrative. As argued throughout this book, those features, when carefully interpreted, can be equally valuable and revealing.[59] Items broadly catalogued as maritime 'logbooks', 'journals', and 'diaries' similarly took on new and broader implications when read against the grain of their placement within the more specialised category of technical 'maritime' writing, as argued in detail in Chapter 2.

If one of my methodological tasks was to chart a course through what turned out to be an abundance of texts that provided evidence of maritime relations, the research for Chapter 4 brought a different challenge: namely, the relative smallness of the corpus of life stories by daughters of nineteenth-century sailors. Here I drew on all the sources I was able to locate, not withstanding their slightness or legibility (although one seafarer's daughter's handwritten memoir, tantalisingly entitled 'Soul Adrift – Being the Adventures of a Queer Child', remained largely unreadable due to the deterioration of the manuscript). Few of the memoirists I explore in this chapter were writers by profession. Yet these 'amateur' working-class women writers, drawing on memory and personal experience through the idiom and literacy skills they possessed, all penned accounts that are vivid and moving. As Florence Boos effectively puts it in her survey of Victorian proletarian autobiographies, unschooled, amateur memoirists rose to eloquence 'when their language quickened with the urgent desire to express a formative incident or central truth'.[60] Crucially, the smallness of the corpus itself raises important questions about gender, literacy, women's writing, and archives, that are discussed as part of the story of maritime relations in the final chapter of this book. But one advantage of the smallness of the corpus of memoirs by sailors' daughters of this period is that it made necessary the use of that venerable literary methodology, still so rarely applied to working-class autobiographies: close reading of individual texts.

As these notes on methodology have indicated, my work is rooted in literary analysis, intersecting with methods and insights drawn from the blue humanities, gender studies, narratology, cultural history, and the history of the emotions. It offers a literary reading of maritime relations rather than a social history, although the study is historicist in its approach. The emphasis is on prose narrative and the interconnection between fiction and nonfiction forms, the canonical and the ephemeral, collective myths, and family stories. Indeed, a recurring motif throughout the book is the uncannily fluid boundaries between fact and fiction – between 'life' and 'writing' – in the context of maritime experience, though with due recognition of the well-documented challenges of using autobiography as a historical source.[61]

That maritime relations are marked by an intermingling of forms seems apt in the context of the representation of lives marked by forms of fluidity, mobility, the crossing of borders, and shifts in identity, for reasons that were, according to circumstance, as much strategic and opportunistic as creative or liberatory. Each of the chapters in *Maritime Relations* accordingly takes a long view of the way in which particular narratives of maritime relations are established, tracing patterns and affiliations across a multiplicity of texts, from life writing, to ephemeral and vernacular sources, to works by more canonical writers of the nineteenth century, including Captain Frederick Marryat, Charles Dickens, Herman Melville, and Joseph Conrad. Some of the autobiographies employed in this study are unusual in that they were written over long periods of time, or looked back over a life course spanning decades, meaning that their observations are pertinent to the century as a whole. The study also examines texts by twentieth-century writers reflecting on Victorian and turn-of-the-century family stories, thereby expanding the historical remit of the study. *Maritime Relations* further draws attention to the significance of generic developments and transitions across the period. Thus while the book's historical focus is on nineteenth-century writing and Victorian subjects, it attends to the ways in which late-Victorian maritime writing seeps into literary modes of the early twentieth century, including forms of modernism and social realism.

Chapter Summary

Chapter 1, 'A Sailor in the Family: Watery Genealogy and the Maritime Memoir', surveys the skein of maritime threads across a range of working-class autobiographies that tell the narrative and myth of the 'sailor in the family', and indicate how 'watery' family stories flowed and circulated

through a range of writings. Charting stories of self and family marked by maritime themes of travel, separation, dispersal, orphanhood, vanishings, and improbable returns, I argue that these accounts form a counterpart to landlocked tales of rootedness and linear progression that more commonly marked Victorian narratives of genealogy, symbolised by the image of the family tree. By interweaving readings of autobiographies and family myths, alongside the forms of the *Bildungsroman*, adventure fiction, fairy tale and waif stories, the chapter shows how global maritime experience shaped the composition of ordinary families and the stories they told about themselves. The maritime relations of this chapter also reveal alternative family structures, beyond the nuclear family order, flexibly adapting and shaping themselves to the realities of loss, mobility, and various forms of opportunity.

In Chapter 2, 'Logbooks: Life Writing at Sea', the analysis moves from the family memoir, with its retrospective narrative of the life course, to a mode of writing that captures the strange instantaneity of life at sea: the personal logbook or sea diary. This chapter explores logbooks by non-elite seafarers as a hybrid mode, combining the model of the ship's official log with the practice of the ordinary terrestrial diary, a form that flourished throughout the nineteenth century. It brings together original archival research into sea journals with critical approaches to the diary stemming from life writing studies, thereby re-framing the logbook beyond its traditional categorisation of a document of work, to see it as a text that served as both a form of self-preservation and a medium for the maintenance of bonds of family and kinship across oceans. Logbooks were linked to the terrestrial world in other ways too, recurring as a literary motif from Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* through to fictions by Robert Louis Stevenson and Joseph Conrad. Tracing their evidentiary and narrative potential, this chapter positions material and fictive logbooks as circulating objects that travelled across social, spatial, and generic borders.

Chapter 3, 'Watery City: Sailors and Sailortown in the Urban Imagination', moves from ship to shore to explore metropolitan writing that captured the distinctive urban-littoral spaces of the Victorian port city. Forging connections between the urban ethnography of Henry Mayhew and Charles Booth, with accounts of 'sailortown' and its attendant 'waterside characters' in novels by Herman Melville (*Redburn: His First Voyage*), Charles Dickens (*Our Mutual Friend*), and James Joyce (*Ulysses*), this chapter shows the urban waterfront to be an important edge space that functioned as both a working-class habitat shaped by its waterside industry and community, and an imaginative locus for a range of

nineteenth-century writers. Despite its physical location on the edge of the city, and its peripheral status within literary history, I argue that the watery city was a site for the production of new narratives of modernity at the turn of the century.

With a focus on sailors, shipping and imperial trade, maritime studies, and the analysis of the literature of the sea has inevitably been preoccupied with a world of men. Recent scholarship has drawn on the insights of gender studies to appraise more carefully the complexities of masculinities within seafaring cultures and to give more emphasis to the role and representation of women, with an emphasis on sailors' wives. Over and against this familiar image of the sailor's wife or sweetheart lies the more tangential figure of the sailor's daughter, the subject of Chapter 4. For though neglected, her life was also shaped in material and emotional ways by the intermittent presence of a seafaring father and the complex gender dynamics that attended the composition of the maritime family. With reference to a unique and overlooked corpus of memoirs by working-class women raised in seafaring families, the chapter returns to the myth of the 'sailor in the family', presented in Chapter 1, but this time from the sidelong perspective of the daughter. I show how these memoirs disrupt the paradigmatic model of the dutiful sailor's daughter in narratives that set out the compromises, strange intimacies, and frustrations of childhoods shaped by the maritime world. While the sailor-fathers described in these memoirs belong to the Victorian period, the book concludes by showing that it is the writerly daughter's insurgent narrative that carries new perspectives on maritime relations into the twentieth century.