

Making Waves: Gender and Sex in the History of Seafaring

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Review Essays/Notes critiques

Making Waves: Gender and Sex in the History of Seafaring

IN THE FALL OF 1936 two young Nova Scotia men, Adelard and Etienne, drowned when their small boat capsized during a storm. Shipwreck and loss of life were, of course, common experiences for those whose lives revolved around the sea. But this particular incident left so deep an impression on one man that he was compelled to write a story about it. "Cleophas and His Own" was written by Maine-born painter and poet Marsden Hartley. It is an account of the time Hartley spent in 1935-36 with the Mason family of East Point Island, near Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. The story, discovered unpublished after Hartley's death in 1943, is intriguing in part for the light it sheds on two elusive aspects of the history of seafaring: gender and sexuality.¹

Hartley devotes significant attention in "Cleophas and His Own" to the work performed by women, and his story can be read for an account of the gendered division of labour in a Nova Scotia fishing village. His portraits of women express much respect, though it is his description of relations with men that he suffuses with particular emotion. Cleophas, who is Adelard and Etienne's father, is a "a natural mystic of the sea" whose "body is as hard as the rocks". Hartley describes their relationship as that of two "human beings together who have learned much in the university of the imagination, he from the sea — I from the little things on the edge of the sea, intricately enfolding, binding us together and I know it is a case of true unspoken love". But Hartley reserves his real affections for the two sons. About Adelard, Hartley writes that "he lives for the consummate satisfaction of the flesh, the kind of flesh making no difference....He has no common codes, no inhibitions — he will give as much love to a man as to a woman....He has transferred his affections to his men friends for he loves them and will do anything for them, and with this comes no mercy, love for him being the outpouring of his devastating energy — all flame, smoke, fire, steam".²

1 A published version of "Cleophas and His Own" can be found in Gerald Ferguson, ed., *Marsden Hartley and Nova Scotia* (Halifax, 1987). Note that Cleophas, Adelard and Etienne are the fictional names Hartley gave to these members of the Mason family. Most of the literature on Hartley elides the issue of his sexuality and the homoeroticism of his painting and poetry. For an elegant recuperation of the gay Hartley, see Michael Lynch, "A Gay World After All: Marsden Hartley (1877-1943)", in "Our Image", *The Body Politic* (Dec./Jan. 1976-77), pp. 1-3. Thanks to Ian McKay for putting me on to Hartley.

2 Hartley, "Cleophas and His Own", in *Marsden Hartley and Nova Scotia*, pp. 94-5, 98.

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Many of the subjects that struck Hartley when he wrote "Cleophas and His Own" more than 50 years ago, such as women's work, intimate friendship and sexual relations between men — in short, questions of sex and gender — still occupy only a very small space in historical writing on seafaring life. With the publication of *Jack Tar in History: Essays in the History of Maritime Life and Labour* (Fredericton, Acadiensis Press, 1991), a larger place is carved out for issues of gender in maritime history. An anthology of original essays drawn from a conference held in Halifax in 1990, *Jack Tar in History* covers many facets of seafaring life including the law, punishment, resistance, war and labour. Following Marsden Hartley, I want to discuss *Jack Tar in History* by looking at those essays which focus on gender and sex at sea and on shore.

As the editors note in their foreword to the volume, the essays in *Jack Tar in History* build upon the foundation laid by such historians as Jesse Lemisch, Alfred Young, Judith Fingard and Marcus Rediker, and this is no less true for the essays on gender. It is difficult to imagine these articles without, for example, the work of Marcus Rediker who has done so much to open up the social and cultural worlds of merchant seamen and pirates. With the publication of *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea* in 1987 Rediker drew attention to the gendered nature of the 'brotherhood of the deep', including the value seamen placed on masculinity and how sailors experienced physical discipline as a loss of manhood.³ Two years later Eric Sager, after exploring the presence of women on board the ships of Atlantic Canada's merchant marine, noted that "the sailing ship was still predominantly a male community". Sager also looked at the initiation rituals practised by Neptune's disciples as "an initiation to manhood".⁴

While credit must be given to those labour/social historians who signaled the importance of gender in the history of the common seaman, their analyses remained marked by certain limitations. As Margaret Creighton, one of the contributors to *Jack Tar in History*, explains: "Social and labor historians ...have considered fraternity at sea, but largely in terms of class relations". Recent intellectual developments, especially the emergence of gender history or gender studies, have provided the impetus to look at fraternity at sea in different terms. Creighton draws upon this work when she urges: "it is time, certainly, to approach the maleness of the sailing ship...not as a given or a timeless happenstance, but as a variable social construction. It is time we took a look at the various ways that the sailing voyage made men, and how men *as men* shaped the sailing voyage" (p. 145). Several of the essays in *Jack Tar in History* move us in this direction. They take us beyond an analysis of masculinity solely in terms of its role in solidifying sailors' class-based culture of resistance (important as this is) to a more complete investigation of masculinity as an historically changing gender formation.

3 Marcus Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea: Merchant Seamen, Pirates, and the Anglo-American Maritime World, 1700-1750* (Cambridge, 1987), pp. 93, 250.

4 Eric Sager, *Seafaring Labour: the Merchant Marine of Atlantic Canada, 1820-1914* (Kingston and Montreal, 1989), pp. 237-8.

But before looking at the masculinity of sailors, let us consider another way in which gender is deployed in these essays. Much maritime history has been written as though sailors existed entirely apart from women, family and households. While the current trend is to recognize that gender history encompasses more than the history of women by acknowledging that men too are gendered beings, there is still much work to be done within maritime history in simply restoring women to the picture. Women enter this picture in a number of ways. Some, especially masters' wives, put to sea with their men. Other women, such as those studied by Dianne Dugaw in "'Wild Beasts' and 'Excellent Friends': Gender, Class and the Female Warrior, 1750-1830", devised a more daring route to sea: they dressed as men and passed as sailors.

Dubbed by Dugaw the "female warrior", she was a staple character of printed and folksong balladry during the early modern era. Dugaw concentrates on the textual representation of three such female warriors. At her best Dugaw does not attempt to use the representations as unproblematic sources or windows onto the past experience of cross-dressing women. Rather, by treating the ballads and stories as representations and by using a textual analysis, she uncovers the central tropes employed within the texts. Dugaw discovers recurring motifs of female delicacy and property ownership and argues that these were employed in order to objectify the female warrior, to cast her as 'other'. This was necessary because she challenged the dominant bourgeois ideology of femininity and because publishers needed to make accounts of the female warrior palatable to their middlebrow readership. While her focus is on textual representations, Dugaw does not view female warriors solely as discursive inventions but as "actual women" (p. 132), although just how she defines the line or relationship between representation and what she calls "the facts" is often unclear. There is also the way in which Dugaw de-sexualizes her female warriors. Consider the example of Hannah Snell. We learn from Dugaw that Snell, passing under the name James Gray, served during the mid-1700s as a cook, assistant steward and common seaman. What gets left out of this account are the suggestions that Snell also "flung herself head first into a series of adventures" with women in part so that "her title to manhood was no more suspected".⁵ Whether representational or 'real', by putting the sex back into the lives of cross-dressing women we open up the possibility that the need to 'other' them had something to do with sexual transgression in addition to gender nonconformity.⁶

Women — in this instance the whale-women of Nantucket Island — also figure prominently in Lisa Norling's "The Sentimentalization of American Seafaring: The

5 See the account of Snell in Jonathan Katz, ed., *Gay American History: Lesbians and Gay Men in the U.S.A.* (New York, 1976), p. 239.

6 Our knowledge of cross-dressing and many other aspects of sex and gender in seafaring history will be greatly enhanced with the forthcoming publication of *Iron Men and Wooden Women* (Johns Hopkins, 1993).

Case of the New England Whalefishery, 1790-1870". As her title suggests, Norling is interested in what she calls the "sentimentalization of seafaring" or a "reconceptualization of seafaring that shifted attention away from the sea to the land, from maritime work to maritime home" (p. 165). Beginning in the 1830s Norling traces the process of sentimentalization through the tracts and speeches of those involved in the sailor's reform movement. By explaining sailors' problems with reference not to the social relations of their work but to the "perversion of their family life" and by concentrating their energies on building sailors' homes and places of worship, maritime reformers played a key role in redirecting attention away from the sea to the home. As one Reverend John Weiss explained in 1849, when sailors come into port "they fall into the hands of harpies, to be stripped in grog-shops....The first prerequisite for the moral improvement of seamen...is a Seamen's Home" (pp. 171-2). The shift in focus from ship to shore had particular repercussions for the women of Nantucket. Once viewed as strong and independent, their material contributions to the fishery were downplayed and emphasis was now placed on the deprivation and loss they experienced in the home as they waited for their men to return from sea. While the net effect was to diminish women's agency, some women were able to reverse the emergent discourse of domesticity by using their newly assigned position in the home to articulate a critique of men who left family for long periods of time.

Sentimentalization was the symbolic handling of the polarization of gender roles experienced in New England whaling communities during the 19th century. According to Norling this polarization of gender is only partly attributable to the increasing separation of home and work concurrent with the process of industrialization. Rather, Norling argues that gender polarization was due in large measure to the "convergence of maritime and non-maritime cultures" when, as the centre of the whalefishery shifted from the island to the mainland, Nantucket became "more fully integrated into the mainstream of American society" (p. 178). While Norling has hit upon a crucial process here and while she has related shifts in the discourse of moral reform to broader changes in economic relations, I am not certain that it is the convergence of sea- and land-based cultures that entirely accounts for the polarization of gender roles and the sentimentalizing of seafaring. Perhaps more attention to the motivations and activities of the moral reformers, linking up their ideas to more general strategies of gender and moral regulation in the 19th century would help clarify matters. Can we speculate, for example, that the existence of the hardworking Nantucket whale-woman posed a challenge to the consolidation of middle-class definitions of femininity in this period? In this scenario, the increasing connection between Nantucket and "mainstream society" is a necessary precondition; but the actual sentimentalizing of women was part of a

7 Christine Stansell makes a similar argument for the urban setting during this period in *City of Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860* (Urbana, 1987).

broader discursive response to the moral problems posed by working women, a response aimed at containing anxieties rooted in the changing shape of gender relations.⁷

If Norling shows that sentimentalization was something largely imposed upon fishing communities, Valerie Burton argues that Jack Tar himself played a part in refiguring his image in the sentimental terms of husband and father. In "The Myth of Bachelor of Jack: Masculinity, Patriarchy and Seafaring Labour", Burton outlines the contest which erupted in the late 19th century British merchant marine over the image of Jack Tar. Shipowners were eager to maintain the stereotype of Jack as a footloose and single sailor for it provided them with a rationale to sustain the casual nature of seafaring labour. Sailors on the other hand, especially organized sailors, increasingly stressed their role as family providers. Not surprisingly, then, the family wage became a key demand of the organized sailor's movement and the ensuing struggles were played out over the issue of allotments or that portion of a sailor's pay given to wives to provide for family while husbands were at sea. Sailors resented the power shipowners had to control or withhold allotment pay. But what began as largely a class issue quickly turned into one of gender, for when legislation was introduced to make family provision allotments compulsory, something vigorously opposed by shipowners, sailors rejected it. Burton maintains that sailors' opposition to compulsory allotments was rooted in the fact that making allotments a wife's right rather than a husband's gift challenged sailors' position of dominance within the patriarchal family, and so a "class issue" was lost in defence of masculine privilege.

The power of Burton's article is the way in which she attempts to bring the case of seafaring labour to bear upon the feminist debates on skill, status and the family wage and in the way she demonstrates the complex slippage between class and gender issues. At times, however, I was frustrated by a lack of empirical detail. Broad statements such as "the consolidation of patriarchy in society at large" (p. 195) or "the process by which capitalist patriarchy restructured masculinity" (p. 196) stand in for complex processes which need to be detailed. In other places Burton states that "the acquisition of a wife and the fathering of children were key reference points in the definition of masculinity" (p. 187), but aside from noting that sailors married younger than most working-class men, it is left unclear just how sailors actually articulated their definition of masculinity. Burton suggests that compared with the case of seafarers, all of labour history "perhaps furnishes no parallel in terms of the insights afforded into gender- and class-based structures of power" (p.183). While at the level of theory I might be persuaded, I am less convinced of this assertion in view of the limited empirical evidence provided in this particular article.⁸

8 Such a case could be made using the example of printers. See Ava Baron, "Questions of Gender: Deskillling and Demasculinization in the U.S. Printing Industry, 1830-1915", *Gender & History*, 1 (Summer 1989), pp. 178-99.

The masculinity of sailors gets its most sustained analysis in Margaret Creighton's essay "American Mariners and the Rites of Manhood, 1830-1870". Creighton begins by making the important point that sailors "espoused many ideals of masculinity" (p. 147), encouraging us to cease conceiving of sailors' masculinity as an unchanging monolith and to begin speaking about a variety of seafaring masculinities. Creighton is adept at teasing out the subtle meanings of masculinity at sea. For example, she draws our attention to how young men on the mainland during these years "learned to negotiate between the demands of two different worlds — a female one of cooperation and nurture and a male one of competition and conflict". But for the men before the mast whose work and survival demanded cooperation, they "were called on to forfeit the female world of nurture for the *male* world of interdependence" (p. 149). On one level this is evidence that working-class masculinity has not and need not always be comprised of elements of competition even under the strain of capitalist relations. But for Creighton this male world of interdependence provides a provocative hypothesis. After sketching the conflict and animosity that sometimes existed between sailors and women, Creighton suggests that such gender conflict may have partially arisen from the sailors' apparent ability to take care of each other in their all-male family — which in turn challenged middle-class women and their claim to a public voice based on their role as mothers and caretakers.

There are many other examples of Creighton's nuanced handling of masculinity. While showing how sailors shored up a heterosexual identity in their all-male world by bringing women on board as symbol (particularly in the female form of the ship's figurehead), Creighton is also attentive to the precariousness of heterosexual masculinity as in the doubts expressed by sailors over the faithfulness of their sweethearts. In all, Creighton's essay should serve as a model for future research into gender and seafaring particularly given its dual analytic focus on gender relations — that is, the relations between women and men — and on masculinity as a complex and contradictory formation in its own right.

For as much as the essays in *Jack Tar in History* expand our understanding of gender in seafaring life, in a curious way they sidestep many related issues. Creighton, for example, notes that sailors spoke of "male romantic friendships and expressed vehement ardour for their shipmates" (p. 148), but having offered this observation she does not develop it. Indeed, the subjects of male romantic friendship and the sexuality of sailors make only fleeting appearances in these articles. In the absence of in-depth analysis, generalizations and speculations abound. Burton, for example, citing only one secondary source, tells us that sailors' connections with prostitutes served to reaffirm heterosexual identity in the face of the guilt and anxiety experienced by sailors resulting from shipboard homosexual liaisons.

When we come to sexuality, answers to even the most basic questions are still lacking. On the existence of same-gender sexual activity at sea, for example, opinions are all over the map. Marcus Rediker would have us believe that "alternative sexual practices were common, even sanctioned, at sea", though he

admits it is difficult to know how widespread such practices were or what seamen thought of them.⁹ For a later period Eric Sager ventures that “rarely did the relationship between men become sexual itself, although homosexuality may have been more common where young apprentices were commonly employed. The occasional references to homosexuality in British and Canadian vessels, and the reminiscences of former sailors, suggest that it did occur but that the prejudice against it was very strong”.¹⁰ Margaret Creighton sums up the foggy state of our current knowledge: “There were many reasons why such attachments might have been considered normative at sea, such as the need to accommodate sexual drives and the emotional bonding that invariably took place between seamen, but also many reasons why such behavior might have been discouraged or outlawed, such as prevailing shore-based injunctions against sodomitic acts, and, within the forecabin, an ethos of mutuality that discouraged exclusive pairing of any sort” (p. 155).

There are at least three major problems currently hindering a better understanding of sailors’ sexuality and they have to do with theory, evidence and interpretation. In terms of theory, historians of seafaring need to take more notice of work currently being done in the rapidly expanding field of the history of sexuality, including the insights offered by gay history. As a starting point, maritime historians need to weed out of their work the remaining traces of an ahistorical and biological conception of sexuality, as in Margaret Creighton’s references to “sexual orientations” and “sexual drives” (pp. 148, 155).

For too long now sexuality in all-male environments such as the sailing ship has been analyzed as “situational homosexuality” or the exceptional product of “total institutions”. We need to begin from the premise that all sexuality is situational, that is the product of historical forces which vary over time and place. Some gay historians, for example, argue that the modern homosexual identity first appeared in the late 19th century when rapid urbanization and the spread of wage labour set in place the material preconditions for some land-based men to construct same-gender sexual lives apart from families and small communities.¹¹ Is it possible to understand the wooden world of the sailing ship in a similar way? Rediker has written about the ship as a community in which sailors forged their own unique social relations and in which the seamen’s cramped living quarters created a densely communal social life. It was also a world which existed apart from dominant land-based institutions of family, church and state. Add to this Rediker’s description of seamen’s life as one perpetually in motion and one begins to see the possibility of a cultural and material world in which gender and sexual relations were fluid.¹² The point here is that instead of viewing the ship as exceptional, we

9 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, p. 176.

10 Sager, *Seafaring Labour*, p. 239. It should be noted that these generalized statements are based almost wholly on the reminiscence of only one sailor.

11 See, for example, John D’Emilio, “Capitalism and Gay Identity”, in Anne Snitow, Christine Stansell, Sharon Thompson, eds., *Powers of Desire: the Politics of Sexuality* (New York, 1983), pp. 100-13.

12 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, pp. 110, 160-1, 173, 158-9.

need to see it as one among many different settings and ask how the material and ideological conditions of the ship constructed the range and limits of sailors' sexual practices and the meanings attached to them.

As we begin to think through how to conceptualize and theorize the sexuality of seafarers, we will also come up against the problem of sources. Like Margaret Creighton, almost all commentators note "the paucity of records on sexual relations between men at sea" (p. 155). The evidence itself provides a few clues regarding the paucity of sources. Consider the case of two men who in 1841 were discharged from the ship *Ohio* for a homosexual offence. We do not know anything of the details surrounding this event for the men were discharged without a trial, leaving us without any further documentary evidence.¹³ Referring to life aboard the "wooden-walled gomorrahs of the deep", Herman Melville suggested that when complaints of a homosexual nature were made "the deck officer would turn away with loathing, refuse to hear them, and command the complainant out of his sight".¹⁴ This suggests that we should be careful in coming to hasty conclusions about the incidence of same-gender sex at sea based on its invisibility in the sources. How many men were discharged from ships without trials and how many more reports of sexual activity went entirely unrecorded as shipmates and masters turned away?

Where then do we look for evidence of sailors' sexuality? Criminal court records have been a particularly rich source for historians of sexuality. There are scattered references in court documents such as the case of shipmaster Richard Cornish who was executed in the early 1600s for allegedly putting William Crouse, a 29-year-old steward, "to pain in the fundament".¹⁵ Some time ago Arthur Gilbert made use of courts-martial records to explore buggery and the British Navy from 1700-1861.¹⁶ We also need extensive searches of civilian court records for charges of "buggery, sodomy, gross indecency and indecent assault upon a male" in order to get at the nature of same-gender sexuality in the sailortowns of Atlantic Canada.¹⁷ Other government records need to be mined. George Chauncey, Jr. used the evidence generated by a navy investigation at the Newport Naval Training Station in 1919-20 to write an impressive article on the social organization of homosexual relations including homosexually active sailors.¹⁸ Senate executive documents list

13 F.P. Torrey, *Journal of the Cruise of the United States Ship Ohio* (Boston, 1841) cited in Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 470.

14 Herman Melville, *White-Jacket, or the World in a Man-of-War* (Chicago, 1970 [1830]), pp. 375-6.

15 The case is recorded in the *Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia, 1624-25* and cited in Katz, *Gay American History*, pp. 16-19.

16 Arthur N. Gilbert, "Buggery and the British Navy, 1700-1861", *Journal of Social History*, 10 (Fall 1976), pp. 72-98.

17 My own research involves using court records in this way for Ontario from 1880 to 1940. Even in Central Canada the occasional sailor crops up in the records.

18 George Chauncey, Jr., "Christian Brotherhood or Sexual Perversion?: Homosexual Identities and the Construction of Sexual Boundaries in the World War I Era", in Martin Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey, Jr., eds., *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past* (New York, 1989), pp. 294-317.

homosexual offences aboard U.S. vessels including floggings for “homosexual crimes”.¹⁹ Sailors also frequently ended up as case studies in the medical literature on homosexuality.²⁰ We need to go back to sailors’ memoirs and diaries and read them for those moments when, as Margaret Creighton has suggested, sailors expressed vehement ardour for their comrades²¹ or when they mentioned the ‘unmentionable’. How many others are there like Jacob Hazen, a sailor aboard the *Columbus* in 1839, who described the ship as “a den where...every kind of sinful vice...[is] the continual order of the day ...where crimes abound of even so deep and black a dye that it fires the cheek with shame to name them?”²² And what about the sexual imagery of sailors’ songs and language?²³ For more recent periods, oral history has proven useful in documenting the sexual lives of sailors, including their often cited but little explored exploits with prostitutes.²⁴

After gathering up the evidence, we are still faced with many questions of interpretation. Consider again the example of sodomy. Marcus Rediker cites a case aboard the ship *Tartar* in 1725 in which seamen several times attempted to commit sodomy with a Reverend Ogilvie who, disapproving of the sailors’ swearing and drinking, offered them bibles.²⁵ What meanings were attached to these actual or attempted sodomitical acts? Certainly we should avoid ascribing a homosexual identity to sailors who engaged in sodomy in periods when sodomy was viewed not as a homosexual act nor as a sign of a homosexual identity but rather as a sin capable of being committed by any person.²⁶ Perhaps in this instance sodomy, like swearing and filthy song, was an expression of sailors’ irreligion and contempt for the Reverend’s morality? Perhaps the key to interpreting sodomy is the way it was

19 See Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 470.

20 See, for example, Douglas McMurtrie, “Moral Conditions Among Seamen”, *American Journal of Urology*, 10 (1914), pp. 432-6 or Edward Kempf’s *Psychopathology* (St. Louis, 1920), a study based on the case histories of soldiers and sailors who suffered from what Kempf called “acute homosexual panic” during and after the First World War. Both cited in Jonathan Katz, *Gay/Lesbian Almanac: a new documentary* (New York, 1983), pp. 353, 391.

21 On men’s romantic friendships see Robert K. Martin, *Hero, Captain, and Stranger: Male Friendship, Social Critique, and Literary Form in the Sea Novels of Herman Melville* (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1986); Alan Bray, “Homosexuality and the Signs of Male Friendship in Elizabethan England”, *History Workshop*, 29 (Spring 1990), pp. 1-19; E. Anthony Rotundo, “Romantic Friendship: Male Intimacy and Middle-Class Youth in the Northern United States, 1800-1900”, *Journal of Social History*, 23 (Fall 1989), pp. 1-25.

22 Jacob Hazen, *Five Years Before the Mast; or Life in the Forecastle Aboard of a Whaler and a Man-of-War* (Chicago, 1887), p. 227, cited in Katz, *Gay American History*, p. 470.

23 For an example of song see Judith Fingard, *Jack in Port: Sailortowns of Eastern Canada* (Toronto, 1982), pp. 74-8. Eric Sager notes that sexual imagery loomed large in the idiom of seafaring and writes that this “sexual imagery was rooted in heterosexuality, although references to sexual perversion were common”, *Seafaring Labour*, p. 239.

24 See, for example, Beth Bailey and David Farber, “Hotel Street: Prostitution and the Politics of War”, *Radical History Review*, 52 (Winter 1992), pp. 54-77 and Allan Berube, *Coming Out Under Fire: the History of Gay Men and Women in World War Two* (New York, 1990).

25 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, p. 176.

26 John D’Emilio and Estelle Freedman, *Intimate Matters: a History of Sexuality in America* (New York, 1988), pp. 30-1, 122.

linked to the broader operations of discipline and power aboard ship? We know that captains were empowered to punish all “immoral practices” such as were “contrary to the rules of discipline and subordination”.²⁷ Perhaps the homosexual offences for which sailors were sometimes flogged were viewed as challenges to the work discipline and established hierarchy of the ship. And during a flogging, what forms of sexual power were channeled through this scene of physical domination, through what we might call the erotics of the lash? Undoubtedly, the meaning of sodomy was not fixed but changed over time and depended on the circumstances. Whatever the interpretation, certainly we want to do more than simply document the existence of sailors’ sexuality. We must be careful not to hibe it off as a discrete realm of experience, but rather probe the links between sexuality and other aspects of seafaring life.

Before Marsden Hartley left Nova Scotia in the fall of 1936, he paid a visit to the cemetery where Adelard and Etienne were buried. There, he writes, “I looked down into the earth as far as I could see and I said, only the seagulls hearing — ‘Adelard and Etienne, I loved you more than myself...I truly loved you’. I did not wait for plausible replies, I could only hear the wind rustling”.²⁸ The end of Hartley’s story symbolizes the silence that has surrounded issues of sex and gender in the history of sailors and seafaring life. With the publication of *Jack Tar in History* that silence has been broken, at least in terms of the study of women, femininity and masculinity. The editors are to be congratulated for making gender a central component of both the conference and the book, and while all the gender essays focus on British and American settings, their publication should encourage similar research within the Atlantic Region.

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27 Rediker, *Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea*, p. 208.

28 Hartley, “Cleophas and His Own”, p. 106.