

To Swear Like a Sailor

Anyone could swear like a sailor! Within the larger culture, sailors had pride of place in swearing. But how they swore and the reasons for their bad language were not strictly wedded to maritime things. Instead, sailor swearing, indeed all swearing during this period, was connected to larger developments. This book traces the interaction between the maritime and mainstream worlds in the United States while examining cursing, language, logbooks, storytelling, sailor songs, reading, images, and material goods. *To Swear Like a Sailor* offers insight into the character of Jack Tar – the common seaman – and into the early republic. It illuminates the cultural connections between Great Britain and the United States and the appearance of a distinct American national identity. This book explores the emergence of sentimental notions about the common man – through the guise of the sailor – on stage, in song, in literature, and in images.

Paul A. Gilje is a George Lynn Cross Research Professor at the University of Oklahoma, Norman. His book *Liberty on the Waterfront* (2003) won the best book award from the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic. He is the author or editor of ten other books, including the most recent, *Free Trade and Sailors' Rights in the War of 1812* (2013). He has lectured throughout the United States and in Europe and has received numerous grants to support his research. In 2009–10, he served as president of the Society for Historians of the Early American Republic.

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To Swear Like a Sailor

Maritime Culture in America, 1750–1850

PAUL A. GILJE

University of Oklahoma, Norman



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*To my brother, Stephen Gilje
and my sister, Kathleen Gilje*

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History, Connecticut Historical Society, the G. W. Blunt White Library at Mystic Seaport, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Kendall Whaling Museum, the Library of Congress, the Marblehead Historical Society, the Maryland Historical Society, the Massachusetts Historical Society, the Mariners' Museum, the Nantucket Historical Association, the National Archives in New York and Washington, DC, the New Bedford Free Public Library, the New Hampshire Historical Society, the New-York Historical Society, the New York Public Library, the Old Dartmouth Historical Society at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, the Newport Historical Society, the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum, the Providence Public Library, and the Rhode Island Historical Society. Since I visited some of these libraries two decades ago, some of the staff have moved on or retired, while others have continued to render wonderful service to new generations of scholars. Whether they are still in the same institutions or not, I would like to single out a number of individuals who have been particularly helpful to me, and to especially thank a few people whose guidance in their archives was invaluable, including Paul O'Pecko, Chris White, and Kelly Drake at Mystic Seaport, Conrad Wright and Peter Drummey at the Massachusetts Historical Society, Michael P. Dyer at the Kendall (now part of the New Bedford Whaling Museum), Betsy Lowenstein at the Nantucket Historical Association, Tina Furtado at the New Bedford Free Public Library, Judith Downey at the New Bedford Whaling Museum, Rick Stattler at the Rhode Island Historical Society, Rick Sanger at the Providence Public Library, and William T. La Moy, Kathy Flynn, Charity Galbreath, and Irene Axelrod at the Phillips Library. I want to acknowledge the assistance I received in working on the images from Anna J. Clutterbuck-Cook, Massachusetts Historical Society; Louisa Alger Watrous, Mystic Seaport; Mark D. Procknik, New Bedford Whaling Museum; Nicole Joniec, Library Company; Jackie Penny, American Antiquarian Society; Peter Harrington, curator, Anne S. K. Brown Military Collection, Brown University Library; J. D. Kay, Rhode Island Historical Society; and Kristen McDonald and Susan Chase Jones, Yale University Library.

I wrote the original draft of the first chapter long before completing the rest of this book. I therefore had the opportunity to present it in a number of public forums. Needless to say there was always an audience for an academic paper on swearing and plenty of questions that have helped me to refine and rethink my argument. The first time I "swore like a sailor" at an academic conference – at least from a podium – was at the 2003

Organization of American Historians conference in Memphis, Tennessee. I also presented “To Swear Like a Sailor: Cursing in the American Age of Sail,” as a Presidential Lecture at Old Dominion University as well as at Carleton College, Northfield, Minnesota; the McNeil Center for Early American Studies at the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the Phi Alpha Theta Oklahoma Regional Conference, Cameron University, Lawton, Oklahoma. In addition, under the title “‘The Worst and Most Profane Language I Have Ever Heard from Mortal Lips,’” I offered my ideas on cursing at the C. V. Starr Center and Washington College, Chestertown, Maryland; the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island; the Glasgow Maritime Geographies Conference, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK; Warwick University, Coventry, UK; and East Anglia University, Norwich, UK. I have also presented an overview of my work to the staff at Mystic Seaport Research Library and Museum Collections and at the Phillips Library at the Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts.

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I have been fortunate in having a great family. I dedicate this book to my brother, Stephen Gilje, and my sister, Kathleen Gilje. They have known me all my life and I must confess that as we were growing up

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they occasionally made me swear. But they have always loved, watched out for, and supported their younger brother. I owe more to them than they can ever imagine. I have two exceptional children – Erik and Karin – who have started their own careers and their own families and two great children-in-law, Beth Gilje and Joshua Hignight. My life has also been brightened by the arrival of my granddaughter, Rachel Brooklyn Gilje, as I was working on this book. My greatest blessing remains my wife, Ann. As a scholar I have occasionally stumbled upon a passage that speaks to me directly across the ages. The reader will find one such passage in this book in a line of poetry from the logbook of Thomas Nicolson. “Amazing was thy love! God of my life / Hannah thou gavest me for a partner! Wife!” After more than forty years of marriage I understand Nicolson’s gratitude. I close these acknowledgments with a slight alteration to Nicolson’s words: “Amazing was thy love! God of my life / Ann thou gavest me for a partner! Wife!”

Abbreviations

Libraries and Museums

AAS	American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts
Beinecke	Yale Collection of Western Americana. Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Room, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut
CHS	Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Connecticut
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
LC	Library of Congress, Washington, DC
MdHS	Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, Maryland
MeHS	Maine Historical Society, Portland, Maine
MHS	Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, Massachusetts
MM	The Mariners' Museum Library, Newport News, Virginia
Mystic	G. W. Blunt White Library, Mystic Seaport, Mystic, Connecticut
NA	National Archives, Washington, DC
N-YHS	New-York Historical Society, New York, New York
NBWM	New Bedford Whaling Museum, New Bedford, Massachusetts
NHS	Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island
NMM	National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, United Kingdom
ODHS	Old Dartmouth Historical Society (now part of NBWM)
PEM	Phillips Library, Peabody Essex Museum, Salem, Massachusetts

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PPL	Nicholson Whaling Collection, Providence Public Library, Providence, Rhode Island
RIHS	Rhode Island Historical Society, Providence, Rhode Island
UCSB	University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, California

Journals

EIHC	<i>Essex Institute Historical Collections</i>
JER	<i>Journal of the Early Republic</i>
WMQ	<i>William and Mary Quarterly</i>