

The Fortune of War Study Guide

The Fortune of War by Patrick O'Brian

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Contents

The Fortune of War Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapters 1 and 2.....	4
Chapters 3 and 4.....	7
Chapters 5 and 6.....	9
Chapters 7 and 8.....	11
Chapter 9.....	14
Characters.....	16
Objects/Places.....	21
Themes.....	24
Style.....	26
Quotes.....	28
Topics for Discussion.....	32



Plot Summary

Aubrey and Maturin return from presumed lost at sea and attempt to return home on a doomed voyage. They are passengers first on a ship that burns, then are rescued by a ship that is captured, and finally escape to a ship that engages the enemy only hours later. Along the way Aubrey is severely injured and Maturin is pursued by French intelligence agents determined to kill him—all part of the Fortune of War.

Having survived an eventful but plagued voyage aboard HMS Leopard, Aubrey and Maturin return to civilization where Leopard is converted to a transport due her great age and poor condition. The two friends, accompanied by a handful of long-time friends, take voyage to England on La Flèche, a quick ship. During the voyage, however, fire breaks out and La Flèche is lost. Aubrey, Maturin, and the other Leopards end up in an eighteen foot long cutter set adrift in the vast ocean. They suffer severely for many days until they are rescued by HMS Java, a frigate transporting diplomatic passengers.

Saved, the men quickly recuperate and learn that war has been declared between England the America. Then, HMS Java runs afoul of USS Constitution, a magnificent frigate with many large guns. A hot ship-to-ship action occurs and Aubrey participates by captaining guns in the waist. He is seriously wounded—his right arm utterly shattered—but fights on until Java is disabled and strikes her colors. Most of the English sailors are quickly paroled but Aubrey and Maturin are transported over several days to Boston where Aubrey is transferred to a private hospital, a hovering Maturin amazed that he is still alive.

In Boston Aubrey slowly recovers his health but suffers a bleak depression brought on by a long string of English defeats. He carefully watches the American Navy and dreams about not being a prisoner of war. Meanwhile, Maturin is pursued by French intelligence agents who attempt to kidnap him, obviously a prelude to torture and murder. At the same time, Aubrey befriends Herapath and his father—Herapath being an old friend. Maturin also meets his love interest, Diana Villiers, who is in the company of Johnson, a vitriolic and passionate patriot engaged in private intelligence work and involved with the French agents. Villiers is slowly becoming estranged from Johnson and fears for her safety.

When the situation becomes untenable, Aubrey, Maturin, and Villiers escape to a boat and head for the open sea. They are eventually picked up by HMS Shannon, on station blockading Boston harbor. They are also pursued by USS Chesapeake, and a hot ship-to-ship action ensues. Fortunately for the heroes, the English are finally victorious and Chesapeake strikes her colors as the novel concludes.



Chapters 1 and 2

Chapters 1 and 2 Summary

Aubrey and Maturin return from presumed loss at sea and attempt to return home on a doomed voyage. They are passengers first on a ship that burns, then are rescued by a ship that is captured, and finally escape to a ship that engages the enemy only hours later. Along the way Aubrey is severely injured and Maturin is pursued by French intelligence agents determined to kill him—all part of the Fortune of War.

HMS Leopard has reached the safety of Pulo Batang, thanks to the incredible seamanship of Captain Jack Aubrey. Thought to be long lost at sea, Leopard makes quite a stir upon entering the anchorage. Aubrey proceeds ashore and calls upon the Admiral who expresses admiration for Aubrey's exploits and tenacity. The Admiral then informs Aubrey that Leopard will be converted to a transport and that Aubrey will be sent home to England aboard La Flèche to accept command of Acasta. This is agreeable to Aubrey save that he must strenuously argue to retain his lieutenants and midshipmen—the remainder of Leopard's crew will be disbursed among the Admiral's other ships. Meanwhile Maturin calls on Wallis, the local intelligence officer. As with Aubrey and the Admiral, Maturin and Wallis exchange information regarding their respective spheres. Wallis is well-informed and insightful, and he discusses Maturin's recent intelligence coup with enthusiasm.

Maturin then joins Aubrey in a game of cricket, playing against the Admiral's prime team. Maturin has only a vague idea of the game of cricket, but erroneously assumes it is more-or-less equivalent to hurley. He intends to watch the match develop but is instead called away to assist in preparation of some documents. Thus, when his place at bat arrives he is summoned to the field bearing his hurley, and creates an enormously funny scene by smashing the wicket to pieces.

Maturin and Aubrey board La Flèche and Maturin agonizes over his numerous natural history specimens. Most of the hands are more interested in drinking the spirits in which the specimens are contained than in securing the specimens themselves. Maturin nearly makes a serious faux pas in preferring his collection to the captain's table—but he is rescued at the last moment by Aubrey. Maturin and Aubrey retire to Captain Yorke's table and Maturin finds the man entirely agreeable, well-read, and intelligent. The dinner conversation is stimulating and lasts a good time—it includes Aubrey's famous joke about weevils perpetrated upon an unsuspecting Maturin. Yorke provides good news to Aubrey—Sophie Aubrey is aware that, contrary to popular opinion, Aubrey is alive and well because she received a letter from Diana Villiers conveying information from Wogan to such effect.

The voyage proceeds with a remarkably monotonous regularity, the ship covering about 200-250 nautical miles each day through unvarying weather and steady wind. Aubrey writes many lengthy letters home, summarizing his thoughts and reporting many current



events. When not writing, Aubrey instructs his midshipmen on navigation and attempts the rudiments of education—much of which is new material for him. Maturin meets and befriends the ship's surgeon, McLean—both men share a common passion for natural history and McLean is a keen dissector and describer. The two men spend countless hours and days pouring over Maturin's extensive collections. McLean's tendency to smoke a pipe while dissecting specimens preserved in large amounts of distilled alcohol troubles Maturin.

La Flèche calls at Cape Town to resupply—as a dispatch-carrying ship she does not stay long but does learn that war has erupted between England and the United States of America. As the voyage continues the talk aboard ship is entirely dominated by a consideration of the USA's fledgling navy, consisting of eight frigates and a small collection of lesser vessels. Most of the English sailors deplore the war but do not take the threat of the USA's navy very seriously. La Flèche gains deep water and the voyage continues as the weather begins to change. Then, Aubrey wakes Maturin from a deep sleep and they flee the ship—La Flèche is ablaze. Taking to the boats, the various sailors watch in forlorn desperation as La Flèche burns and explodes.

Chapters 1 and 2 Analysis

As with any novel, the first chapter establishes the tone and texture of the book, and introduces the two principle characters of the volume—namely, Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin. The book is part of a series of novels dealing with the same characters and events, and thus the novel carries on the action established in a previous novel in the series—the current novel is the sixth in a series of twenty novels. In the previous novel Aubrey had commanded Leopard through a series of adventures leading up to a near-sinking and stranding on Desolation Island. During these adventures, Maturin had befriended a certain Mrs. Louisa Wogan, an American intelligence officer being transported to Botany Bay for spying. Maturin had arranged to plant a vast store of false information upon Wogan, who deemed it credible and accurate. After arranging for her escape, Maturin is much satisfied to learn from Wallis that the 'poison documents' caused numerous executions of French intelligence officers now implicated as double agents. The background developed regarding the previous novel is particularly significant to the plot development of the current novel, and thus consumes much of the initial chapters of the present work. Aside from the plot, several characters recur, including Wogan and Michael Herapath.

The initial chapter sets the tone of the novel and establishes a lighthearted approach to narration; for example, note the Admiral referring to Abraham as "that old Sodomite," (p. 19) which is humorous because it is true in the literal sense but obviously pejorative in the colloquial sense in which it is intended. Later, Aubrey discreetly verifies the fact that Abraham was a Sodomite. Later still, Aubrey flogs Forshaw for referring to Abraham as "only an ordinary wicked Jew" (p. 70). The humorous tone of the narrative is strongly reinforced by Maturin's ridiculous cricket outing; Americans may imagine his performance as, perhaps, a lacrosse-playing man interrupting a baseball game.



La Flèche's prohibition of open smoking, McLean's circumventing the rule, and Maturin's remonstrating McLean about smoking over specimens (see page 65) strongly foreshadows the eventual loss by fire of La Flèche at the end of Chapter 2. Note the scandalous discussion regarding the ridiculous nature of novels at Yorke's dinner table (roughly, pages 52-53); a discussion that is obviously a tongue-in-check meta-fictional assertion of the current novel's insufficient weight. The subsequent condemnation of fiction's inability to represent battle sequences (see page 54) is likewise particularly humorous when one considers that the current novel's predominant appeal is its lengthy and exacting depiction of several battle sequences. Aubrey's joke regarding "'the lesser of two weevils'" (pp. 54-55) is probably the most-quoted scene in the entire series of twenty novels.

The novel's presentation of information flow in the early 1800s is intriguing. Most of the English world considers Aubrey's prolonged absence as proof of his demise. Yet, Wogan has reached America and contacted Diana Villiers, a common friend, providing information to the contrary. Diana has written her cousin Sophie Aubrey—Jack Aubrey's wife—and informed her of his good health. Sophie has written Aubrey a letter and this has been transported by Yorke. Thus, Sophie writes to Aubrey even though he has been absent over one calendar year. Note Aubrey's stunned surprise when Yorke playfully mentions that Sophie had a babe-in-arms when he had seen her; he does not let Aubrey suffer long, however, noting that it was a niece. The news of the war between England and the USA (today usually referred to as the War of 1812) means that this section of the novel can be conclusively dated to July, 1812. This date matches with later historical dates presented in the novel and makes Aubrey's fictional participation in the historic battle between USS Constitution and HMS Java possible. It also indicates a novel opening date of circa June, 1812.



Chapters 3 and 4

Chapters 3 and 4 Summary

The old crewmates from *Leopard* have all taken passage in the same boat and they are joined by a few men from *La Flèche*. The first night in the boats foul weather separates all the craft and thus Aubrey and his boat are isolated. They begin to sail for Brazil and ration food and water. The boat is eighteen feet long and holds thirteen men, including Aubrey, Maturin, lieutenants Babbington and Byron, midshipmen Forshaw, Holles, and Peters, Bonden, Killick, one unnamed seaman, and, from *La Flèche*, Harboard and Raikes. After several days in the heat and sun dehydration becomes acute and starvation seems a real possibility. Once a sail is sighted and the boat closes by rowing but they are not seen and the ship sails away. That night Raikes, exhausted from rowing, dies. Maturin begins to have prolonged cramping and all of the men's health suffers. Once heavy rain offers respite and occasional animals are captured and eaten raw. Finally a sail is seen and the boat is rescued by *HMS Java*—Raikes' bloated body has been gnawed upon by then. Aubrey finds his host to be Captain Lambert; *HMS Java* welcomes the survivors with open arms and larder. The ship is carrying a diplomat and his retinue and thus is crammed with men but is also particularly well supplied.

HMS Java continues to sail for Brazil and the voyage proceeds apace. The survivors eat huge amounts daily and slowly recuperate. Meanwhile news of the war depresses Aubrey—the Americans have encountered the British on three occasions and on all three encounters the Americans have been decisively victorious. Christmas, 1812, thus passes with muted celebration. A few days later a strange sail is raised. At first most of the crew believes it to be a friendly vessel at an appointed rendezvous, but Bonden believes it to be the *USS Constitution*—and Bonden's opinion proves correct. The *Constitution* leads *Java* on a long chase to sea and then turns to offer combat. Aubrey and the *Leopards* volunteer to serve the forward gun battery, thus relieving some marines for small-arms work in the fighting tops. Lambert decides to close the enemy directly and take her by boarding—sensible in that *Java* holds many, many more men than *Constitution*. Aubrey is somewhat taken aback that Lambert will not first exchange long-range gunfire to allow the superior British marksmanship to tell. A fierce combat ensues while *Java* attempts to close *Constitution* but fails to close to boarding distance. The *Java's* relatively inexperienced gun crews fail to seize a few opportunities and eventually *Java* is largely disabled and is forced to strike her colors. Aubrey has been seriously wounded during the combat and his right arm is shattered. Forshaw is killed and Byron is seriously wounded. Maturin attends to the injured as the survivors of *Java* are put into prison—of course, officers are paroled. Lambert dies of his wounds and Maturin expects Aubrey to die nearly any day. Meanwhile the two men are befriended by Evans, an officer of *Constitution*, and Maturin meets a Frenchman—the French being allied with the USA—named Pontet-Canet and realizes he has seen the man before.

The ship finally lands in Boston and the men are taken ashore. Evans has arranged for Aubrey to recover at *Asclepia*, a sanitorium run by his relative Dr. Choate. Choate has



remarkably modern sensibilities and accepts Aubrey on easy terms. Evans further presents Maturin with a collection for Aubrey, taken up among the American crew—it is a magnanimous gesture. Aubrey expects to be quickly paroled and exchanged but this proves not the case. Instead he is interviewed by several obnoxious agents from the Navy who accuse him of various war crimes. Meanwhile Maturin learns that Herapath and Wogan are living in town, as is Herapath's father, an English sympathizer. He also learns that Diana Villiers and Johnson will be visiting town shortly. Wogan knows that the papers she obtained were false, but Maturin slowly realizes Wogan believes them to have originated with Aubrey—hence the Navy's intense interest in Aubrey.

Chapters 3 and 4 Analysis

The description of being adrift in the small boat accords very well with similar autobiographical descriptions. The minor cannibalism that takes place is accepted but not commented upon—apparently a common usage of the sea in that type of extremity. Historically, the battle between USS Constitution and HMS Java occurred on December 29, 1812, off the coast of Bahia, Brazil. The Constitution's survival without comparatively minor damage earned her the nickname of 'Old Ironsides.' Aubrey's participation in the fight is an exciting intersection of fiction and history, and the situation enabling him to fight to the best of his ability without winning the encounter is surely a stroke of narrative genius. Aubrey's surprise of Lambert's course of battle of course foreshadows the Java's eventual defeat just as Aubrey's consideration of Lambert's inability to procure sufficient private powder foreshadows the green gun crews' poor performance.

Aubrey and Maturin have certainly had a run of bad luck—previously wrecked on Desolation Island they have recovered civilization only to lose their ship, then lose another ship and nearly die, then enter combat and lose yet another ship and be captured. Aubrey's spirits are crushed and Maturin regrets the loss not only of his vast natural history specimen collection but also of nearly all of his notes. This trying period is referred to by Evans as "the fortune of war" (p. 145), a common-enough colloquialism that informs the title of the novel.

The action of the latter half of Chapter 4 depends heavily upon a prior novel in the series. In that novel, Maturin had contrived to deliver a vast amount of false intelligence information to Wogan. Wogan is an enthusiastic but amateurish intelligence agent. The false information implicated numerous French operatives as being double agents and caused numerous executions. Wogan has since learned the information was falsified but has come to hold Aubrey responsible because she has been entirely fooled by Maturin. Pontet-Canet is vaguely attached to French intelligence and hence is a significant danger to Maturin; his early introduction heavily foreshadows later intrigues and involvement. Michael Herapath, likewise, was introduced in a previous novel. He is the sometimes lover of Wogan and is so besotted with her that he runs after her even as she beds various other men. Together they have a child, Caroline, who is raised predominantly by Herapath. Herapath's father, Mr. Herapath, is a wealthy Boston merchant who was a loyalist during the Revolutionary War and is still strongly sympathetic to English interests.



Chapters 5 and 6

Chapters 5 and 6 Summary

Wogan calls on Maturin at the Asclepia and tells him about Herapath and their infant child, Caroline. Herapath attempts a living by translating ancient Chinese poetry. Wogan's warm approach lets Maturin know that, incredibly, she still does not suspect him of any treachery regarding the false documents. Maturin calls on Herapath and finds him in good spirits. Meanwhile Aubrey broods with low spirits about the numerous American victories—or more precisely, the numerous British losses.

Later, Maturin calls on George Herapath, Michael Herapath's father. Mr. Herapath proudly explains that he was a loyalist during the American Revolutionary War, and remained in Canada throughout. As a Bostonian, he is sympathetic to the English cause and finds the current war deplorable and ridiculous. He explains his vast wealth and notes that several of his ships are currently idled in the harbor. He assures Maturin of friendship and advocacy. Mr. Herapath finds his son ridiculous but Maturin suggests medical school as a viable option. Mr. Herapath clearly dislikes Wogan, finding her presence an insult to honor, yet dotes upon his granddaughter Caroline. Mr. Herapath and Maturin then call on Aubrey at the Asclepia—Aubrey and Mr. Herapath are immediately fond of each other and spend some time discussing nautical matters.

Later still, Wogan and Maturin have a lengthy private conversation. Wogan obviously has erroneously concluded that Aubrey is to blame for the false information—and that Aubrey is an intelligence agent. She attempts to enlist Maturin as an American agent, noting that Mr. Harry Johnson is her employer. Johnson is a private citizen but one well-connected with American intelligence and possessed of a great attraction to intelligence work. An incredibly wealthy man, he spends vast sums on a private intelligence empire that collaborates with official American intelligence work. Johnson is also the same man with whom Diana Villiers absconded some months previously. Maturin does not want to be a double agent but realizes he is in an exceedingly difficult situation—as is Aubrey.

Later, Wogan introduces Maturin to Johnson and the two men size each other up, beginning with a wonderfully comic discussion about boobies—the birds, but full of double entendre. After speaking with Johnson, Maturin finally meets Villiers, his long-time, but one-sided, love interest. He finds her aged, dissipated by alcohol, and fairly crass of speech. For her part she seems very drawn to him and needy. Meanwhile, at the Asclepia, the Navy department again calls on Aubrey and interviews him about some ancient and rather cryptic notes. Aubrey, his arm still nearly unusable, becomes angry and shaken. They depart and later Aubrey watches two American frigates sneak past the English blockade in a dense fog. Later still Aubrey sees HMS Shannon look into the harbor—Shannon is captained by Aubrey's close friend and cousin Philip Broke.

Over the next several days Maturin again meets Wogan and Herapath while Aubrey is called upon by Mr. Herapath. Maturin and Villiers share occasional discussions. Villiers



candidly relates her recent history to Maturin, noting her many poor decisions. She fled England under a cloud of suspicion for having been Wogan's close friend—yet she had done nothing wrong. She had fled to America with Johnson who had promised marriage, but the marriage has never come. She has become an American citizen which complicates things enormously. Johnson is a tyrant and a philanderer. His large plantation has many slaves, most of whom are his children, his half-sisters, or some combination of both. Further, Johnson's new love interest is Wogan and Villiers is thus being slowly cast off—a role to which she is entirely unaccustomed. It is obvious that she looks to Maturin's fortuitous arrival as some type of rescue.

Chapters 5 and 6 Analysis

The situation which develops over Chapters 5 and 6 is enormously complicated in detail but fairly simple in general. The Americans are paroling and exchanging nearly all captured seamen—Aubrey and Maturin being the exception. This is because they believe Aubrey to be an English intelligence officer—hence a spy. Fortunately, the wounded Aubrey is fairly protected inside a hospital. American intelligence is fairly new and benign, although they are aligned with France. Two French intelligence officers, Pontet-Canet and Dubreuil, operate with much latitude and are aggressive professionals. The American intelligence operation is further bolstered by Johnson's private initiatives. Thus, Maturin realizes it is only a matter of time before Wogan's error is discovered. Dubreuil will shortly realize that Maturin is the real intelligence officer, whereupon Maturin is sure he will be abducted, interrogated, and murdered. During this brief period of missed identity, Johnson attempts to recruit Maturin to the American cause—in effect, he asks Maturin to be a secret agent against England, something Maturin finds reprehensible.

Complicating matters somewhat further is the complex romantic triangle—polyhedron might be a better description—of Johnson and Villiers, Johnson and Wogan, Wogan and Herapath, and Villiers and Maturin. This complexity will all play out remarkably well in the end. During these chapters, however, Maturin realizes that his love for Diana has crumbled away; that Diana has become a coarse and gross version of her prior self; and that Mr. Herapath strongly desires his son to be uninvolved with Wogan but more strongly desires continued close contact with his granddaughter Caroline.

As with any complicated love triangle situation, boobies become a major topic of conversation between the men competing for Villiers' attention. Note the lengthy and frequent conversations about boobies between Maturin and Johnson (p. 186, etc.). At one point, Johnson attempts to give Maturin several lifelike paintings of boobies. Of course the men are discussing birds, but the narrative construction makes the double entendre a very enjoyable experience for the reader, especially as Maturin is recognized by Johnson as the subject-matter expert. Of course, Harry Johnson's name is not accidental.



Chapters 7 and 8

Chapters 7 and 8 Summary

In time, Maturin is identified as the intelligence officer—a fact that he is made aware of by Wogan's sudden change in behavior toward him. Johnson continues to attempt to recruit Maturin and makes a thinly veiled threat that if Maturin does not come over as a double agent the French agents will be allowed a free hand. As Maturin mulls over his gloomy future, Aubrey watches HMS Shannon make her daily observational foray into the bay. Aubrey admires the way Broke handles Shannon and contemplates his own past history with Broke at some length. Then Maturin asks Aubrey to ask Mr. Herapath to obtain some pistols to be used for protection. One afternoon Maturin goes to call on Johnson and is assaulted by Pontet-Canet and French thugs—they attempt to drag him into a waiting coach but the fortunate proximity of English officers allows an intervention; Maturin's life is spared for the moment. He calls on Johnson who is entirely nonplussed by the assault. Clearly, the die has been cast and not in his favor. Later that day, Aubrey shows Maturin a pair of new Joe Manton pistols. Maturin explains that he has contracted to marry Villiers such that her citizenship will revert to England; thus, she will be free to flee America.

To that end he attends early mass the following day and speaks with the priest. After, he attempts to call on Villiers but becomes lost in the dark, foggy streets. He is ambushed by Pontet-Canet and a band of thugs and a pell-mell flight through the streets of Boston ensues. It ends with Maturin doubling back to Villiers' hotel and ascending to her balcony on a workingman's rope. Aware that Johnson is out of town, he enters her room through the window and hides under her bed covers when the hotelier comes to search the rooms. He sends a breathless Villiers off to enlist possible aid and then collapses with fatigue and contusions obtained during the chase. After a brief rest he begins to search Johnson's papers to glean what he can. He is shocked to find a note from Villiers accepting his marriage proposal—obviously Johnson has intercepted it and Villiers' life is thus forfeit. Alerted by sounds, Maturin hides as another furtive figure enters the room. It is Pontet-Canet and the French agent quickly begins to read through Johnson's papers—his obvious mission in entering the room subsequent to Villiers' departure. Maturin moves forward and knocks Pontet-Canet down and then slits his throat with a scalpel; he drags the corpse into a washing tub. Some few minutes later another man enters the room—it is Dubreuil. Drawing his Joe Manton pistol, Maturin murders the man with a point-blank shot through the chest and also drops him into the washing tub. Apparently some local holiday is being celebrated and the single pistol shot does not draw attention because of fireworks.

A few hours later Villiers returns—she has been unable to find help. She has met Herapath in the hotel, however, and Maturin sends him to Aubrey with a note explaining the gravity of the situation. Maturin tells Villiers that her note was intercepted and she realizes Johnson will likely murder her at his convenience. Villiers and Maturin then talk



about life in general and he cautions her against too much drinking while she verbally accepts his marriage proposal.

Aubrey receives the note and goes to Mr. Herapath's house, asking for help and silence. The two men contrive an enormously complicated plan to evacuate Maturin from the hotel. Aubrey, Maturin, and Villiers will then hide aboard *Arcturus*, one of Herapath's idled ships. Mr. Herapath is delighted to learn Villiers will be leaving, because it will free Johnson's hand to openly take Wogan, freeing his son of her influence—Aubrey assures Mr. Herapath that Wogan will abandon Caroline to Herapath. After the plan is worked out, the party of Aubrey, Mr. Herapath, and Herapath travels to the hotel with considerable mishap. Herapath enters the hotel while Aubrey stands watch and Mr. Herapath sits on the coach as driver. After a few minutes Mr. Herapath's courage falters and he simply drives off, leaving all to their fate. Inside, Maturin gathers up intelligence papers and Villiers gathers up a fortune in diamonds. Fortunately, the overly-complex plan is not needed and Herapath simply guides Maturin and Villiers from the hotel. Joined by Aubrey, the party simply walks through the early morning fog to the ship.

They remain aboard ship until high tide and then enter the ship's boat and set sail for the sea. Maturin proves entirely hopeless and Aubrey grouses about his inability—as they argue, Villiers turns green and begins to vomit convulsively. The small boat moves out to sea until morning dawns and then Aubrey sees Shannon on her morning inspection. Hailing her, they are taken aboard and rescued. While Maturin makes the prostrated Villiers comfortable he determines that she is likely pregnant. Shannon is an unusually taught ship and is run with professional care. Aubrey is quite literally stunned at the level of gunnery demonstrated during exercises. He learns that Shannon is running low on water and has been on the American blockade for nearly five years. Broke has been sending in challenges to *USS Chesapeake*—the sole seaworthy frigate in Boston harbor. Aubrey assures him that with their escape, *Chesapeake* will likely come out. Aubrey also learns that lieutenant Chad and the other surviving Java officers have been cleared in a court martial.

Chapters 7 and 8 Analysis

Chapters 7 and 8 deal with another exciting Aubrey-Maturin escape. The French agents are determined to seize and murder Maturin, the man that has caused them so much difficulty. After eluding them, Maturin is fortunate in being able to surprise both men, one at a time, and he takes advantage of the situation by killing them both. He then gathers up an appreciable amount of intelligence papers and absconds with Villiers. Much of the narrative is given over to the development of an intricate plan of escape, complete with alternatives and contingencies. In the end, the complicated plan falls apart and in a humorous scene the practical Herapath simply walks out of the hotel, Maturin and Villiers following. This complicated Aubrey plan is mirrored by Maturin's plan to wed Villiers—a plan also with much formulation and no result. It is also interesting that in the execution of the escape plan the blustery and loud Mr. Herapath falters and runs while the unassuming younger Herapath improvises successfully.



When the escaping threesome readies to enter the fishing boat from the ship, Maturin argues that the vertical distance is too great for Villiers and urges Aubrey to wait until the tide lifts the boat up to the ship—Aubrey scoffs at Maturin's complete lack of nautical understanding (obviously, any tidal surge would float the boat and the ship by the same amount). After such a protest, it is of course amusing that Villiers scampers up and down the vertical distance several times and Maturin barely manages the traverse. Note that Aubrey's comment on Villiers' weight—"No one could call you a light woman, Diana" (p. 271)—infers her pregnancy.

Once again, Aubrey and Maturin are inserted into a historic event—the battle between Shannon and Chesapeake. This time they are rather more than inconsequential participants, however: they are the actual cause. The resulting victory for Shannon is heavily foreshadowed by the narrative's focus on the facts of the ship. She is not ostentatious but incredibly efficient. No less a warrior than Aubrey is literally stunned by Shannon's gunnery precision and speed.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Shannon stands off and on Boston harbor. Broke has sent several messages to Captain Lambert of the Chesapeake, desiring him to come out to combat. Shannon's water is nearly depleted and the frigate must shortly sail for resupply. Aubrey watches the ship and is truly impressed with the high state of readiness that is everywhere apparent. Broke is a thoroughly modern captain and has outfitted the guns with sights of his own design. Maturin considers Aubrey and Broke and finds them simultaneously similar but opposites—Aubrey is representative of an older style of naval captain while Broke represents all that is modern. Nearly all shipboard talk concerns possible combat with the American frigate, though from time to time other nautical topics arise—such as the newfangled steam engines that are coming into some vogue.

Finally Chesapeake puts out from Boston and it is apparent that she intends to engage Shannon. The two ships sail into the open sea and clear for action. Villiers, somewhat recovered from seasickness, is relocated to the forepeak. She is there joined by Maturin who brings her soup and explains the situation. They agree that Johnson is certain to be aboard Chesapeake—to that end, Maturin hands Villiers a pistol. It is a small gun that, with half a load, can be used to murder rats. Meanwhile Broke delivers a calm but inspiring speech to the crew.

On deck, Aubrey takes charge of the quarterdeck carronades. Chesapeake ranges up alongside Shannon in a direct route, and the two ships begin exchanging broadsides. Very quickly, Shannon's superior shooting begins to tell. Aubrey observes through the smoke that Chesapeake's quarterdeck is nearly empty, and that the wheel has been shot entirely away. Chesapeake founders and then drifts off. Gunfire falls the Shannon's jibs, and she loses steerageway as Chesapeake drifts down upon her, stern first. Aubrey fears that Chesapeake's vast crew will overpower Shannon's normal numbers, but Broke leads the charge as his marines, in the fighting tops, perform great execution on the Americans. A confused melee ensues and Aubrey joins in with his left hand swinging a heavy saber—his right arm bound tightly to his chest. He helps to defend Broke and then Chesapeake's decks are swept clear of Americans—the day has been won by Broke and Shannon. As combat ends Aubrey congratulates Shannon on his brilliant victory.

Chapter 9 Analysis

The novel concludes with an exciting naval combat between Shannon and Chesapeake—a lightly fictionalized account of a historic ship fight that took place on June 1, 1813, at the location indicated. The author's foreword notes that the action described matches eyewitness accounts as closely as possible. Details such as Broke's custom pendulum sights and the Chesapeake's enormous white flag not only make compelling reading,



but are historical facts about the situation. Aubrey, the consummate fighting captain and hero of the novel, finds Broke's seamanship and gunnery nearly unbelievable—which speaks volumes about the man and his vessel.

Maturin's visit to Villiers is more than an act of friendship. Although unspoken, his intent in donating the tiny pistol is obvious—the gun can be used for suicide but is not a particularly effective weapon for self defense. He then leaves her to take his station in the cockpit, where he will assist the ship's surgeon. The ongoing quest to be wed to Villiers is again postponed, adding a sad but comic element to the ships' duel.



Characters

Jack Aubrey

Aubrey is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Stephen Maturin. Aubrey is a larger-than-life character with dash and charisma. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of the sea; a legendary captain, a masterful navigator, a superb tactician, and an invincible warrior. Although he is intelligent he relies more on experience, insight, and a nearly infallible instinct to carry him through the various perils he encounters.

Aubrey is a post captain initially assigned to H.M.S. Leopard. After a mission fraught with catastrophe, Aubrey leaves Leopard as that ship is to be converted to a transport. He then embarks with Maturin on a series of misadventures—the fortune of war—until being seriously injured aboard HMS Java during combat with USS Constitution. Maturin fears that Aubrey will die or lose his right arm, but Aubrey's iron constitution carries him through a long and painful recovery.

Aubrey wears his blond hair in a long queue and dresses as a traditional ship's captain. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent; his weight fluctuates wildly. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds including an ear sliced apart in an old encounter and various scars on his head. Aubrey is usually quite useless on land—for example, he has signed over his fortune to an scheming enterpriser—but on the occasion of the escape from Boston he approaches the caper as a nautical exploit and thus brings it off with great success. Aubrey's participation in several historic battles is definitely one of the novel's highlights.

Stephen Maturin y Domanova

Maturin is one of two principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute—for example, Harry Johnson holds Maturin to be an expert on boobies. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions are surprisingly modern and always correct. Maturin has performed several miraculous cures through advanced techniques and is considered, by the crew, to hold life in the palm of his hand. Although possessed of some financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct.



Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is a pro bono agent for the secret intelligence network of England. From time to time, Maturin's relationship with the intelligence service is complicated, such as when the French agents in Boston seek to kidnap and murder him. However, such is the life of an international spy.

Maturin is a small, squat man who in many respects is the antithesis of Aubrey. Maturin is much given to introspection, subtle interpretations, and Byzantine analysis of the current situation. He is nearly entirely mental, with little interest in things physical—though capable enough when the time comes. Although he is possessed of a nearly preternatural constitution, Maturin is not notably dexterous or strong, though his physique is rarely a handicap to his desires. Although he can be over-confident of his abilities, he is nearly always correct in his analysis of situations and people. A notable exception to his typical clarity of vision centers on his love interest, Diana Villiers; Maturin generally is unable to comprehend her complexities and unwilling to accept her rather obvious shortcomings. Like Aubrey, Maturin derives great pleasure from music and is a capable musician. He is a master surgeon and accomplished medical man, but his real love is the investigation of the natural world. Nearly every stop ashore finds Maturin eagerly gathering local flora and fauna and returning to the ship at the last possible instant. The loss by fire of his vast collection of unique specimens from Desolation Island is a particularly cruel turn of events.

Diana Villiers

Diana Villiers is exceptionally beautiful; indeed, physical beauty and sexual allure are clearly her dominant features and she easily controls most men through her physical charms. Even the usually resolute Maturin is smitten with her and in the past has irrationally held out hope that she would return his fervent devotion. Usually, his desire is returned by cruel use. Villiers is in her early thirties and has long, jet black hair and a long, slender neck. Villiers is the cousin to Sophie Aubrey, Jack Aubrey's wife, and has a long and complex history that is fully developed in several prior novels. She had accepted a previous marriage proposal from Maturin before absconding to America with Harry Johnson to avoid possible complications with Louisa Wogan's arrest.

Villiers becomes an American citizen but her heart remains with England. As her relationship with Johnson falters Villiers sees Maturin's arrival as a form of rescue—one might say her knight in shining armor, were the appellation not so ill suited to Maturin. She explains the situation and asks him to solve it. He proposes marriage to resolve her citizenship, and she readily accepts—though she has accepted his proposals before and they never are culminated. The novel finds Villiers much hardened by her stint in America. Maturin is shocked by her vulgar and coarse speech, her hardened and nearly alcoholic complexion, and her increase of weight—later determined to be pregnancy. Surely, the novel presents Villiers as nearly completely beaten down but still desirous of living a good and adventurous life. Her behavior during the escape and subsequent naval combat is exceptional.



Mrs. Louisa Wogan

Wogan is about thirty, with black hair and blue eyes. She stands straight and is 5'8", with a slight but noticeable figure. She speaks English and French, knows how to ride a horse, but has atrocious spelling and poor penmanship. Wogan has a passing likeness to Diana Villiers. Wogan is an American spy who was apprehended by the English intelligence service and condemned for violently resisting arrest and sentenced to transportation to Botany Bay, Australia. She joined Leopard as a prisoner, though a distinguished one, and made the transit to Desolation Island where she escaped. During the voyage, Maturin easily mastered Wogan and planted credible but entirely false information on her. Wogan has loose morals and uses her physical charms as a primary weapon in her arsenal of espionage. Although married to a presumed Mr. Wogan, Wogan live with Herapath and has a child, Caroline, with him. She spends her time in the company of Harry Johnson, and has sex with him on demand.

Michael Herapath and Caroline

Herapath is an American citizen who holds a desperate and usually unrequited love for Louisa Wogan. The two characters have a long and fairly banal history together. Herapath has estranged, and even defrauded, his family by the pursuit of Wogan and from time to time the two have lived as husband and wife—as they do during the novel, along with their infant daughter Caroline. Herapath is an intelligent man with a reedy physique that usually borders on the sickly. He is undernourished and delicate, though educated—he makes his living, such as it is, by translating Chinese and desires to go to medical school. He stowed away aboard Leopard so that he could follow Wogan and after he was discovered eventually became acting surgeon's assistant to Maturin. Herapath proves a competent if unexciting man and assists Aubrey, Maturin, and Villiers in their successful escape—apparently unaware that it means Wogan will quickly leave him for Harry Johnson. Herapath dotes upon his daughter.

George Herapath

George Herapath is Michael Herapath's father, a merchant of means and reputation. Mr. Herapath supported the English cause during the American Revolutionary War and was forced to live in Canada for several years. Although nominally an American citizen, he is favorable to the English cause and unsurprisingly vehemently opposed to the war. Herapath finds Wogan entirely distasteful but dotes upon his granddaughter Caroline. His relationship with his son is strained, to say the least. Mr. Herapath works with Aubrey to evolve a ridiculously complicated plan of escape but in the execution of it his courage fails him and he drives off, leaving all to their supposed doom. Fortunately, he son is not so flighty and helps carry of the escape.



Harry Johnson

Harry Johnson, a ridiculously named over-sexed man, is Diana Villiers lover. He is described as large, loud, opinionated and exceedingly wealthy. Possessed of an insatiable lust, Villiers states that Johnson has fathered most of the young slaves on his plantation and is half-sibling to many of the older slaves. During the novel, Johnson slowly discards Villiers for Wogan. Johnson is engaged in intelligence work as a sort of private hobby, and has spent vast personal sums to develop an equally vast personal network. He works in close collaboration with the fledgling American intelligence network. During the novel, Johnson works as a patriotic but over-zealous character—he tells Maturin he must either work as a double-agent or be sacrificed to the French, and both Villiers and Maturin believe that Johnson will shortly sacrifice Villiers as well.

Jean-Paul Pontet-Canet and Dubreuil

The two men are French intelligence agents working in America with the begrudging approval of American intelligence agents. Dubreuil is an old adversary of Maturin but Pontet-Canet is a somewhat young agent. The two men work behind the scenes in Boston to secure Maturin's arrest. Failing that, they decide to simply kidnap him and subsequently probably intend to severely interrogate him and then murder him. They make two attempts at kidnapping—and blunder each attempt. Both men then sneak into Johnson's room to read his personal papers, not realizing that Maturin has already taken refuge within. Maturin kills Pontet-Canet by bashing in his head and then slitting his throat, and kills Dubreuil a few minutes later by shooting him through the heart at point-blank range. Within the novel, both men—particularly Pontet-Canet—function as antagonists.

Captain Yorke

Yorke is captain of La Fleche, and is described as a small dark man, somewhat heavy, with a clever face. He appears to be in his early middle-age and has a clever face. Maturin believes that Yorke is overly concerned with creature comforts. Indeed, Yorke is a capable but uninspired leader and prefers easy anonymity to consuming devotion to duty. Yorke is well-read, well-spoken, and enjoys music. He befriends Maturin and Aubrey during their voyage together and runs a generally efficient ship, largely thanks to his first lieutenant's efforts.

Captain Lambert

Lambert is captain of Java and is described as a poor but earnest captain. As Lambert must rely entirely upon the official ball and powder stores from the navy, his ship's gun crews are infamously untrained. Lambert is a fairly unimaginative tactician though he handles his ship well enough. When Java meets Constitution, Lambert pursues directly with the intention of boarding—when boarding becomes impossible Lambert has no



fallback plan and thus Java loses the contest. Lambert dies from wounds received during the battle, though Maturin rather feels Lambert had given up the will to live.

Captain Philip Broke

Broke is captain of Shannon and is described as a smaller, dark man. He is religious and demands a strict but fair discipline aboard his ship. Ironically wealthy, despite his name, Broke has purchased vast stores of shot and powder for Shannon and drilled her crew into a singularly perfected mechanism. Broke's one desire is to engage in single-ship combat with an American frigate. Broke is Aubrey's cousin, and as young men the two spent much time in each other's company.



Objects/Places

HMS Leopard

HMS Leopard is a two-decker, fourth-rate, ship of the line. Leopard carries fifty guns and is a fictionalized representation of the historic HMS Leopard involved in the infamous Chesapeake-Leopard Affair, occurring June 22, 1807. During that incident the British ship attacked and boarded the American ship to press escaped British sailors. Leopard was Aubrey's command during a previous novel, but upon the opening of the present novel is in such an advanced state of disrepair that she is converted from a warship to a transport.

HMS La Flèche

La Flèche is a dispatch-carrying ship upon which Maturin and Aubrey take passage from Pulo Batang to somewhere off the coast of Cape Town. She is a twenty-gun sixth rate, displacing about 450 tons, with a normal complement of one hundred and fifty-five. She is captained by Yorke who is a competent if uninspired leader, and has Warner as a first lieutenant. Warner is a consummate seaman but devoid of personality. The ship manages to cover between 200-250 nautical miles every day given good wind. After leaving Cape Town, however, she catches fire and burns to the powder magazine before exploding. Maturin and Aubrey escape the ship, along with nearly all of her crew. La Flèche is the predominant setting of Chapter 2.

The Blue Cutter

After HMS La Flèche burns, Aubrey and Maturin take refuge in an 18' blue cutter. They spend several days—probably about a month—in the open boat on the high seas before being rescued by HMS Java. While aboard, one seaman dies and the body is retained as a source of food—fortunately, they are rescued before the corpse is eaten, though it is gnawed upon somewhat. The blue cutter represents a severely difficult aspect of the fortune of war.

HMS Java

HMS Java is a thirty-eight gun, fifth rate frigate that rescues Aubrey and Maturin and then carries them into unsuccessful combat against USS Constitution. It was originally named La Renommée and was captured from the French in 1811. Java is commanded by Lambert, who attempts to close with and board Constitution. The American ship evades boarding, however, and uses superior firepower to wreck Java. Java strikes her colors and is so damaged that the Americans burn her instead of towing her into port. Java is the predominant setting of Chapters 3 and 4.



HMS Shannon

HMS Shannon is a twenty-four gun, sixth-rate frigate on the American blockade station off Boston. She rescues Aubrey and Maturin after their escape from Boston. The ship is well-described and mounts twenty-four guns on her broadside with one light boat gun. The broadside is composed of eighteen-pounder cannon on the maindeck and thirty-two-pounder carronades on her quarterdeck and forecastle. Her normal complement is 300 and she is captained by Philip Broke. Shannon is a particularly well-disciplined ship and proves victorious against USS Chesapeake during a hot action described in Chapter 9.

Futtock-Shrouds and the Lubber's Hole

The top of each lower mast is surrounded by a platform known as the top—hence, maintop, foretop, etc. The top is reached by climbing the ratlines on the standing rigging which runs from the outside hull upward on an incline to a point just below the platform of the top. The top is most-easily attained by climbing the rigging and then passing through a hole in the top known as the "lubber's hole." The top itself is stabilized by standing rigging which runs from the edges of the platform to the mast, forming lines which have a negative angle; that is, an overhang. These overhanging lines are called the futtock-shrouds. Seamen climb the rigging, then move onto the futtock-shrouds and climb up, hanging backwards at a steep angle, and thus gain the top by clambering over the edge of the platform. Aubrey gains the top of Shannon by being helped through the lubber's hole because he must climb with his injured arm bound to his chest.

Splinters

Naval combat between large ships was violent and dangerous, even though it rarely resulted in complete victory for either side. Ships rarely sank outright, though they were sometimes captured, as are HMS Java and USS Chesapeake. The chief weapon of naval engagement was the cannon—several types, weights, and configurations are noted in the novel. In general, cannons threw heavy iron balls—cannonballs—at the enemy. The cannonballs would strike the enemy ship's outer hull and cause enormous swarms of splinters to spall away from the ship's inner hull. These splinters, traveling at great velocity, were the chief cause of injury and death among the ship's crew—this is why, for example, Broke commands his gunners to lie down should the ship be raked. The word 'splinter' seems innocuous enough; however they were lethal and often very large.

Weathergage

To have or possess the weathergage describes the favorable positioning of a sailing vessel relative to another with respect to the wind; in brief, it is any position upwind of the other vessel. Being upwind, or having the weathergage, allows a vessel to



maneuver at will toward any downwind point and thus gain the tactical advantage over other ships. Further, the ship having the weathergage controls the timing and even the occurrence of military engagement. In general, correct tactics dictate that seeking the weathergage is always an appropriate endeavor. When Chesapeake fights Shannon, the American ship has the weathergage and thus controls the combat approach.

The Diamond Necklace

Johnson has given Villiers a diamond necklace, made from his mother's diamonds. When he is about to discard Villiers he asks for its return on the pretext that the clasp seems weak. When Villiers is escaping from Boston, she runs back into Johnson's study, stepping through the blood of two executed Frenchmen, to retrieve the diamonds, explaining to Maturin that she has "earnt" (p. 265) them. Maturin finds the diamonds symbolic of Villiers' untoward descent into vulgarity.

Maturin's Small Pistol

During the final combat of the novel, Maturin gives Villiers a small pistol and explains that she can use it to shoot rats by charging it with only half a charge. The implication is fairly obvious—the arm is not a viable weapon of self defense, but its small size is yet adequate for suicide. This gesture indicates that the outcome of the venture was in doubt, and Maturin wanted to shield Villiers from the last extremity of hanging for treason. Maturin retained a similar weapon in the surgeon's cockpit.



Themes

The Fortune of War

The novel is fairly episodic in construction—Aubrey and Maturin first turn in the Leopard, then seek passage on La Fleche, then are castaway and rescued, then help fight Java and are captured, then recuperate in Boston, then become embroiled in intrigues and escape, and finally help fight Shannon. Although the two combats described were historic events and the plot positions the two characters at the correct time and place to participate in them, there is little narrative necessity to the overarching construction. In general, the adventures and misadventures of Aubrey and Maturin—and later Villiers—are simply the fortune of war, as foreshadowed by the novel's title.

As with many elements of the narrative construction, however, the title has a subtle double meaning. Throughout the discussion of the war between America and England the dominant concern of most characters voicing any opinion is trade—money. Some characters comment on the cost of the war while others focus more on the money they are losing by idled international commerce. In this secondary sense, the 'fortune' of war is quite literally a fortune, and helps to explain why some men, such as George Herapath, are willing insofar as possible to contravene their nation's interest to shorten the war. This of course contrasts sharply with men like the ironically named Broke, who are voluntarily foregoing a veritable fortune of war to prosecute their duty.

Escape

The basic plot of the middle narrative arc involves an escape from imprisonment and possible execution. Indeed, nearly all of the events between the capture of HMS Java and the victory of HMS Shannon are focused on Aubrey's and Maturin's escape from America. At first, escape is only a nebulous ideal and Aubrey rather waits for parole and exchange while he recuperates. As Maturin's physical safety becomes precarious, however, escape becomes increasingly important. Much of the plot during this segment concerns an overly-complex escape planning carried on by George Herapath and, to some extent, by Aubrey. The plan rapidly becomes ridiculous and in the execution is completely collapses. Fortunately, Michael Herapath steps in and simply leads the escaping Aubrey, Maturin, and Villiers to a ship.

The escape is a desperate gambit but is the only plausible alternative to imminent death. Whether Maturin is shot during an escape attempt or shot against a wall matters little—in fact, the former is perhaps preferable. Aubrey is so deeply depressed by his captivity that seizing his future by the main chance is preferable to nearly any other alternative. Finally, Villiers is reasonably certain that Johnson will kill her or, barring that, discard her to the street. Thus, all three characters have plausible and strong motivation for pursuing the dangerous exploit.



Individual Responsibility in a Time of War

The war between America and England was largely unpopular and is represented as such throughout the novel. In fact, there is no character presented who is aggressively for the war except, perhaps, the French intelligence agents who realize it will draw off some of England's strength and attention. Aubrey and Maturin both deplore the war and feel that it is diverting England from all that is important. George Herapath and many other Bostonians are against the war because it interferes with their livelihood without offering substantive benefits. Even Harry Johnson thinks the war a trifle ridiculous though he commits himself entirely to victory. Against this backdrop of unpopular war, however, most individuals never falter in pursuing their own declared duty—they take personal responsibility for their actions. For example, Aubrey is entirely determined to achieve English victory against the Americans, even though many of the men he will be fighting are his acquaintances and even friends. Maturin continues his intelligence work with vigor. Lambert and Broke, of Java and Shannon, respectively, take strong actions to ensure English victory. On the other hand, men like Lawrence, of Chesapeake, represent the American cause with equal vigor.

Several other characters pursue a course not so easily categorized. Villiers is an American citizen but supports England—insofar as she supports any political cause. George Herapath is predominantly interested in his own profits, and is willing to help Aubrey escape even though doing so would be an act of treason. Meanwhile Michael Herapath pursues duty regarding his personal friendships despite the political consequences. Thus, the novel presents a rich range of individuals taking personal responsibility against a difficult political backdrop.

Style

Point of View

The novel is told from the third-person, limited, point of view. The narrator is reliable, entirely effaced, and unnamed. Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, the main characters, are the protagonists and central figures in all of the scenes in the novel—with Maturin being predominant in scenes set on land and Aubrey being predominant in scenes set on water. The narrator divulges some internal thoughts of the two protagonists, but not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are very infrequent and are used for characterization rather than plot development.

The third-person point of view allows Aubrey and Maturin to be presented in a highly sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays Maturin's offer of marriage as genuinely selfless rather than self-serving. The narrative also allows portrayal of characters' life situations as difficult but not pathetic. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. As both characters are roughly equal in significance, the third-person point of view also allows their textual representations to be roughly equivalent. Indeed, the structure of the novel and the method of plot development nearly require the use of a third-person point of view. Finally, the frequent appearance of minor characters is allowed through the point of view selected; it is carried throughout all of the novels of the series and is accessible and successful.

Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most enjoyable is shipboard in a British warship. Examples of these include *Leopard*, *La Fleche*, *Java*, and *Shannon*. *Leopard* is captained by Aubrey but he is merely a passenger on the remaining vessels. The novel presents Aubrey's leadership style in contrast to other men such as Lambert, Yorke, and Broke; in a parallel development Maturin's surgical approach is contrasted to the surgeons of *Java* and *Shannon*. One of the novel's achievements is the presentation of shipboard life as something intriguing and even desirable while simultaneously presenting a realistic view of the often horrible hardships endured.

The second setting presented in the novel is Boston, Massachusetts, during c. 1812. The city is described in general terms and several citizens are developed as characters. Boston is the principle setting for the middle part of the novel, and several establishments within the city are further developed, including Franchon's hotel, the *Asclepia*, George Herapath's house, and portions of the waterfront. Boston Harbor is particularly well described during Aubrey's, Maturin's, and Villiers' small-boat escape. While the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin.



Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simply and accessible. Standard English punctuation is used to indicate dialogue and interior thoughts and descriptive text are easily distinguished. Many of the places, objects, and events referenced in the narrative are identifiable as real geographical locations or historic events—notable the two major naval combats between HMS Java and USS Constitution and, later, between HMS Shannon and USS Chesapeake. It is notable that the novel was originally written and published in England and uses standard English punctuation and spelling styles which may somewhat unfamiliar to American readers but should pose no especial problem.

The novel becomes linguistically complex in two primary respects. First, when dealing with nautical events a somewhat complicated specialized language is used which includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques which are probably not particularly familiar to modern readers. The technical language is accurate and interesting and a reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of the text. Second, the novel makes frequent reference to various events which occur prior to the novel's opening, proper. In many cases, these events are detailed in a prior novel in the series and readers unfamiliar with these novels may find the references frustratingly vague.

Structure

The 329-page novel is divided into nine numbered chapters of roughly equal length though some chapters are noticeably longer than others. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. Of course references to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

The novel is intended to be read as part of a series of novels; specifically as the sixth novel in a series which extends to twenty volumes, with an unfinished but published twenty-first novel available. All but one of the principle characters presented in the novel, therefore, are recurring characters with backgrounds and histories developed in prior novels. Similarly, events happening prior to the scope of the current novel are often referenced. This structure may prove somewhat difficult for readers unfamiliar with the prior novels. Nevertheless, basic character glosses and event recaps are provided.

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, the main events in the novel are fictional or fictionalized events which could have occurred, or did occur, in the period of time used as the novel's setting; namely, the war between England and America during the year c. 1812. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, geography, et cetera, are all based upon historically accurate representations.



Quotes

'Maturin!' cried the politico, whipping off his green spectacles and grasping the doctor's hand. 'Maturin! By God, I am glad to see you. We had given you up for dead. How do you do? Achmet!' - clapping his hands - 'Coffee.'

'Wallis,' said Maturin, 'I am happy to find you here. How is your penis?' At their last meeting he had carried out an operation on this colleague in political and military intelligence, who wished to pass for a Jew: the operation, on an adult, had proved by no means so trifling as he or Wallis had supposed, and Stephen had long been haunted by thoughts of Gangrene.

Mr Wallis's delighted smile changed to gravity; a look of sincere self-commiseration came over his face, and he said that it had come along pretty well, but he feared it would never be quite the member it was. (p. 20)

They instantly dropped through the scuttle, Killick carrying what remnants of uniform Dr Maturin still possessed, a clean shirt and a comb, for he knew perfectly well what was afoot. Leopard's surgeon, mad with drink, had refused the Captain's invitation. It was confidently expected that Mr Warner would have him brought aft in irons, that his jaws would be prised open with a handspike and his dinner poured down his throat, whether or no; that he should be placed under close arrest, forbidden to move from his cabin for the remainder of the voyage and court-martialled the moment La Flèche reached Pompey. It was with a certain feeling of disappointment, of anticlimax, therefore that they saw him pass at a shambling run, square-ribbed and fairly trim, in his own captain's wake, at one minute to the hour.

'You will be civil?' Jack whispered in his ear at the cabin door.

Stephen's noncommittal sniff gave him no comfort, but immediately afterwards, he was relieved to see Stephen's courtly leg and bow, to hear his urbane 'Your servant, sir'. (p. 48)

Two weevils crept from the crumbs. 'You see those weevils, Stephen?' said Jack solemnly.

'I do.'

'Which would you choose?'

'There is not a scrap of difference. Arcades ambo. They are the same species of curculio, and there is nothing to choose between them.'

'But suppose you had to choose?'

'Then I should choose the right-hand weevil; it has a perceptible advantage in both length and breadth.'

'There I have you,' cried Jack. 'You are bit—you are completely dished. Don't you know that in the Navy you must always choose the lesser of two weevils? Oh ha, ha, ha, ha!' (pp. 54-55)

'Mr Forshaw,' he said. 'What is a sine?'



'A sine, sir,' said Forshaw, speaking very fast, 'is when you draw a right line from one end of an arc perpendicular upon the radius from the centre to the other end of the arc.' 'And what is its relation to the chord of that arc?'

Mr Forshaw looked wild, gazed about the day-cabin that Captain Yorke had given over to his guest, but found no help in its neat fittings, its skylight, nor in the nine-pounder gun that took up so much of its space, nor in the blank and hideous face of his companion, Holles, nor in the title of the novel *The Vicissitudes of Genteel Life: life aboard La Flèche* might not be particularly genteel but it was certainly full of vicissitudes. (p. 69)

'I am glad to hear it. Where the Devil would you be, if you neglected your Bible? Tell me, Mr Holles, who was Abraham?' Jack was particularly well u in this part of sacred history, having checked Admiral Drury's remarks on Sodom.

'Abraham, sir,' said Holles, his pasty, spotted face turning a nasty variegated purple.

'Why, Abraham was...' But no more emerged, other than a murmur of 'bosom'.

'Mr Peters?' Mr Peters expressed his conviction that Abraham was a very good man; perhaps a corn-chandler, since one said 'Abraham and his seed for ever.'

'Mr Forshaw?'

'Abraham, sir?' said Forshaw, whose spirits had recovered with their usual speed. 'Oh, he was only an ordinary wicked Jew.'

Jack fixed him with his eye. Was Forshaw making game of him? Probably, judging from the extreme innocence of his face. 'Bonden,' he called, and his coxswain, who was waiting outside the door with sailcloth and rope-yarn to learn the young gentlemen to make foxes, walked in. 'Bonden, seize Mr Forshaw to the gun, and know me that rope's end.' (pp. 70-71)

'You have had bad news, brother?'

'Of course I have,' said Jack in a low, vehement tone. 'Surely you have heard?'

'Not I.'

'I will put it in half a dozen words: it don't bear dwelling on,' said Jack, putting down his untasted cup. 'Tom Dacres, in *Guerrière*, thirty-eight, met the American Constitution, forty-four, brought her to action of course; and was beat. Dismasted, taken, and burnt. Then their sloop *Wasp*, eighteen, tackled our brig *Frolic*, of almost exactly the same weight of metal, and took her too. Then United States, forty-four, and our Macedonian, thirty-eight, had a fight off the Azores, and Macedonian struck to the Americans. Two of our frigates and a sloop have struck to the Americans, and not one of theirs to us.' (p. 97)

Stephen said that Mr. Johnson was too kind, too indulgent by far: yet it was a fact that in the matter of boobies he had been more fortunate than most men—the merit, if merit there were, lay in circumstances, not in himself. He had been marooned on a tropical island during the height of their breeding-season, and he had of necessity grown intimate with most of the species.

'We are very poor in boobies, alas,' said Johnson. 'With great good fortune, when I was



off the Dry Tortugas, I managed to secure one of the blue-faced sort, but the white-bellied I have never seen, far less your red-legged species, or the spotted Peruvian.' 'Yet on the other hand, you have your skimmers—you have your wonderfully curious anhinga.' (p. 186)

The big frigate, looking perfectly enormous in the fog, moved steadily across the smooth harbor; a freak of the breeze or some odd echo brought the cry 'Up and down, sir' clear to the open window, and it was followed by the crisp orders.

'Hook the cat.'

'Man the cat.'

'Off nippers.'

'Away with the cat.'

'Hook the fish.'

'Away with the fish.'

'Haul taut and bitt the cable.'

In a single movement the President dropped and sheeted home her topsails; and the Congress did the same. (p. 191)

'Joe,' came a voice from the darknes under the Arcturus's stern. 'Joe. Are youse a -going out?'

'I ain't Joe,' said Jack.

'Who are you, then?' asked the boat, now visible.

'Jack.'

'Where's Joe?'

'Gone to Salem.'

'Are youse a-going out, Jack?'

'Maybe.'

'You got any bait, Jack?'

'No.'

'Well, fuck you, Jack.'

'And fuck you too, mate,' said Jack mildly. He watched the boat scull clear, hoist its sail, quietly swearing, and glide away on the slack water. Then he went below, groping along aft to the bread-room. He saw light showing through the joints in the hinged sheet, tapped, and heard Diana's low voice, 'Who is it?' (p. 270)

'You are cursed snappish tonight, Jack,' said Stephen. 'How do you expect me to understand your altumal cant, without pondering on it? I do not expect you to understand medical jargon, without giving you time to consider the etymology, for all love.'

'Not to know the odds between a halliard and a sheet, after all these years at sea: it passes human understanding,' said Jack.

'You are a reasonably civil, complaisant creature on dry land,' said Stephen, 'but the moment you are afloat you become pragmatical and absolute, a bashaw—do this, do that, bluppit the prawling strangles, there—no longer a social being at all. It is no doubt



the effect of the long-continued habit of command; but it cannot be considered amiable.' (p. 272)

'Are you any kin to the Captain Littlejohn of the Berwick?' he asked.

'Yes, sir,' said the youth, quickly swallowing, 'he was my father.'

'Ah,' said Jack, wishing he had asked some other question. 'We were shipmates once, long ago, in Euterpe: a thorough seaman. I do not suppose,' he said, considering Littlejohn's age, his lack of emotion, and the year the French took the Berwick, 'I do not suppose you remember him very clearly?'

'No, sir: not at all.'

'Could you eat another chop?'

'Oh yes, sir, if you please.'

Jack thought of his own boy, still in coats: some day, would George reply to the same question in the same words, with the same decent but unmoved gravity, and continue eating with the same undiminished appetite? (p. 306)

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Topics for Discussion

The novel's title, *The Fortune of War*, is a colloquial phrase of frequent use. Describe events in the novel that properly can be attributed to the fortune of war. Might the title also be interpreted different? How?

The novel presents a fair amount of toilet humor—Maturin's opponent in love is named Harry Johnson, and Harry Johnson admires Maturin's expertise with boobies. Discuss how this type of bawdy humor functions to make the narrative accessible to a modern reader.

Maturin has burned with intimate desire for Villiers for many years, yet as he hides in her bed he realizes that the flame of love has gone out. Villiers remains a close friend and trusted ally, but she is no longer the object of his desire. Discuss the nature of love in the novel.

In one scene a gruff lieutenant admires the beauty—the physical beauty—of a young midshipman. Maturin ponders the difficulties arising from homosexual attraction for sailors living in close proximity for years at a time. Do you think that the modern navy is similar to the old navy regarding homosexuality?

In Boston, Maturin invites a black man into a particular hotel and the black man laughs at him and walks away into the morning fog. Maturin appears oblivious to the reason. Also in Boston, Maturin greets an American Indian porter with the phrase "Ugh," explaining that he believed it to be a valid greeting because of various fictional portrayals. Discuss how racism varies between America and England. In the novel, are the Irish subject to racism by the English?

The novel portrays lightly fictionalized versions of numerous historic events, including primarily the combats between HMS *Java* and USS *Constitution*, and between HMS *Shannon* and USS *Chesapeake*. Discuss how 'historical fiction' functions at the intersection of fact and fiction.

Maturin coldly murders Pontet-Canet and Dubreuil, realizing that if he does not he will surely be captured, tortured, and murdered. Yet, he feels cold and dehumanized by his actions. Throughout the entire novel are scenes of combat and destruction, but they do not impact Maturin in the same way. Contrast how personal involvement in violence is different from a more abstracted involvement in violence.

After reading the novel, why do you think Johnson and Herapath find Wogan more attractive than Villiers while Maturin finds Villiers much more attractive than Wogan?