Hornblower During the Crisis Study Guide

Hornblower During the Crisis by C. S. Forester

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Commander Horatio Hornblower transfers command of Hotspur to a replacement officer and then takes passage to England aboard a supply ship. He is shortly joined by the officers of Hotspur, which has run aground and foundered. As the supply ship sails for England a French privateer attempts a capture. Hornblower formulates an audacious surprise counter-attack on the French vessel and disables it, allowing the supply ship to escape. In addition, Hornblower captures a large store of secret French documents. In England, Hornblower becomes involved in a plot to utilize the captured documents to introduce forged orders to the French fleet. Hornblower travels to France and, acting as a spy, places the forged documents into the French naval communication stream where they cause the French fleet to sortie, leading to the triumphant English victory at Trafalgar.

Hornblower has just completed a two-year tour of duty commanding Hotspur in the shoaling and tricky waters of the approach to Brest, as part of the blockading English fleet. In the opening of the novel, he transfers command to Meadows and then takes passage aboard Princess, a water-hoy bound for England. The very next day, however, Meadows runs Hotspur aground and the sloop founders, breaks up and is lost. While Princess awaits a fair wind, a court-martial ensues and Meadows is reprimanded. Meadows and the other former officers of Hotspur are subsequently transferred to Princess for transport back to England. After several days aboard the exasperatingly over-crowded Princess, the wind makes fair for England and the supply ship departs.

A few days later Princess is chased down by a French privateer. As night falls the privateer overtakes the water-hoy and the English vessel heaves to while the French privateer sends a prize boat. Hornblower quickly proposes an audacious plan. The French prize crew is captured, and the many Hotspur supernumeraries take to the boats and close on the French privateer in the dark. The French privateer, expecting the water-hoy to be crewed by perhaps ten men, is lackadaisical in security. Rather quickly, the English take the upper deck of the French privateer. They disable the ship by cutting rigging, capture a large store of secret documents and then flee back to Princess and escape.

In England, Hornblower turns the documents over to the admiralty. They prove of great worth and a plot of intrigue is conceived. Acting as a servant to a Spanish Count, Hornblower captures forged documents—enabled by copying the just-captured French codes—and travels to France. Although plagued by a crisis of conscience about acting as a spy, Hornblower carries out his duty. In France, the forged documents are secretly introduced into the French navy's command communiqués. They are subsequently delivered to Admiral Villeneuve, who sorties with the French fleet. Villeneuve's fleet subsequently encounters Nelson's fleet and the resultant combat—known to history as Trafalgar—proves gloriously victorious for the English.

The text also includes two short stories. The first, "Hornblower's Temptation," relates an episode in Hornblower's early career as a junior lieutenant. He is appointed to watch

over a condemned man prior to execution. The man attempts to fool Hornblower into delivering a revolutionary message to Ireland, but Hornblower discovers the trick and averts unwitting assistance. The second, "The Last Encounter," relates an episode near the end of Hornblower's life as a retired admiral. His evening at home is interrupted by a traveler requesting assistance. The traveler introduces himself as Napoleon. Hornblower and Brown want to throw him out, but Barbara requests forbearance. Hornblower provides the requested assistance and later realizes the traveler was in fact Napoleon the Third, returning to France from exile in the United Kingdom to engage in national politics.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Commander Horatio Hornblower transfers command of Hotspur to a replacement officer and then takes passage to England aboard a supply ship. He is shortly joined by the officers of Hotspur, which has run aground and foundered. As the supply ship sails for England, a French privateer attempts a capture. Hornblower formulates an audacious surprise counter-attack on the French vessel and disables it, allowing the supply ship to escape. In addition, he captures a large store of secret French documents. In England, Hornblower becomes involved in a plot to utilize the captured documents to introduce forged orders to the French fleet. Hornblower travels to France and, acting as a spy, places the forged documents into the French naval communication stream, which orders the French fleet to sortie, leading to the triumphant English victory at Trafalgar.

When the unfinished novel opens, Lieutenant Hornblower is commander of HM Sloop Hotspur. He has just completed a two-year tour of duty, which is related in a previous volume of the series. Hotspur's primary function is to serve as the forward lookout for the Channel fleet, which blockades a French squadron in the harbor of Brest. Hornblower has drilled Hotspur's crew into an efficient mechanism and has come to heavily rely upon his good friend and Hotspur's lieutenant, William Bush. But now, Hornblower surrenders command to his replacement, James Percival Meadows. Meadows appears competent, if slightly cocksure, and as the water-hoy Princess resupplies Hotspur with nineteen tons of water, Meadows reads his orders and assumes command. Hornblower introduces Meadows to Bush and executes the formalities of command change. He then crosses over to Princess and informs her captain, Baddlestone, that he has been ordered to seek passage to England upon the returning empty hoy. Baddlestone is gruff and slightly insulting and surprises Hornblower by demanding a considerable sum for provisions on the voyage. Hornblower is confused about such technical matters and agrees to a remarkably large amount as payment. He then looks over at Hotspur and realizes she is no longer his responsibility; he muses that he will likely never see Bush again. He feels relief at discharging the responsibility for maneuvering Hotspur throughout the complicated, shoaling waters of the approach to Brest.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The initial chapter is critical to an understanding of the novel. It introduces all the principle characters presented in the unfinished novel, establishes the dominant setting as the Royal Navy at sea and sets the tone and texture of the narrative. Hornblower, the main character and protagonist in the series of novels, is a lieutenant acting as commander of Hotspur. His recent achievements have led to a promise of promotion to captain—post captain—but such promises are often dropped on the floor by the admiralty. Hornblower faces a doubtful future. As Hornblower turns over command, he is

fretful and strained, though his intimate friendship with Bush is unmistakable during their brief interactions.

The chapter provides some heavy foreshadowing of several elements of the narrative. First, Meadows is perfunctory in relieving Hornblower and assuming command. This casual dismissal of Hornblower does not bode well and indicates Meadows will not be successful in the immediate future. He should seek to gain knowledge from Hornblower rather than seeking to present an effected, infallible façade to the crew. Second, Hornblower is immensely relieved to be free of the responsibility for conning Hotspur throughout the area it must often patrol. This contrasts sharply with Hornblower's regret at leaving command—obviously, the most difficult aspect, by far, of his command has been keeping Hotspur off the bottom amid the shoaling and dangerous waters of the approach to Brest. Meadows' willful ignorance of the danger combines, along with Hornblower's evident relief, to strongly foreshadow Hotspur's imminent danger. Second, the narrative phrasing of Hornblower's musing that he will probably never again see Bush hints that the opposite is likely true. Finally, Baddlestone's penurious manner and grizzled, but informed attitude, indicate that, with time, Hornblower will come to terms with the apparently aloof captain of the water hoy.

Chapters 2 and 3

Chapters 2 and 3 Summary

Hornblower examines his tiny cabin aboard Princess. Although very cramped, it is at least private. The water-hoy, built to carry a tremendous load, rides very high in the water once emptied of its cargo. The many empty barrels in the hold cannot be filled with seawater as ballast because that would contaminate them for future use. Thus, Princess bobs like a cork, and the crank vessel yaws, rolls, and pitches in a very disagreeable way. Within minutes, Hornblower is seasick. He ponders his personal future. He has been promised a promotion to post captain but wonders if the promotion will actually be given. There are many, many captains waiting for a command. Even if promoted, as the most-junior captain he may simply sit ashore and watch the war pass him by.

Hornblower returns to deck just as a large English fleet passes by. Baddlestone is much better informed than Hornblower and explains the strategic situation. The French fleet, commanded by Villeneuve, escaped from the Mediterranean some weeks previously. Pursued by Nelson, Villeneuve reached the West Indies and then turned around, heading for Ferrol. Nelson, in hot pursuit, is unlikely to catch Villeneuve. The passing fleet is commanded by Calder; he has been sent to intercept the returning French fleet when, it is hoped, it will be destroyed by Calder with assistance from the Channel fleet. Stragglers will be destroyed by Nelson. Baddlestone flatly states that everyone in England knows of this situation. Hornblower is horrified that such vital strategic information is common knowledge.

For several hours dirty weather blows Princess against her course, and only a shifting wind allows her to finally regain her position within the fleet. The next morning Hornblower wakes up, despairing of ever returning home. Then he is delivered a summons to a court-martial. He learns that within hours of handing over command of Hotspur, the sloop had run aground on Black Rock and had been holed on a rock by the ebbing tide. The next rising tide had rolled her off the rock, and, filled with water, she had sunk with no loss of life. Hornblower dresses and reports to the court-martial aboard a ship-of-the-line. He offers testimony which tends to exonerate Meadows; Hornblower notes the difficult local conditions and tricky tides and currents in the area. He also establishes that Hotspur's proper station was in the general area of Black Rock. But, responding to a question, Hornblower admits he guided Hotspur into the same area nearly every other night for two years without incident. Meadows has quite obviously made a navigational mistake, which has ended catastrophically.

Chapters 2 and 3 Analysis

The strategic situation established in Chapter 2 is vital to the remainder of the narrative; unfortunately, the ultimate resolution of this paradigm remains among the unwritten

portion of the novel. Nelson is unable to catch Villeneuve and Calder fails to intercept him, necessitating some action to cause Villeneuve, in the future, to escape from safe harbor. Hornblower's amazement that such vital information is public knowledge on the streets of London foreshadows his later capture of French secret information. Though the French government is tyrannical and abusive, it clearly maintains a much tighter control over state secrets than the liberal English government. Hornblower mulls this over as he becomes seasick due to Princess' erratic motion. Note that Hornblower is coming off two years' sea duty and yet becomes seasick within minutes—obviously, Princess is not a comfortable vessel. She is also not very handy and bad weather blows her far off course; she must then regain her prior station; thus, after a few days she is no nearer England.

Then Hornblower receives the foreshadowed news—his beloved sloop Hotspur has gone hard aground on a falling tide. The rocky bottom has holed her, and upon the rising tide, she has rolled and sunk. Fortunately, the accident occurred without loss of life. When a commander loses a vessel, a court-martial is automatically convened to inquire after the event. Hornblower is summoned to offer expert testimony at Meadows' court-martial. He tries to largely excuse Meadows' loss of Hotspur by noting the difficult conditions of wind and wave in the patrol area, but Hornblower's success over two years, with the same ship, crew and conditions, is clearly damning evidence despite his testimony. Note that Hornblower also has a vested interest in defending Meadows because Bush's fate is linked to Meadows' fate. And yet Hornblower does not prevaricate or offer extenuating circumstances which are not true. The entire court-martial presentation heavily foreshadows Meadows' verdict of guilty, which is delivered in the next chapter. It also establishes Hornblower's expert seamanship and navigational abilities—a fact which the self-critical Hornblower, typically, does not realize.

Chapters 4 and 5

Chapters 4 and 5 Summary

Hornblower returns to Princess and wonders how long it will take to be informed of the court-martial through official channels. He is spared the wait, however, when Baddlestone receives the news within the hour. Meadows has been found guilty and will be issued a reprimand—the least severe response with a guilty plea. Still, it will ruin his career, and he will not see another command. Bush and Prowse, the sailing master, are cleared. Within a few hours Meadows, Bush, Prowse and a dozen other warrant officers from Hotspur board Princess, accompanied by about a dozen rated seamen. The Hotspur officers are returning to England to seek reappointment. The rated seamen are injured, ruptured or being returned to England following illegal impress. Baddlestone begins to demand payment for fare when Meadows flatly states the payment rates established by the admiralty will be adhered to; Hornblower is amazed to discover that Baddlestone has been charging him 126 times the legally established daily amount.

With the new additions and her crew, Princess holds about thirty men; she is desperately overcrowded and Hornblower's erstwhile private cabin is given over to a sleeping room. The many men use 'watch-and-watch' to access the limited hammocks; that is, they are divided into two watches and each alternately spends four hours sleeping and four hours huddled on deck, and then repeat. For days Princess blows back and forth awaiting a favorable wind for England. The naval officers grow restless and pass the time criticizing Baddlestone, Princess and the wind. Finally, a fair wind arises and they begin to make for home.

After a few days a sail is spotted, and it gives chase. Princess turns and runs. Soon they realize it is a brig, and then they discern it is a Frenchman. After a while it becomes obvious that the French brig of war will overtake Princess about nightfall. Hornblower formulates a plan, noting that there are thirty men aboard while the French ship will anticipate perhaps a half-dozen. The man men huddle below deck to maintain this erroneous belief as the French brig continues to close. Meadows, the senior naval officer, assumes command but adopts Hornblower's plan wholesale. Meadows realizes that should the plan succeed, his failure will be tempered by later success. Baddlestone, fearing the loss of a ship which he largely owns, agrees to the plan even though it is audaciously desperate. The men arm themselves with what weapons or instruments are available.

Chapters 4 and 5 Analysis

The fortunes of war result in unlikely situations. Having turned over command of Hotspur to Meadows only days before, Meadows now joins Hornblower as a passenger on Princess. Meadows must return to England where his career will be ruined by failure. He will not command again and will spend his days ashore on half pay. He realizes this

as well as every man aboard, and Meadows spends his time aloof, brooding and ill tempered. Bush, Prowse, and the other officers exonerated by the court-martial will likewise return to England but there they can expect, with good luck, to pick up another position. The conditions aboard Princess, already unpleasant, become like torture for Hornblower. Deprived of privacy and even space, he is simply cargo aboard Princess as she blows back and forth awaiting a favorable wind.

Finally progress is made, but of course the fortunes of war again intervene. Princess is sighted and chased by a French brig. In any gunfire exchange, the French ship will prevail—Princess' only hope lies in flight. Unfortunately, she handles like a log and cannot escape from the French ship. Hornblower, ever the tactician, notes that the capture most likely will be completed just after dark. He also realizes the French ship will expect no resistance once the chase concludes, and these two facts compound in his mind to generate an audacious and desperate plan. As Hornblower is still, technically, a lieutenant, Meadows takes command. He is wise enough to realize Hornblower's plan is sound, though, and adopts it wholesale. Meadows' court-martial could be materially tempered should he be successful in executing Hornblower's plan. Baddlestone owns the ship and would lose all his personal wealth were it to be captured. Thus, all the principle players desire to resist French capture, no matter the consequence. The fact that Meadows will command is irrelevant—as Hornblower has conceived the plan, so the narrative foreshadows success. That the men arms themselves indicates the plan features violence. It is critical to the plot to note that the French brig is not a privateer, but a ship of the French Navy.

Chapters 6 and 7

Chapters 6 and 7 Summary

Princess heaves-to and wallows in the falling darkness, while Hornblower, Meadows and Baddlestone put their plan into action. The French brig sends a prize crew to Princess. When the longboat arrives, Hornblower tells them to board. As they gain the deck they are knocked down and silenced, one by one, until all the men are captured. English sailors then drop quickly into the French longboat and kill the crew. Princess' boat is quickly launched and the two boats are filled with armed men. They row back to the French brig and board her—Hornblower muses that his boat is rowed nearly entirely by officers. The unsuspecting French ship is stormed by surprise and the thirty Englishmen quickly sweep the deck, killing about forty French sailors. Meadows charges the French captain, and as the Frenchman thrusts his rapier through Meadows' heart, Meadows crushes the Frenchman's skull with a huge blow; both men die instantly. After the brief but intense melee, the hatches are battened down, sealing the off watch below deck.

Baddlestone and Hornblower confer as the ship is secured. Within minutes, the off guard begins to batter the hatches. Hornblower calculates there must be fifty armed Frenchmen below. Ready for combat, they will prove a formidable opponent to the thirty Englishmen. As long as they can be contained below, however, the ship can be held. But within minutes the Frenchmen begin firing muskets upwards, through the deck; begin hacking at the hatches with axes; and cut the tiller ropes making the ship uncontrollable from the deck. Hornblower and Baddlestone quickly concur that holding the ship is unfortunately untenable. Baddlestone suggests they burn the ship, but Hornblower, aghast at burning men alive, declines. Instead, he orders the English sailors to wreck the ship. They slash the running and standing rigging, causing spars to fall and masts to lean—the French ship will not be captured, but is certainly disabled. While the Englishmen wreck the ship, Hornblower goes to the captain's cabin and forces open the locked desk. He removes many papers, a letter book, the ship's log, and a curious, weighted and sealed packet. He packages these documents for transport, and then Baddlestone loads one deck nine-pounder with canister shot. As the Englishmen pile into the boats to depart, Baddlestone points the cannon down the main hatchway which is full of Frenchmen trying to get up on deck. He discharges the canister shot at point blank range. As Baddlestone leaps from the French brig, Hornblower can hear many men screaming in agony. The two boats quickly row away from the wrecked French brig.

Hornblower, the senior surviving naval officer, finishes his written after-action report as Princess, about thirty hours after attacking the French brig, gains port. Hornblower speaks to Baddlestone about the captured papers and suggests that Baddlestone must turn them over to the admiralty. A confused Baddlestone declines, noting that Hornblower will gain substantial professional prestige by turning over the papers. Hornblower goes ashore and finds it to be an unreal place, full of what he terms

nightmare clarity. Sound, wind and society are all different in strange ways. He writes and sends a letter to Maria and then says goodbye to the men. He reports to the port admiral, Rear Admiral Harry "Dreadnaught" Foster. Fosters examines the documents and retains them all except for the sealed packet. This he entrusts to Hornblower and orders a post-chaise for London. Hornblower leaves the admiralty and boards the post-chaise, stopping for only a few moments to greet Maria. After a tearful and brief meeting, Hornblower departs. He finds the transition confusing and exhausting—just hours before he had been hacking apart Frenchmen, and now he watches Maria's receding, tearful face with his infant son in her arms.

Chapters 6 and 7 Analysis

The unfinished novel's climax of action occurs during this segment, though doubtless there would have been others had the novel been completed. Hornblower's plan is based around typical naval usage of the time. Once a pursued vessel heaves-to, it is a tacit admission of defeat and capture. The pursuing vessel would then send over a prize crew to take control of the capture and sail her into some nearby port for disposal. It is obviously the capturing ship's responsibility to ensure the prize is secured in reality. The French brig demonstrates laxity in this, and assumes that having pursued and closed, the English water-hoy the capture is complete. The prize crew mounts Princess' deck only to be knocked out one by one, and then the longboat's crew is likewise captured. Typically, after rowing the prize crew to the prize, the ship's boat would return to the capturing vessel. Thus, the longboat's return occasions no surprise. Princess' boat hangs back a little and is concealed by the darkness. The French ship has about half of her men on deck for the capture, and of these apparently none are particularly alert. Thus, Meadows' first boatload of Englishmen easily gains the deck and with their first discharge of musketry kills or disables about one-third of the Frenchmen on deck. Before the survivors can regroup, Hornblower's contingent mounts from a different point and kills about a dozen more men with an initial volley. Subsequently the remaining perhaps dozen Frenchmen are easily mastered by the thirty English sailors. The deck is captured apparently without loss or injury to the Englishmen.

The long-term retention of the ship is impossible, however. The fifty Frenchmen below deck arm themselves and spoil for a fight. Hornblower realizes that his forces are unlikely to triumph without severe losses. Discretion being the better part of valor, the Englishmen retire to Princess and make good their escape. Within hours, Hornblower is back in England and looking at Maria and his infant son Horatio. His bewilderment at being ashore, and the strangeness of his perceptions, evoke a modern sensibility to contemplate if he is suffering from post-traumatic stress.

Hornblower and Baddlestone have surmised that the captured papers are valuable; in particular, the sealed and weighted packet is interesting. The weighted nature suggests it to be of a secret nature; in the event of imminent capture, the bearer would throw it overboard. The weights would insure that the packet would sink. Baddlestone could profit somewhat by handing over the documents; Hornblower could—and does—profit a great deal by handing over the documents. As always, Hornblower properly suggests

Baddlestone bear the documents. Baddlestone by now has been won over by Hornblower and allows the younger man to deliver the documents. The port admiral, "Dreadnaught" Foster, is a lightly-fictionalized representation of a historic person. That he does not open the packet signifies a great deal; he believes it is too important for a 'mere' admiral to review and forwards it—along with Hornblower—to the admiralty. This action heavily foreshadows the document's momentous import. That Hornblower is attached to the document also suggests that his future fate will be altered because of it.

Chapters 8 and 9, and the Author's Note

Chapters 8 and 9, and the Author's Note Summary

Hornblower rides all night and arrives at a cheap London hotel in the morning. He washes, dresses and reports to the admiralty. He is admitted to a waiting room, sits down, quickly falls asleep, and has confused dreams bordering on nightmares. He is then escorted into the presence of Mr. Marsden, the secretary to the admiralty, and Mr. Barrow, the assistant secretary. He makes a complete report and presents the sealed packet. Marsden believes it to be authentic and not a ruse de guerre. He hands it off to a specialist to open and examine. While it is being opened, Marsden tells Hornblower that Calder has intercepted Villeneuve but has bungled the encounter; with slight loss, Villeneuve has gained safe harbor in Ferrol with a combined fleet of about twenty ships. The news is devastating to England's interests. Hornblower casually mentions that he was a prisoner of war at Ferrol for about two years. Marsden and Hornblower discuss conditions at Ferrol, and Hornblower again casually mentions that he speaks Spanish. Marsden is evidently impressed with Hornblower's intelligence and powers of observation.

The specialist returns with the document. It was sealed with the newest seals of empire, which have been copied. It is signed by Napoleon using a new style of signature, which has never been seen before in England. Marsden studies the document and comments upon its style and wonders aloud what it might say. Hornblower casually translates the document, again surprising Marsden by his ability to read French. They discuss the letter; it is of no real import aside from the signatures and seals. As Marsden and Barrow drift into related conversation, the exhausted Hornblower allows his reticence to slip and blurts out that the seals, signature and style of the document would allow false orders to be issued to Villeneuve, who would likely believe them authentic. Marsden considers Hornblower's suggestion and quickly determines it is a good idea. The three men form further plans and summon an imprisoned forger for assistance. Marsden sends a secretary to find a certain Count Miranda, who will be somehow involved and then dismisses Hornblower to seek sleep. Hornblower returns to his hotel and sleeps for many hours. When he wakes, he gets breakfast and overhears many people who speak indignantly about Calder's failure—some suggest he should be shot. He reads a full account in the newspaper, which is highly critical of Calder's actions.

Hornblower returns to the admiralty as directed and learns that Lord Barham, the first sea-lord, has approved of the plan. Hornblower joins Marsden and Barrow while they interview the Reverend Doctor Claudius, a forger convicted to death by hanging. In exchange for commuting the sentence, Claudius agrees to execute the forgery. He delivers a lengthy monologue on the techniques of forgery. Later, the plan is developed in more detail and finally Marsden suggests that it should naturally be executed by Hornblower. Hornblower considers the implications of acting as a spy and wonders if it is the right thing to do. Marsden states that Hornblower will be promoted to post-captain immediately if he accepts the assignment. Hornblower considers his options very briefly

before announcing "'I'll do it'" (p. 123). Marsden continues to develop the plan, noting that Hornblower will shortly meet Count Miranda. After several more minutes, Hornblower is again dismissed. He walks out of the admiralty and ponders the fact that he will shortly be a spy.

The completed portion of the novel abruptly ends at this point. The unfinished novel is followed by a one-page presentation of errata compiled from the author's notes. Hornblower trains for his mission and brushes up on Spanish. He poses as Count Miranda's servant and travels to Spain. They somehow introduce the letter into the command structure, and Villeneuve receives it and treats it as if it were genuine. Following the false orders, he sorties with the combined fleet and encounters Nelson's fleet at Trafalgar. Hornblower's plan has thus altered the course of history.

Chapters 8 and 9, and the Author's Note Analysis

Sea-lords, more properly Lords Commissioners of the Admiralty, such as Barham, were appointed to lead naval function and served terms usually spanning a few years. The First Secretary of the Admiralty, such as Marsden, was also appointed, but typically served long terms. All the men indicated—Barham, Marsden, and Barrow—are lightly-fictionalized representations of historic persons occupying the indicated military positions during the time period discussed in the novel. Hornblower notes that the rather short terms of sea-lords led to the office being somewhat less effective than that of the longer-tenured secretaries; humorously, Marsden was one of the shortest-serving secretaries of the period.

Marsden has the secret packet opened by an expert in such things, and this process takes some time. During this period, Marsden, Barrow and Hornblower hold what appears to be casual conversation. Calder's bungling combat is discussed, and Hornblower makes several minor comments that happen to impact his future greatly—he mentions he is intimately familiar with Ferrol, the very harbor where Villeneuve shelters; he mentions he speaks Spanish, and he demonstrates that he can read French. Marsden is suitably impressed. Thus, when Hornblower generates and proposes the plan for falsifying orders, Marsden naturally proposes that Hornblower execute his own plan. The process of appointing an individual to post-captain rank was somewhat involved and very political. Posting Hornblower via the Sea Fencibles (a naval force, which protected England from invasion by Napoleon) would obviate much of the red tape involved.

The meeting with Claudius is described in considerable detail and seems fairly out of place within the narrative. One wonders if the author intended Claudius to recur in the narrative or if, perhaps, upon a final edit the encounter would have been reduced in prominence. As it stands, Claudius is an interesting, but fairly inconsequential, character in the narrative. His lengthy monologue about forging techniques is interesting but is not well-integrated with the remainder of the extant narrative. Likewise, the references to Count Miranda are not developed in the text, and one only wonders the exact role the gentleman was to play in the intrigue. Further, it can be speculated that several

elements within the segment provide heavy foreshadowing—perhaps the nature of the forgery is such that it can be detected; perhaps Count Miranda is more than he seems, but without the remainder of the novel available, such can only be mere speculation.

Much of the latter portion of Chapter 9 is devoted to Hornblower's impending crisis of conscience about acting as a spy. He muses that in Spain, spies are executed by garroting, a particular unpleasant way to be killed, and the prospect of facing an ignominious and painful death is obviously not appealing. Further, behaving as a spy is not at all what Hornblower is about. His life has been dedicated to the quite obvious fulfillment of a public role of prominence. Coupled with his recent disorientation upon returning to a non-combat life ashore, he finds the entire prospect confusing and daunting. It is this crisis which informs the title of the novel. Yet England, too, faces a crisis brought about by Calder's failure to destroy Villeneuve's fleet. Whether actually bungled or not, the encounter is perceived as having gone dreadfully wrong for England and hence as a French victory at sea. Fortunately, England has Hornblower and he will correct Calder's mistake in due time. The historic events of Trafalgar are common knowledge, and the great English victory ensured the empire's continued existence. Though not a direct participant, the redoubtable Hornblower is nevertheless intimately involved with the event.

Hornblower's Temptation

Hornblower's Temptation Summary

The Channel Fleet shelters in Tor Boy through a period of dirty weather. Hornblower, at about twenty-three years of age, is the most-junior lieutenant aboard HMS Renown, commanded by Captain Sawyer. Prior to the foul weather Renown had captured a French ship, and the prize is anchored nearby. When the weather moderates, signals bloom out all around the fleet. Hornblower, as the signal lieutenant, is responsible for communications. He is therefore very aware when the lieutenant of the prize crew comes aboard and speaks to Sawyer. Within minutes, Sawyer summons Hornblower, and many signals are hoisted. Renown's recent prize, the French brig Epérance, held one Barry I. McCool. Hornblower quickly learns that McCool was an Irish revolutionary who escaped hanging by joining the Royal Navy under the alias of O'Shaughnessy, only to subsequently desert and join the French Navy. Sawyer calls for an immediate court-martial. As preparations are made, Hornblower considers Ireland's unfortunate plight; though largely uneducated on the matter, he remains ambivalent about England's dominance.

Some minutes later, Sawyer appoints Hornblower to a special duty; he is to watch over McCool and ensure that he does not escape, that he does not commit suicide and that he does not make any incendiary communication with the crew of Renown, which is about one-quarter Irish. McCool is brought on board; he is a well-formed man with long red hair, strong, with an easy charisma. Hornblower interviews McCool in the brig and finds him calm, polite, and likable. McCool sits in the brig atop his large sea-chest, an impressive and massive affair made from solid slabs of mahogany. The top of the sea chest is boldly emblazoned with large, raised mahogany letters spelling 'B I McCOOL'. Soon enough, a special envoy from the admiral arrives and thoroughly searches McCool's person and chest, as well as the brig; he pronounces it safe. Some time later, the court-martial takes a mere fifteen minutes to find McCool guilty and sentence him to death by hanging. Hornblower then receives a lecture from Admiral Cornwallis, who stresses that McCool must not be allowed to make any speeches or incendiary statements—for such might incite general mutiny amongst the fleet.

Hornblower wonders how best to approach the subject and finally decides an honest approach is advisable. He therefore flatly informs McCool that no speeches will be allowed and that, if necessary, he will have McCool's mouth sealed with tow. McCool considers the matter and proposes a bargain—if Hornblower will deliver a final letter and his massive sea-chest to McCool's widow, McCool will promise to go to his execution in silence. Hornblower considers and then agrees. McCool spends several hours laboring over a letter and then hands it to Hornblower. Hornblower reads the letter and finds that it contains platitudes and a bizarre poem full of strange imagery but devoid of much meaning. In the morning, McCool is hung and, true to his word, goes to his death silently. The weather breaks, and the fleet quickly returns to blockading stations in the English Channel.

Hornblower moves the sea-chest into his berth and spends the next weeks contemplating the letter and the chest. Something about the poem troubles him as he re-reads it several times. He searches the chest several times but finds it to be merely a massive mahogany box full of a sailor's miscellany. Then, suddenly, Hornblower has an epiphany. He re-reads the poem and realizes that it contains secret instructions on how to manipulate the raised letters atop the sea-chest. Following the instructions, Hornblower opens a secret compartment in the chest, which contains a list of Irish revolutionaries, some posters proclaiming revolution and a vast store of high-denomination banknotes. Hornblower leaves this all in the compartment and begins a long period of agonizing over what to do. He finds the vast store of cash very tempting and wonders about taking it all for his personal use. He also thinks about how McCool nearly tricked him into sparking an Irish revolution. Finally he decides that duty must prevail, and he has some hands haul the chest on deck and fling it overboard. It sinks, laden with money, into the seas. Later, Hornblower frets about McCool's widow being deprived of her husband's final things and then is shocked to learn that McCool was a bachelor. Indeed, the address specified must—Hornblower reasons—belong to an Irish revolutionary establishment.

Hornblower's Temptation Analysis

The short story displays a young Hornblower at his best—intelligent, compassionate and entirely devoted to duty. The story opens with the establishment of setting and the rationale for the plot which follows—a storm has concentrated the fleet alongside of some prizes, and there is a lull in the blockade. The plot is further developed by the introduction of McCool; in reality, Hornblower and McCool are the only two characters in the entire story—everybody else is merely a plot device. McCool is presented as an intelligent, likable and committed individual, who happens to be on the 'wrong' side of politics. Given that Hornblower is the protagonist, McCool must be the antagonist. But he is a very likable and sympathetic antagonist. An Irish rebel, a deserter, and in some sense of the word, a traitor, McCool could hardly be more objectionable to the establishment order of things. As Cornwallis and others mention, about one fourth of the men of the Royal Navy were recruited from Ireland—for many of them it was either the gallows or the navy. McCool joined under an assumed name, which indicates his previous criminal history must have been too notorious to be absolved by joining the service.

Hornblower is given the task of overseeing McCool, and he has three main responsibilities. He must not let McCool escape; he must not let McCool cheat the gallows by committing suicide, and he must not let McCool incite rebellion and mutiny in the fleet. The first two responsibilities are fairly easy given the circumstances and length of time involved, but the final task calls for management. Hornblower quickly decides he has two courses of action—physical restraint preventing speech, or a gentleman's accord prohibiting it. He offers the latter as the preferable alternative but notes he is prepared to pursue the former if necessary. McCool quickly judges his chances and decides to rely upon Hornblower's word and attempts to trick the young lieutenant in the process.

The object of interest in the story is McCool's huge sea chest. Its construction is described in some detail, and McCool draws attention to it by noting how uncomfortable it is to use as a chair because of the raised letters spelling his name. The chest is obviously an item of craftsmanship; it also contains a capacious secret compartment. Note that the narrative introduces Payne, the admiral's assistant, who searches McCool and the chest without finding anything. That a professional search yields nothing frees Hornblower of negligence in not discovering anything too quickly. In any event, the execution is glossed over in the text and all that remains is for Hornblower to either make the fatal mistake of acting in accordance with his promise, or to discover the fraud.

Hornblower puzzles over the poem for a long period of time. In essence, he realizes it was crafted with extreme care because McCool made numerous drafts before settling on the final copy. And yet the final copy makes little sense and seems an unlikely production from a man about to hang. One particular contraction bothers Hornblower, and it is this use of "'em" in place of "them" that yields the final epiphany. Hornblower then opens the secret compartment and discovers that he was nearly duped. And then the temptation ensues. Faced with enough money to make him wealthy for life, Hornblower must decide what to do. It is no surprise that in the end his strict sense of duty causes him to throw the chest overboard, contents and all. He does not sacrifice the list of rebels to the authorities, but yet nor does he allow the money to survive. It is a fitting compromise to a man who self-admittedly knows little of the political situation in Ireland at the time.

The Last Encounter

The Last Encounter Summary

The year is 1848, and Hornblower is 72 years old; a retired admiral living in his comfortable estate at Smallbridge. Barbara lives with him, and she has aged well. Hornblower thinks about his achievements, his comforts, his wealth and his family, and is pleased with life. Richard, his only son, is doing well and has given Hornblower grandchildren. Hornblower is considerate of the townspeople and tenant farmers; he thinks Barbara to be gracious, beautiful and dignified. But as usual Hornblower is very self-critical. Outside a heavy storm rages.

Hornblower knows that France is embroiled in rebellion and social disorder. Political upheaval is constant, and he reflects on a long life of fighting against Napoleon's tyranny, though Napoleon is now long dead. And then comes a knock at the door. Brown, Hornblower's long-term servant, goes to answer it and there is confusion. After some moments, Brown returns and announces that a well-dressed lunatic, claiming to be Napoleon, is requesting transportation. Hornblower invites the man in and sees that he is indeed well dressed. The man introduces himself as Napoleon, states that the nearby rail line has been blocked by a mudslide and says that he must hurry at all costs to France. He then makes a rather bold request and asks Hornblower to provide a carriage for transportation. Hornblower finds the man amusing but assumes he is a crackpot and is about to send him away when Barbara intervenes. She briefly interviews the man and then requests that Hornblower comply with the request. Never one to argue with his wife, Hornblower acquiesces, and the man calling himself Napoleon is soon again on his way, presumably to France.

Some weeks later news arrives that Napoleon the Third recently has returned to France amidst political upheaval and gained power within the government. Hornblower is astounded to realize the man really was Napoleon. Later still a packet arrives from the French government. It offers thanks, awards Hornblower a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor and includes a sapphire for Barbara. A bemused Hornblower reflects upon the irony inadvertently of inadvertently helping his old enemy's political descendant gain power in France. He also admits the sapphire sets off Barbara's insightful blue eyes.

The Last Encounter Analysis

The short short story is chronologically the last event recorded about the fictional protagonist's life. It finds Hornblower enjoying the fruits of a life of labor and stringent adherence to duty. Approximately 72 years old, he has been married for about three decades, and his son, Richard, is in his mid thirties; Hornblower makes allusion to grandchildren. As the local Lord, he doubtlessly enjoys great prestige and spends his time in easy comfort. Typically, he criticizes himself for enjoying this period of his life, noting that until he is dead it can all be taken away.

The plot is very simple, though it makes heavy use of historic facts. Napoleon the Third was a nephew of the Napoleon who was opposed by Hornblower and all of England. He enjoyed great political successes late in life after a series of early reverses. His various exploits are not considered in the short short story, but are a matter of historic fact. As indicated in the story, during early 1848, Napoleon the Third was living in exile in the United Kingdom and thereafter returned to France during a period of political upheaval; he managed to gain political ascendancy and thereafter was involved in national and international politics. His fictional portrayal is interesting but trivial.

Barbara's typical insight into people presents itself in the story—she notes Napoleon's bearing, elocution and persona and determines him to be a person of substance. Hornblower, as usual, acquiesces to his wife's demands. It is ironic that after spending a life fighting against the political aspirations of Napoleon, Hornblower in the "last encounter" helps Napoleon rush to France and seize political power. Humorously, he is rewarded for his efforts by receiving distinction with a French decoration. The brief tale is quite enjoyable, easily accessible and presents no especial problems to comprehension.

Characters

Horatio Hornblower

Horatio Hornblower is the primary character in the novel and in both short stories, and indeed in the entire series of novels. He is above average in height and average in weight. During his later life, he gains some small excess weight and finds it disagreeable, and his hair recedes and thins somewhat. Nevertheless, he is physically strong and has an excellent constitution. He is prone to seasickness, a weakness of some irony given that he spends almost his entire life upon the sea. Hornblower joined the Royal Navy at the fairly advanced age of seventeen, entering as a midshipman. He thereafter climbed through the ranks rapidly, as a lieutenant, commander, captain, and finally admiral. Devoid of patronage or political connections, Hornblower's promotions are all due to superior performance. He is without question a heroic figure. His navigational skills and seamanship are superior and his tactical judgment is almost infallible. He possesses great strategic vision and is capable of making instantaneous decisions and plans that are nearly always essentially correct. Hornblower's career has seen him involved in almost every major nautical development during his lifetime, though his involvement is often tangential. Such is the case, for example, with the Battle of Trafalgar, in which he precipitates but not directly.

At a fairly young age, Hornblower married Maria Mason. She gave birth to two children —Horatio and Maria—though both died of smallpox as infants. She also gave birth to Richard—though Maria herself died during this childbirth. Hornblower thus has one surviving child. Hornblower's relationship to Maria was not a source of great pleasure to him. Although she loved him dearly, he found her common and rather irritating. While married to Maria, Hornblower met Barbara Wellesley and fell in love with her. She married an admiral shortly thereafter, however, which caused Hornblower a great deal of emotional pain. The marriage was for political reasons, though, as Barbara's family is of great political importance. Only a few months after her marriage, her husband was killed in battle. With the loss of Barbara's husband and Hornblower's wife, the two characters courted and married. Their marriage persisted for over thirty years, though they did not have children.

The novel presents Hornblower as a commander approaching promotion to post captain rank. In the first short story Hornblower is a young lieutenant, and in the second short story he is a retired admiral. Thus, the book spans Hornblower's career nearly completely. If Hornblower has a primary weakness, it is doubtlessly his endless cycle of self-criticism. Although this works in his favor often by honing his plans to perfection, it also causes him a great deal of pain in life, and he spends many months in self-imposed isolation, doubting his courage, intelligence and even worth.

William Bush

Bush appears only in the novel; in the first short story Hornblower has not yet met Bush, and at the time of the second short story, Bush has been dead for about three decades. Bush is a prominent character in many of the novels of the series—indeed, one volume is related from Bush's point of view. He is Hornblower's particular friend; indeed, he is nearly the only friend Hornblower has at all. The men met aboard Renown, shortly after the events described in the first short story. Bush was the senior lieutenant, having many years more experience than Hornblower. Bush is also older than Hornblower. Bush is a large man, and incredibly powerful. He relishes combat and physical danger and finds excitement in fighting and looks forward to it. He is a consummate seaman and impeccable in the execution of his duty. He finds mathematics difficult and spherical trigonometry nearly incomprehensible, which insures that his navigation is not exceptional. Bush is not possessed of a great intellect, and beyond a basic grasp of politics, he finds little pleasure in contemplating the world. He is a great leader of men, however, and is much admired by the crew. Bush has a few sisters and a mother who he supports.

Bush serves as Hornblower's lieutenant aboard Hotspur for about two years prior to the opening of the novel. Throughout the period, he served with distinction—characteristic of the man's devotion to duty. He serves Meadows well enough for the few hours he is under the man's command. Bush then rejoins Hornblower and participates in the boarding action. Bush serves again with Hornblower in later novels in the series, eventually rising to the rank of captain.

James Percival Meadows, Esq.

Meadows replaces Hornblower as commander of Hotspur at the opening of the novel. His credentials are not considerable, but obviously the admiralty believes him fit for command. As was often typical, Meadows declined to receive much orientation from Hornblower, instead preferring to command by his own wits. This was an unfortunate decision as Meadows lost Hotspur within hours of assuming command. Although Hornblower attempted to soften the blow to Meadows, the court-martial considered him guilty of navigational negligence and formally censured him. This effectively ends Meadows' naval career. Meadows adopts Hornblower's plan to storm the French brig by surprise and executes it correctly; as the senior naval officer, his command of the action was appropriate, perhaps salvaging his career.

Meadows is described as a large and strong man. He is very withdrawn after the loss of Hotspur, as would be expected. Knowing that his career is over, he treats Baddlestone with a total lack of courtesy. Meadows dies during the boarding of the French brig—the French captain pierces Meadows' heart with a rapier just as Meadows smashes in the French captain's skull. Both men die simultaneously. Meadows is a minor character in the novel.

Baddlestone

Baddlestone is the captain of Princess and owns more than half of the vessel. He and his men are immune to the press because of their naval contract to supply fresh water to the Channel Fleet. Because of this, he is very haughty, bordering upon insufferable. Even though personally unlikable, Baddlestone is a competent seaman and knows his own vessel well. He demands respect aboard his own ship but is not above extortionist practices. For example, he charges Hornblower over one hundred times the standard rate for rations while aboard. Baddlestone fights bravely during the boarding of the French brig and gradually warms to Hornblower. At the end of the voyage, Baddlestone allows Hornblower to carry the captured documents to the admiralty. Baddlestone is a memorable but minor character in the novel.

Secretary Marsden and Assistant Secretary Barrow

Marsden and his assistant Barrow are the constant power behind the changing Sea Lords of the Admiralty. Because their tenures are prolonged, they weather politics and operate behind the scenes to effect continuity of operations. Both men are nearly interchangeable within the narrative; they appreciate Hornblower's ideas and gusto and allow him free reign to pursue his ideas. Note that both men are lightly-fictionalized representations of historic figures serving in the indicated capacities during the time period considered by the novel. Marsden and Barrow are minor characters in the extant portion of the novel, appearing in the concluding chapters. It is reasonable to assume they would have had larger parts had the novel been completed.

Reverend Doctor Claudius

Claudius is a priest and putative medical doctor, and practices both trades in England just prior to the opening of the novel. He also is a supremely capable forger and amasses a fortune by circulating various forged monetary instruments; he is eventually discovered and imprisoned. After a speedy trial, he is condemned to hang. Fortunately for Claudius, the admiralty finds itself in need of a capable forger to execute Hornblower's audacious plan. Claudius agrees to forge the documents if he is spared execution—Marsden quickly agrees. Claudius then delivers a lengthy monologue on the processes of forgery. He is clearly a master of the trade. Claudius is presented in the text seemingly all out of proportion to his actual significance, and it is possible that he would have had a larger role had the novel been completed. As it stands, he is a minor and transient character in the narrative. Claudius is described as rather squat and heavy with an unattractive face.

Barry Ignatius McCool

McCool is an Irish rebel who has been convicted of various political crimes. During the period of the novel, most convicted Irishmen were allowed to escape the gallows by

joining the Royal Navy; Cornwallis estimates the Royal Navy to be nearly one fourth Irish. Whatever McCool's crimes, they were substantive enough that the Royal Navy option was not extended to him; he thus enlisted under the assumed name of O'Shaughnessy. After joining the navy, he deserted at the first opportunity, going over to the French and joining their navy to fight against England. Rebellion, desertion and treason are obviously capital crimes, and when McCool is captured and discovered, he is found guilty and condemned to hang. McCool is an eloquent and fiery speaker, and Cornwallis fears the condemned man might start an Irish mutiny amongst the fleet. He therefore appoints Hornblower to make sure the man remains silent.

McCool has a large sea-chest with a secret compartment. Within the compartment is a vast sum of paper money, a list of Irish dissidents and posters proclaiming Irish independence. McCool promises Hornblower to forego any speeches at his hanging if Hornblower—unaware of the chest's secret contents—delivers the chest to his putative widow. In fact, McCool is not married and the address of his widow is presumably an Irish rebel stronghold. True to his word, McCool goes to his death silently. His plans are foiled, however, when Hornblower discovers the secret compartment and has the entire sea-chest and its contents thrown into the sea. McCool is described as tall, handsome, charismatic, with long, red hair. He is very polite and likable, and is the primary character in addition to Hornblower, in the first short story.

Brown

Brown is Hornblower's personal servant and appears only in the second short story and only very briefly. He answers the door to Napoleon, but assumes the man is a lunatic. Brown suggests that Hornblower have Napoleon ejected. Brown is significant, however, because he is a major character in several of the novels of the series. Brown is about Hornblower's age, and wears his clothes in an exact and stylish cut. As always, Brown has the exactly proper blend of good taste and subservience that make him a consummate steward.

Napoleon the Third

Napoleon the Third is the nephew of the Napoleon against whom Hornblower spent his entire life fighting. For a time, Napoleon the Third was heir apparent to the French empire but subsequently fell out of political favor. He then spent years in exile in various locales, ending up in the United Kingdom. As related in the second short story, Napoleon the Third returned to France during a period of political upheaval and succeeded in gaining political power, eventually rising to great heights. Napoleon the Third is a lightly fictionalized-representation of a historic person and appears only in the second short story. He is described only in vague terms, but wears exceptionally-well tailored clothing and speaks with great eloquence. Barbara finds his bearing exceptional, and even Hornblower is slightly won over to him.

Barbara Hornblower

Barbara Hornblower appears only in the second short story; she had not yet made Hornblower's acquaintance during the first short story or the novel. Barbara is the sister of two men who are both politically significant. Barbara spent many of her early years in India and returned to England aboard Hornblower's ship. While on that voyage, the two characters fell in love. But Hornblower was married to Maria and Barbara married Admiral Leighton for political reasons. Leighton was killed in battle a few months later, and within weeks Maria Hornblower died in childbirth. As Hornblower was lost and presumed dead at the time, Barbara adopted Hornblower's infant son, named him after her two brothers and his father—Richard Arthur Horatio Hornblower—and raised him as her own. Upon Hornblower's miraculous return to England, Barbara and Hornblower courted and were married.

Barbara is elegant and noble-hearted; she has an easy grace and moves among society with ease. Her personal career is distinguished, and she has played a part in many significant political developments. She is very discerning, too, and sees in the strange visitor Napoleon the Third a certain self-possession that indicates him to be a person of substance, no matter how wild his tale. Barbara is a major character in many of the novels in the series, but in the present text has only a very minor appearance.

Objects/Places

Hotspur

Hotspur is a sloop-of-war with a fairly shallow draft and light armament. She is assigned to the Channel Fleet and belongs to the Inshore Squadron. Her primary responsibility is to creep in close to the French harbor at Brest and observe the general conditions on a daily basis. Hotspur is commanded by Hornblower for two years prior to the opening of the novel. Meadows takes her into the shoaling approaches to Brest and runs her aground on a falling tide. She is subsequently holed, flooded and lost.

Princess

Princess is a water-hoy, or fresh water resupply ship, running fresh water between England and the Channel Fleet. She is commanded by Baddlestone and carries water in barrels stored in the hold. She is very broad to assist in stability while empty and does not have a very good point of sail. Princess is one of the major settings in the novel, and Hornblower finds her infamous for her utter lack of comfort.

Guêpe

Guêpe is a French brig plying the dangerous waters of the English Channel. She chases and brings to bay Princess and then sends a prize crew aboard her with a nearly unbelievable laxity in security. Hornblower, Baddlestone and Meadows lead an audacious surprise attack against the ship and carry her deck by storm. The ship is then badly disabled and left to creep back into port. Hornblower captures significant documents from the captain of Guêpe.

Canister Shot

Baddlestone loads a nine-pounder cannon with canister and fires it down the main hatch. Canister was a type of shot consisting of a thin steel canister filled with about one hundred and fifty large musket balls. Canister shot effectively converted a cannon into a gigantic shotgun. The effects of Baddlestone's discharge must have been appalling. Such is war.

Captured French Documents

After storming Guêpe, Hornblower raids the dead captain's cabin and seizes a large number of documents. Among the haul is a secret packet including new seals of the French empire and signatures of Napoleon in a new style. The captured documents—in particular the secret packet—play a major role in developing the plot of the novel.

Sea Fencibles

Established in early 1798, the Sea Fencibles was a naval force which operated to protect England from invasion by France during the Napoleonic Wars. Each stretch of coast was controlled by a post-captain and manned by volunteers. The Sea Fencibles controlled only small and minor vessels and captains posted to Sea Fencibles duties were often retired, incompetent or maimed. Hornblower's appointment as post-captain to the Sea Fencibles allowed the promotion without the bureaucratic red tape usually associated with such promotion.

Ferrol

Ferrol is a Spanish port town where Hornblower was imprisoned for two years as a midshipman. During his rather lenient imprisonment, Hornblower became intimately familiar with the local geography and also learned Spanish. After Villeneuve's fleet escapes destruction, it shelters at Ferrol. This happy coincidence makes Hornblower the obvious choice to lead an espionage mission to the environs of Ferrol, and this mission would presumably have dominated the unfinished portion of the novel.

Renown

Renown is the seventy-four gun ship-of-the-line, commanded by Captain Sawyer, upon which Hornblower is the most-junior lieutenant during the first short story. The ship is only lightly described in the story, but it is the dominant setting for one of the novels in the series.

McCool's Sea-chest

McCool owns a large sea-chest built of apparently solid slabs of mahogany. The chest locks and its lid is embossed with large, raised letters spelling out 'B I McCool'. The chest's embossing is in fact a series of levers and knobs that can be manipulated in a certain order to open a large secret compartment. The compartment contains a list of Irish rebels, posters proclaiming Irish independence and a huge amount of currency. After undergoing a crisis of temptation, Hornblower throws the chest, contents and all, into the sea.

Smallbridge

Smallbridge is the town in Kent over which Hornblower is the Lord. The house in the second short story is located in Smallbridge, and the rail line—blocked by a mudslide—mentioned by Napoleon the Third runs through Smallbridge. The town is described in more detail in a few of the novels of the series.

Themes

Crisis of Conscience

The novel's title is derived from a conflation of Hornblower's personal crisis with that of England's national crisis. Villeneuve has twice led the combined French and Spanish fleet across the ocean and into combat with an English fleet and finally escaped to Ferrol. He is a dominating threat to England, and if he managed the landing of the French army on England, the English would be conquered. Thus, the national crisis precipitated by Villeneuve's activities is the backdrop to the novel. Hornblower's capture of secret documents allows a careful set of forged orders to be created, which Hornblower intends to introduce into the command signals stream leading into Ferrol. Such actions would doubtlessly have formed the basis of much of the novel had it been completed.

Hornblower's personal crisis is the second, and dominant, element of the novel's theme. Hornblower is a military officer, inured to hardship, used to danger, and habituated to public command. He is not a man to to skulk about and behave secretly. But to carry out his mission, he must act as a spy. He knows that if captured in Spain, spies are garroted. Obviously, this is an unpleasant way to die. But more importantly, it is an ignominious way to die. Hornblower would not qualm about being killed in open combat, but the thought of an unknown and disgraced grave is nearly more than he can bear, as is the thought of sneaking about and practicing deceit. The author's notes indicate that Hornblower's crisis of conscience was to be a major consideration in the unfinished portion of the novel. Hornblower faces the first twinges of conscience in the final completed chapters of the unfinished novel.

Temptation

The dominant theme of the first short story is that of Hornblower's temptation—indeed, the theme becomes the title of the story. After discovering a great amount of cash in McCool's sea-chest, Hornblower ponders his future course of action. The money is in the form of bank notes, or currency. At that time, bank notes were a relatively new phenomenon and would likely have been easily identifiable as to origin. Even so, Hornblower could probably have exchanged the notes and lived comfortably for the remainder of his days. As a young man in his mid-twenties, the temptation was sufficient to cause even the resolute Hornblower to pause for several days. Finally, as expected, the heroic Hornblower decides that the call of duty must needs outweigh the lure of temptation, and he discards the cash into the sea, doubtlessly making some anonymous banker so much the richer.

The theme of Hornblower's temptation is subtly echoed by McCool's temptation. The means by which McCool came by so significant a store of money is not disclosed, but that young man must surely have considered his options, too. Having deserted once,

and being familiar with the ways of law enforcement, a man such as McCool could probably escape a second time. Funded with a store of cash, he could have retired into a life of anonymity and wealth in any of dozens of locales. Yet he, too, felt a debt of duty to Ireland. Instead of using the money for personal gain, he intended to use the money to further Irish independence. Both men—McCool and Hornblower—faced the temptation of riches, and spurned the temptation to pursue their respective duties.

The Varied Rewards of Duty

A major theme of The Final Encounter, as well as a minor theme of the novel and first short story, is the reward of duty well served. Hornblower lived the life of a military man for nearly four decades. Year after year of active duty aboard ship, in dirty weather, seasick, and in frequent peril, offered scant immediate reward to Hornblower. And yet the man derived satisfaction from executing his duty. And he is not alone—others such as Bush and Cornwallis obviously relish performing their duty. Meadows, lax in his duty, suffered the consequences of failure. Even the gruff and unlikable Baddlestone exemplifies the execution of duty. In sum, the Royal Navy offered a life of privation in the pursuit of strenuous duty, which was largely unrewarding. And yet, at least for those who survived it, the aftermath of a career afloat could be rewarding in concrete, financial ways. For Hornblower in his declining years, the pursuit of duty as a young man yields riches, comforts and respect as an old man. His house is large and well-appointed; his wife is influential, intelligent and graceful; his servants are efficient and professional, and his tenants are appreciative and loyal. He has a successful son and promising grandchildren. And he can look back over years of service brilliantly performed with major successes.

Not all men are as fortunate as Hornblower. Bush, for example, is long dead—first maimed and then killed in the line of duty. Also recall the many ratings, or enlisted men, that accompany Meadows and Bush aboard Princess. These men are all unfit for duty; one has lost a hand, Hornblower surmises that others are ruptured—that is, suffering from hernias. For these men, their service to duty will not yield happy returns. They will return to England and then labor as cripples for subsistence wages. If extremely fortunate, they may derive some small benefit from their veteran status. The varied rewards of duty forms a major theme running throughout the book.

Style

Point of View

The novel and both short stories are told from the third-person, limited, point of view. The narrator in each case is entirely effaced, unnamed and completely reliable. Hornblower, the main character, is the protagonist and central figure in all the scenes in the text. The narrator divulges internal thoughts of the protagonist, but generally not of other characters. The majority of the story is told through action and dialogue; revealed thoughts are frequent but generally are used for characterization rather than plot development.

The third-person point of view allows Hornblower to be presented in a highly-sympathetic manner. For example, the narrative structure portrays a young Hornblower's doubts about inadvertently assisting McCool as intense but controlled. The narrative also allows portrayal of Hornblower's life situations as difficult but not pathetic. For example, in Hornblower's Temptation, Hornblower's disgust at facing a hanging is presented as a moral objection rather than simple squeamishness. In this way, the choice of narrative view is appropriate and successful. Indeed, the structure of the novel and stories, 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 volumes of the series and is accessible and successful.

Setting

The completed portion of the novel features an initial setting aboard the water-hoy Princess. The ship is a crank vessel and, lightened of burden, is particularly unpleasant to ride in. The text discusses Princess' construction and sailing qualities with notes on Hornblower's reaction to them. In general, the ship is small and not designed for creature comforts. Her hugely over-crowded condition does not assist in these regards, nor does her taciturn and slightly belligerent captain. When fully loaded with water, her intended cargo, the ship would sit very low and provide a heavy, and therefore steady, platform. Freed of any ballast, she rides high and rolls excessively. The empty water casks would be irredeemably fouled by ballasting with seawater, and thus Princess is destined to be an uncomfortable ride about half of the time. Princess probably was not intended, however, to be a dominant setting within the novel—her magnified presence is caused only by the fact that the remainder of the novel is incomplete.

The short story "Hornblower's Temptation" is set aboard HMS Renown, a third-rate British man-of-war. The ship is a two-decker with 74 guns, and has a complement of 20 officers and 80 are marines among others. Hornblower is the most-junior lieutenant aboard, having been promoted from midshipman about eighteen months previous to the short story's events. The ship bears thirty-four, twenty-four pounder carronades on the

lower deck and nine-pounder long guns on the upper deck. Renown is commanded by Captain Sawyer, who appears capable if aloof during the short story but, as recounted in another volume of the series, is a paranoid and mentally-deranged man.

The short story "The Last Encounter" is set at Hornblower's country estate of Smallbridge, in Kent, England. The estate is not well-developed in the novel but obviously consists of a well-appointed and spacious house where the Hornblowers live in comfort. The house also has a stable with a carriage and several servants, including Brown, who has served as Hornblower's steward since 1810, or 38 years. The aged Hornblower obviously enjoys his home and creature comforts, as does Lady Barbara, his wife.

Language and Meaning

The text's language is generally simple and accessible. Standard punctuation is used to indicate dialogue, and interior thoughts and descriptive text are easily distinguished. Most of the places, some of the objects and people, and even some of the events referenced in the narrative are identifiable as real geographical locations, historic objects or people or historic events. It is notable that the text was originally written for publication in England and uses standard English spelling styles, which may be somewhat unfamiliar to American readers, though it poses no problems of meaning. Occasional words are given in a foreign language, nearly always Spanish or French. These, too, present no particular barrier to comprehension as they are brief and their meaning is easily inferred from the context. The text becomes linguistically complex only when dealing with nautical events, as a somewhat complicated specialized language is used, which includes references to various parts of sailing craft and sailing techniques that are probably not particularly familiar to modern readers. The technical language is accurate and interesting and reference to a general sailing encyclopedia will assist in a careful reading and complete understanding of portions of the text.

One interesting aspect of meaning within the text is found in the short story "Hornblower's Temptation." There, Hornblower reads a peculiar poem written by McCool and attempts to decipher some meaning. After noting that the poem is somewhat nonsensical, Hornblower looks for a deeper meaning in the poem and finds one. Indeed, the presentation of the textual cipher key to McCool's carved name on the sea chest forms a delightful meta-fictional play on meaning.

Structure

The volume consists of the unfinished 125-page novel Hornblower During the Crisis, a one-page extract from the author's notes, and two short stories—"Hornblower's Temptation" and "The Last Encounter." Note that "Hornblower's Temptation" has been also published under the title "Hornblower and the Widow McCool." The title of the unfinished novel is apparently derived by conflating Hornblower's crisis of conscience about operating as a spy with the national military crisis caused by the escape of

Villeneuve's combined fleet. These activities are not presented in the finished portion of the novel, however, and are only commented upon in the author's very brief notes. If the notes are taken as representative of the intended finished work, however, Hornblower's crisis of conscience would have consumed a goodly portion of the text. The novel's nine completed, presented chapters are in chronological order with events in one chapter happening after events in previous chapters and before events in subsequent chapters. The events in the novel transpire between August and December, 1805, Hornblower thus being 29 years of age.

The two short stories bracket Hornblower's career. In the first, he is a junior officer entrusted with a rather routine, though important, duty. The date of the first short story can be inferred to be late 1799, or early 1800; in any event, prior to May, 1800, when Hornblower first meets William Bush; Hornblower thus being 23 years of age. In the last short story, Hornblower is presented as a retired and aged man who encounters Napoleon the Third under rather unlikely circumstances. The short story presents, chronologically, the final, fictional portrayal of Hornblower and the date can be inferred to be about February, 1848—Hornblower being 72 years of age.

Quotes

Hornblower was expecting the knock on the door, because he had seen through his cabin window enough to guess what was happening outside.
"Water-hoy coming alongside, sir," reported Bush, hat in hand.
"Very well, Mr. Bush," Hornblower was disturbed in spirit and had no intention of smoothing Bush's path for him.
"The new captain's on board the hoy, sir." Bush was perfectly well aware of Hornblower's mood, yet was not ingenious enough to cope with it.
"Very well, Mr. Bush."
But that was simple cruelty, the deliberate teasing of a nearly dumb animal; Hornblower realized such behavior really gave him no pleasure and only occasioned embarrassment to Bush. He relented to the extent of introducing a lighter touch into the conversation.
"So now you have a few minutes to spare for me, Mr. Bush?" he said. "It's a change after your preoccupation of the last two days." (p. 3)

Life in the water-hoy Princess was exceedingly uncomfortable. She was empty of her cargo of drinking water, and there was almost nothing to replace it; the empty casks were too precious to be contaminated by sea water for use as ballast, and only a few bags of sand could be squeezed between the empty casks to confer any stability on her hull. She had been designed with this very difficulty in view, the lines of her dish-shaped hull being such that even when riding light her broad beam made her hard to capsize; but she did everything short of that. Her motion was violent and, to the uninitiated, quite unpredictable, and she was hardly more Weatherly than a raft, sagging off to leeward in a spineless fashion that boded ill for any prospect of working up to Plymouth while any easterly component prevailed in the wind. (p. 12)

Hornblower was still in his hammock even though it was long after daybreak, even though it was full dawn. He had turned himself over without waking himself up too much —something he had had to relearn now that he was sleeping in a hammock again—and he was determined upon staying where he was, as somnolent as possible, for the longest possible time. In that way he would find the day shorter; his mind, clogged with sleep, would not be working at high tension for so long. Yesterday had been a bad day, when a favorable slant of wind at nightfall had endured just long enough to return Princess to the heart of the blockading squadron before reversing itself maddeningly.
A certain amount of bustle and excitement became audible on the deck over his head, and there was a boat alongside. He snarled to himself and prepared to roll out of his hammock. It would be some trifle of no concern to him, most likely, but it was sufficient to put an end to his resolution to stay in his hammock. (p. 19)

It was less than half an hour after Hornblower returned to the Princess that Baddlestone got the news, passed from one auxiliary vessel to another as they wallowed, waiting for a wind.

"Guilty," said Baddlestone, turning to Hornblower.
This was one of the moments when Hornblower was most in need of an appearance of stolidity while finding the greatest difficulty in attaining it.
"What about the sentence?" he asked. Tension gave his voice a grating sound which he hoped would be interpreted as harsh indifference.
"Reprimand," said Baddlestone, and Hornblower felt the relief flooding his vitals.
"What kind of a reprimand?"
"Just a reprimand."
Not a severe reprimand, then. After a "guilty" verdict it was the mildest sentence a court-martial could pronounce, save for mere admonishment. But with Hotspur lost, every officer and warrant officer in the ship would have to apply for re-employment, and the powers-that-be might still have a word to say. Unless they were vindictive, however, there could be little danger to anyone except possibly Meadows. It was only then that Baddlestone doled out another fragment of information which would have saved Hornblower anxiety.
"They cleared the first lieutenant and the sailing-master," he said. Hornblower kept his mouth shut, determined to give no hint of his feelings. (pp. 27-28)

"What's her course, d'you think?" asked Hornblower.
"Nor'east, sir," said Bush, tentatively, but Prowse shook his head as his natural pessimism asserted itself.
"Nor'east by east, sir," he said.
"A trifle of north in it, anyway," said Hornblower.
Such a course would bring them no nearer Plymouth, but it might give them a better chance of catching a westerly slant outside the mouth of the Channel.
"She's making a lot of leeway," said Prowse, gloomily, his glance sweeping round from the set of the sails to the barely perceptible wake.
"We can always hope," said Hornblower. "Look at those clouds building up. We've seen nothing like that for days.
"Hope's cheap enough, sir," said Prowse gloomily.
Hornblower looked over towards Meadows, standing at the mainmast. His face bore that bleak expression still unchanged; he stood solitarily in a crowd, yet even he was impelled to study wake and sail-trim and rudder, until Hornblower's gaze drew his glance and he looked over at them, hardly seeing them.
"I'd give something to know what the glass is doing," said Bush. "Maybe it's dropping, sir."
"Shouldn't be surprised," said Hornblower. (pp. 34-35)

Princess was lying hove-to in the darkness. The mere fact of being hove-to could be construed by the enemy as an admission of surrender. From her forestay flickered a lighted lantern, trimmed right down, a tiny dot of light that would give the brig little chance to observe what was going on in the waist of the hoy. Across the total blackness a cable length to leeward, four bright lanterns revealed both the brig's position and the fact that she was lowering a longboat.
"They're coming," growled Meadows, crouching at the gunwale. "Remember, cold

steel." In the strong breeze that was blowing, confused noises would pass unnoticed, but a shot would be heard clearly enough downwind.
Now the crouching men could see a solid mass tossing in the darkness; now they could hear the grind of oars; now they could hear French voices. Hornblower was waiting. His was the only white face in the hoy; the others were painted black. He threw them a line as they hooked on.
"Montez," he said; it was an effort to keep his voice from cracking with excitement. (p. 48)

Hornblower wrote the final lines of his letter, rapidly checked it through, from "My dear Wife," to "Your loving husband, Horatio Hornblower," and folded the sheet and put it in his pocket before going up on deck. The last turn was being taken round the last bollard, and Princess was safely alongside the quay in the victualing yard of Plymouth. As always, there was something unreal, a sort of nightmare clarity in this first contact with England. The people, the sheds, the houses, seemed to stand out with unnatural sharpness; voices sounded different with the land to echo them; the wind was vastly changed from the wind he knew at sea. The princess's passengers were already sleeping ashore, and a crowd of curious onlookers had assembled; the arrival of a water-hoy from the Channel Fleet was of interest enough because she might have news, but a water-hoy which had actually captured, and for a few minutes held possession of, a French brig of war was something very new.
There were farewells to say to Baddlestone; besides making arrangements to land his sea-chest and ditty bag there was something else to discuss. (p. 63)

"This'll do," said Hornblower to the landlady.
"Bring it up, 'Arry," yelled the landlady over her shoulder, and Hornblower heard the heavy feet of her dim-witted son on the uncarpeted stairs as he carried up the sea-chest.
There was a bed and a chair and a wash-hand stand and a mirror on the wall; all a man could need. These were the cheap lodgings recommended to him by the last postilion; there had been a certain commotion in the frowsy street when the post-chaise had turned into it from the Westminster Bridge Road and had pulled up outside the house—it was not at all the sort of street where post-chaises were expected. The cries of the children who had been attracted by the sight could still be heard through the narrow window.
"Anything you want?" asked the landlady.
"Hot water," said Hornblower.
The landlady looked a little harder at the man who wanted hot water at nine in the morning.
"Or right. I'll get you some," she said.
Hornblower looked round him at the room; it seemed to his disordered mind that if he were to relax his attention the room would revolve around him on its won. He sat down in the chair; his backside felt as if it were one big bruise, as if it had been beaten with a club. It would have been for more comfortable to stretch out on the bed, but that he dared not do. He kicked off his shoes and wriggled out of his coat, and became aware

that he stank.
"'Ere's your 'ot water," said the landlady, re-entering.
"Thank you." (pp. 77-78)

Hornblower awoke in an overheated condition. The sunshine was blazing through the window, and his little attic room was like an oven. Sleep had overcome him while he lay under a blanket, and he was sweating profusely. Throwing off the blanket brought some relief, and he cautiously began to straighten himself out; apparently he had slept without a change of position, literally like a log. There was still an ache or two to be felt, which served to recall to his mind where he was and how he came to be there. His formula for inducing sleep had worked only after a long delay. But it was well after sunrise; he must have slept for ten or perhaps twelve hours.
What day of the week was it? To answer that question called for a plunge into the past. It had been a Sunday that he had spent in the post-chaise—he could remember the church bells sounding across the countryside and the churchgoers gathering round the post-chaise in Salisbury. So that he had arrived in London on Monday morning—yesterday, hard to believe though that was—and today was Tuesday. He had left Plymouth—he had last seen Maria—on Saturday afternoon. Hornblower felt his pleasant relaxation replaced by tension; he actually felt his muscles tightening ready for action as he went back from there—it was during the small hours of Friday morning that the Princess had headed away from the disabled Guêpe. It was on Thursday evening that he had climbed onto the deck of the Guêpe to conquer or die, with death more probable than conquest. Last Thursday evening, and this was only Tuesday morning. (pp. 103-104)

From the Author's Notes
Hornblower goes through a period of training in preparation for his spy mission. He brushes up his Spanish with the ruddy-complexioned Count Miranda; he is to accompany the Count to Spain disguised as his servant. "He would have to watch every word and gesture; his life depended on doing nothing that would betray them." Then Hornblower goes through a crisis of conscience about becoming a spy.
As he is rowed towards the ship that will take him from Spithead to Spain, Hornblower thinks: One stage further along a hateful voyage. Each stroke of the boatmen's oars is carrying him nearer to a time of frightful strain; to something close to a certainty of shameful and hideous death...
He wonders whether to turn back, but sense of duty prevails. A forged letter is delivered to Villeneuve, which prompts the French to come out and fight.
This is what Hornblower wants. It leads to the victory at Trafalgar. The course of history is changed. (p. 127)

Ye heavenly powers! Stand by me when I die!
The bee ascends before my rolling eye.
Life still goes on within the heartless town.
Dark forces claim my soul. So strike 'em down.

The sea will rise, the sea will fall. So turn
Full circle. Turn again. And then will burn
The lambent flames while hell will lift its head.
So pray for me while I am numbered with the dead.
Hornblower read through the turgid lines and puzzled over their obscure imagery. But he wondered if he would be able to write a single line that would make sense if he knew he was going to die in a few hours. (p. 147)

My Lord:
I am commanded by Monseigneur His Highness the Prince-President, as one of his first acts on assuming the control of the affairs of his people, to convey to you His Highness's gratitude for the assistance you were kind enough to render him during his journey to Paris. Accompanying this letter Your Lordship will fine the insignia of a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour, and I have the pleasure of assuring Your Lordship that at His Highness's command I am requesting of Her Majesty the Queen, through Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, permission for you to accept them.
I am also commanded by His Highness to get that you will convey to Her Ladyship your wife his grateful thanks, and that you will present for her acceptance the accompanying token of his esteem and regard, which His Highness hopes will be a fitting tribute to the beautiful eyes which His Highness remembers so well.
With the highest expressions of my personal regard, I am,
Your most humble and obedient servant,
Cadore, Minister of Foreign Affairs
"Humbug!" said Hornblower, "The fellow will be calling himself emperor before you can say Jack Robinson. Napoleon the Third, I suppose."
"I said there was something about him," said Barbara. "This is a very beautiful sapphire."
It certainly matched the eyes into which Hornblower smiled with tender resignation. (pp. 173-174)

Topics for Discussion

Hornblower commands Hotspur for over two years and spends much of that time in the shoaling, tricky water off the approach to Brest. His replacement runs Hotspur aground during his first day of command, and the ship is lost. Was Hornblower lucky? Was his replacement an incompetent bungler? What could account for such diametrically opposed experiences?

The water-hoy Princess appears to be a terribly inefficient means of transportation. She rolls and pitches violently and spends several days simply blowing around before heavy weather. Do you think that a steamship would have had a profound effect on the Napoleonic wars? Why or why not?

Hornblower is a formidable warrior and masterful tactician. He boards a French brig and fights hand-to-hand without demonstrating fear or reserve. Later, he undergoes a crisis of conscience about operating as a spy. Why do you think this particular task would be so distasteful to Hornblower?

When Hornblower returns to port he meets with Captain Baddlestone to discuss the store of papers captured from the French brig Guêpe. Baddlestone, obviously a self-interested individual, yields the papers to Hornblower—even though both men recognize they are valuable. Why do you think Baddlestone let Hornblower take the papers?

The novel is unfinished, though the first chapters are polished and nearly complete. From this, what can you infer about the methodology Forester used to write novels? How does the experience of reading an unfinished novel differ from the more-typical experience of reading a completed novel? Discuss.

In the short story "Hornblower's Temptation," what physical object tempts Hornblower? What does he finally do with the object? Why does he take the course of action that he does?

McCool's sea chest is intriguing, to say the least. Who do you think manufactured the sea chest? Do you think that a sailor could fashion such a chest while aboard ship and retain any degree of secrecy regarding the completed project? Why or why not?

The Hornblowers accidentally meet Napoleon the Third prior to that man's larger political successes. Barbara rather intuitively feels the man to be significant, while Hornblower and Brown assume he is at best an impostor and at worse crazy. Why do you think Barbara is the better judge of character?

Discuss how it is ironically fitting, not to mention quite amusing, that the last fictional representation of Hornblower depicts him meeting and assisting Napoleon's successor.

What might have happened had Hornblower turned Napoleon the Third out into the night, refusing to provide him transportation?