

Master and Commander Study Guide

Master and Commander by Patrick O'Brian

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Contents

Master and Commander Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Chapter 1.....	5
Chapter 2.....	9
Chapter 3.....	14
Chapter 4.....	18
Chapter 5.....	22
Chapter 6.....	25
Chapter 7.....	27
Chapter 8.....	30
Chapter 9.....	33
Chapter 10.....	35
Chapter 11.....	38
Chapter 12.....	40
Characters.....	44
Objects/Places.....	50
Themes.....	53
Style.....	56
Quotes.....	59
Topics for Discussion.....	61



Plot Summary

This is the story of Captain Jack Aubrey's first command, and the beginning of what has been called one of the greatest literary buddy stories in recent history. *Master and Commander* is the story of the maturing and tempestuous relationship between a ship's Captain and the ship's surgeon, Dr. Stephen Maturin, two unforgettable characters revealing themselves for the first time in Patrick O'Brian's first book about Captain Jack.

The book itself begins with a small concert in Italy, where the Aubrey, at that moment a lieutenant, meets Stephen, who will become his companion on many voyages. The meeting is not sanguine, because Stephen manages to offend the Jack, who has irritated him by his crude attempts at rhythmical thumping during the concert. It is hard to imagine that these two will become very serious musical partners, Stephen on the cello and Jack on the fiddle, during their long voyages.

This first book encapsulates the highs and lows of Jack's life as a Master and Commander, the lowest rank of Captain in the British Navy. It chronicles the precious moments of his receiving his first promotion as Captain of the *Sophie* to his brilliant exploits as the most talented prize hunter in Lord Keith's fleet to the humiliation of a court-martial after his ship has been captured by the French. During the entire book, it chronicles his growing friendship and musical partnership with Maturin and develops pieces of Maturin's independent life as a ship surgeon and naturalist.

An important thread in the book is the growing antagonism between Jack and James Dillon, his first lieutenant, equivalent to a first mate on his ship. Dillon is a patriotic British officer but also a member of the United Irishmen, an organization consisting of Irishmen of various diverse classes and political persuasions, which has fallen into disrepute with the Crown. Although a naval hero, Dillon has been cheated of a captaincy, probably owing to his at least former allegiance to this cause. Dillon, having a very straightforward form of patriotism, is not happy with Jack Aubrey's prize-hunting focus and also has taken moments to challenge his decisions and capable leadership in a not so subtle way.

It is an irony of the story that Dr. Stephen Maturin, who has become a close friend and supporter of Jack, has also been a significant part of the United Irishmen's cause. Owing to this affiliation, both of them significantly obscure their membership, but Dillon, at one point, actually compromises his honor by not reporting certain fugitive members of the organization discovered on another ship, when he is threatened with blackmail by one of them.

Despite his antagonism and the possibility of a potential dual (an ever present possibility in the British Navy,) Dillon becomes a strong component in Jack Aubrey's success. Things come to a head between them but the problem is derailed by Dillon's sudden and tragic death. Dillon's demise leaves Jack with the same ambivalence he felt all along for the man, tremendous respect and tremendous concern over his would-be friend's antagonism and contempt.



After Jack's remarkable conquest of the *Cacafuego*, a prize that has brought him considerable notoriety, Jack suffers a quick and extraordinary defeat at the hands of a French Captain. The subsequent victory of the British fleet frees him but he must face a court martial, a matter of due process for any British officer who surrenders a ship. The court martial ends in a victory for Jack, but not without it taking a toll on his happiness and demeanor.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

This is the story of Captain Jack Aubrey's first command, and the beginning of what has been called one of the greatest literary buddy stories in recent history. *Master and Commander* is the story of the maturing and tempestuous relationship between a ship's Captain and the ship's surgeon, Dr. Stephen Maturin, two unforgettable characters revealing themselves for the first time in Patrick O'Brian's first book about Captain Jack.

The novel opens in a music room in Port Mahon, the capital city of Minorca, one of the Balearic Islands. The room is handsomely set in the Governor's House, with gilt chairs filled with Italian musicians rendering an enthusiastic first movement of Pietro Locatelli's C Major Quarter. Although perhaps not all of the audience is equally energized by the passion of the music and its performers, a handful are, including two men seated in the third row, who pay rapt attention to every rhapsodic chord.

One of the men is quite large. In fact, he is basically overflowing his seat and dressed as handsomely as possible in the blue coat and white waistcoat and breeches of the Royal Navy. His excited blue eyes are riveted on the first violin and when the final resolution came, he turns to the man seated beside him commenting on the fine playing of the Italians. The sigh and smile that preceded his comment indicated his pleasure in the music, and the happiness in which he engaged his unknown colleague seated besides him. Instead of replying in a friendly way, his neighbor took the opportunity to chastise him on his own performance in beating out the music, claiming that Lieutenant Jack Aubrey did not seem capable of beating out a tune correctly.

In perusing the gentleman, Aubrey decided he did not like his demeanor nor countenance, and thought ill of his appearance and ancient wig. Still, though he did not have a face easy to assess when covered with a non-descript wig, Aubrey decided that his companion was roughly his age. During the next piece, a minuet, Aubrey managed, for a time, to suppress his desire to follow the beat by putting his hand underneath his knee. But eventually he did join in, "pom-pom-pomming" along with the cello, eliciting a sharp elbow and a "shhning" sound from the strange, "white-faced creature" besides him.

As he ruminated on retaliation against the elbow, Jack's angry thoughts blended into other, less antagonistic, but more somber ones. Fairly well entrenched in debt to his prize-agent, without a ship, without money or a serious, immediate future, he pondered his condition until an explosion of applause woke him to his senses, as he roundly joined in with the clapping, catching the harpist's eye, as she, in turn, noticed his lack of full attention, which diminished her own happiness. The harpist is Molly Harte, the Commandant's wife. Commandant Harte is the head of all the British Navy Captains stationed at Mahon.



Following the applause, Jack turns to his neighbor and tells him he is staying at the Crown. The man beside him introduces himself as Maturin and tells Jack he can be found at Joselito's coffeehouse any morning. He then asks Jack to "stand aside" so that he may pass, conveying again a level of rudeness which occasions Jack to fantasize beating the little man down to the ground with one of those wonderful little gilt chairs. But, given the nature of the event- and its attendant dignitaries- Jack decides to civilly allow the man to pass, working the room as he leaves, loudly complementing the harpist, over the heads of the small crowd encircling the talented Mrs. Harte, greeting several other fellow officers, finally bowing to the commandant's secretary as he makes his final departure.

As Jack walked down to the harbor, he thought of that secretary, who had sabotaged his chances for acquiring a beautiful, French privateer by rerouting the opportunity to a brother, recently arrived from Gibraltar. Yet, when he had taken his leave, he had been voiceless to comment, however indirect and discreet, on the betrayal.

Jack was enjoying himself, to a degree, in the sardine and wine-drenched aromas of the Crown hotel, not because of the cuisine, but perhaps due to the bouncy little chambermaid, Mercedes, who called him "Teniente" (from Lieutenant,) who announced upon his arrival a mysterious letter and a recent visit from an American Loyalist named Captain Allen, perhaps in regards to the funeral of Captain James Bradby of the *Sophie*.

As he turned over the sealed letter, he stared at the strange address written in an unfamiliar hand- to "Captain Aubrey," it said. The embossing on the black seal was as impossible to make out as the rest of the letters featuring, inducing him to open it and to study its contents, which contained his new orders, easy to understand, but difficult for him to quickly grasp... for were these not, indeed, a written summons to his new duty- as Master and Commander of Bradby's former ship? Once, when assimilated, was this not occasion for a massive explosion of joy, accompanied by laughter, redness of the face and a burst of optimism and hope ill-fitted to the somber, doldrums of the last few weeks? And when he called on Mercedes, did he not call for wine and roast pollo (chicken,) cautioning her that the days of "Teniente" were now over, ushering in the days of "Capitano?"

Yes, Capitano. However, now, as he left the naval outfitters with his new epaulette, marking his promotion to Capitano, he spotted the rude Mr. Maturin across the street. Flush with his new victory, he could not but help reach out peacefully to the black-coated stranger, burying the hatchet by telling him happily of his new orders and ship. Stephen Maturin and Jack Aubrey thereby begin their famous literary (and now cinematic) friendship in a brief, but pleasant encounter, over coffee and chocolate.

Following their discussion of new commands, violins, cellos and hoopes, Jack now calls on Commandant Harte. Harte comments on Aubrey's strange late visit following his orders, Aubrey explaining that he had only found out in the wee early hours of morning. Aubrey leaves to visit with Mrs. Harte, having declined Harte's offer to take aboard a useless chaplain (from a seafaring point of view,) with the prospect of a relatively crewless ship.



Jack's encounter with Mrs. Harte is quite pleasant and unusually intimate, he calling her Molly behind closed doors. She is thrilled by his promotion. Then leaving her, Jack strolls over to the ship, stopping on his way at his business agent, Mr. Williams, where he makes arrangement to borrow money to pay for the gifts his new commission has encumbered him with- thank you cards, in effect, that cost money. He agrees to take on a cousin of the agent's wife, David Richards, a boy conversant with figures, provided he will be accompanied by an able sea hand.

Before actually arriving at the ship, Jack stops at the hospital to see Mr. Baldick, second-in-command on the *Sophie* in its last regime. Baldick appears to be all right, but had been quite upset with the former surgeon who wanted to deprive him of his favorite medicines, Ward's Drops and Ward's Pills- and engage in other suspicious, counter-intuitive measures of the prevailing regime of scientifically-driven medicine featuring "these jumped-up young fellows from the Surgeons' Hall." (p. 26.) Besides Ward's drops, Jack remarks later, there was a strong smell of spirits in the room, more like the stench of a first-rate tavern than a hospital. Despite his reduced state, Baldick is alert enough to assure the young Captain that there is more than a skeleton crew left.

Finally, after leaving Baldick, Jack approaches the ship in a waterman's boat. The ship has been prepared for him, yards squared, decks scrubbed and two brass quarterdeck four-pounders polished and shining, a pleasant facade awaiting inspection by their new Captain. There is an old-fashioned look to the ship, the hands themselves dressed archaically in petticoat-breeches, decades behind the fashions of the contemporary Naval seaman. Jack is formally introduced to his officers by Mr. Marshall, the ship's master- and makes his assessment of his crew and officers.

As he headed back towards shore in a boat pulled by his own crew, Jack felt keenly his status as officer, as Master and Commander of the ship- and the attendant isolation of command. Whatever the quality of his men and his orders, Jack knew one thing- he had fallen in love with the *Sophie* on first sight.

Chapter 1 Analysis

According to a Wikipedia article, the C Major Quartet by Pietro Locatelli was a piece of music apparently created for the deceased musician by author Patrick O'Brien. This does not keep O'Brien from as enthusiastically describing the piece as he describes its energetic performance.

This is the masterful scene in which one of the great novelistic buddy teams of this century is introduced. Jack's introduction to his partner of many future adventures is by way of an elbow, inducing him to stop his annoying accompaniments to Locatelli's inspiring, but possibly fictional piece. His first response to his future friend is- should he take offense at his elbow? Was that to be construed as a blow, worthy of the appropriate retribution from an offended Naval Officer? As he listened to the commandant's wife play a difficult harp piece, ruminating on what action was deserved for the elbow assault, we sense the complexity of Jack Aubrey, reminding us of that other English



officer, Hornblower, a somewhat different, but also intricate piece of work by another great author of the old British navy, C. S. Forester.

Those whose interests have been drawn to this book by the film with Russell Crowe, will now realize that there is a sharp distinction between the content of the film, *Master and Commander*, and the book, whose title is similar but whose content is strikingly different from the outset. The film takes place completely at sea, whereas the book is initiated sometime before the events featured in the film.

But for those who loved the film, the opportunity to experience this meeting of Jack and Stephen is awesome, especially with such loving detail. In fact for those who had warmed up to these characters, the nuances provided by the original author are much sharper than those in the movie, although the outlines are roughly similar.

And, not surprisingly, Stephen Maturin replied favorably, inviting him to coffee and chocolate, at which time, the two, once close to being enemies, now turned to courtly discussion. Jack commented on his difficulties with foreign languages and his tinkering with the fiddle; Stephen now spoke of his joy at seeing a hoopoe dart over the roof while they were talking, introducing himself to Jack as a naturalist by hobby and disposition, if not by profession.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

Jack and Stephen are dining grandly in the backroom of an inn overlooking the sea, tossing their oyster shells back into the deep with a casual and light-hearted air as they converse. Now and again, they dine on mutton, commenting on the somewhat confused status of their original order, as they do not recognize everything before them on their round table by the bow window.

Staring at the strange dishes, Jack laments his poor grasp of language. Did he not generally wind up with two or three dishes he had not ordered? Stephen asks him if he spoke to them in Spanish- the Castilian variety. Jack replies affirmatively. Stephen points out that the correct language is Catalan, a more refined, more Latinized language- with a completely different sound to it. Stephen further amazes Jack with his erudition in pointing out a dish called "bolet" in Catalan. Although Stephen is incapable of rendering the dish in English, he does point out the Latinized name of the species in Linnaeus' categories. How could Stephen possibly know such things?

It turns out that Stephen was brought up in these areas, spending more of his young life in Catalonia than in his native Ireland. Jack complements him on his good use of his childhood, but Stephen demurs, revealing a certain important element of his character, for Stephen laments his wasting of his early years. This is because Stephen, although learning much about the birds and reptiles of the area, did not take advantage of his unique position in an unexplored area to learn about the insects and plants. Stephen, among other things, is a naturalist, a man of pure science, specializing in the classification of plant and animal species at a time when the scientific world is just beginning to unfold its promise.

In his disquisition about his interests in the flora and fauna of Catalonia, Stephen mentions a Mr. Browne, a patient he was supposed to accompany in the region, but who died before he could accomplish his mission. Although in terms of the conversation, this was very much of a sidebar, Jack picks up that Stephen, in fact, is a doctor. And when he does, he presses Stephen to come to sea with him, discounting his need for total proficiency in the surgical area. His arguments are wonderfully comedic, highlighting the wonders of the sea for a philosophic mind like Stephen's and comparing the strange fishes of the sea, the birds and phenomena like meteors to the joys of other components of the voyage- prize money, a commodity that even Aristotle could appreciate. To his complete surprise, Stephen appears to respond favorably to his offer, though remarking of his ignorance of Naval hygiene, an important component of surgical procedure, which Jack discounts as a "gnat" in respect of being able to overcome it as an obstacle of provisional and

quickly alleviated ignorance.



Upon reaching the end of his appeal, a waiter brings in a packet of orders from Captain Harte. The orders were to basically accompany a convoy of twelve merchant and transport ships to Cagliari, traveling at a rapid pace and trying to incur no risk in the process. The orders included secret information about signaling approaching ships to determine whether or not they were friendly. It also stated that Lieutenant Dillon would be Jack's second-in-command. Dillon had distinguished himself in an effort involving three French privateers, sinking one and capturing another. For some reason, his exploits were not recognized and Dillon was not promoted.

Jack, in fact, was promoted, according to his own words, for much less important deeds and a bit of luck, when he was the only lieutenant to survive when the *Genereux* took the *Leander*.

Stephen inquires as to the traveling expenses involved in the new appointment. Jack clarifies the issue for him, saying that the swearing-in ceremony is for lieutenants and that he will not need to go anywhere. Stephen explains that his penury was due to a commission to assist a patient who died before he could be engaged and that he is cut off from his patrimony from home- so that he has been basically penniless, another motivating factor for taking the job.

Stephen will need a warrant, a blue coat and, of course, some instruments which will probably be sent aboard in a chest. Before all those details will be handled, Jack invites him to come aboard, mentioning Dillon as *Sophie's* lieutenant. Has Stephen ever met the man? Stephen replies, to his knowledge, he has never met any James Dillon.

Back on board, Jack, who had made a great coup in capturing Stephen as ship surgeon, tells Marshall and Lamb to prepare for him carefully, to maximize his comfort. He then begins to tend to the ship's myriad details, including her muster-book, her sick-book, her accounts of the provisions they are storing, the expenses of his gunner and carpenter and so on. He tries to hide his ignorance of certain of these accounting details. He warns the purser, Mr. Ricketts, who handles these accounts not to trick him as Ricketts begins to teach him a rudimentary course in the ship's bookkeeping. And, even for a small 150-ton vessel, there was a great deal of inventory to be accounted for. Jack tells Ricketts about Mr. Williams's cousin, who is joining the crew.

When young Richards, indeed, comes aboard, he brings a 6-foot tall Negro with him, named Alfred King. King cannot speak for the Moors cut his tongue out. Jack accepts him as part of the crew, prior to leaving for the shipyard. Further, upon arriving at the shipyard, he is greeted by Brown who gives him a lesson in self-sufficiency, telling him that his economical running of his ship is a firm foundation for promotion. He asks Brown for the loan of his B minor Duetto, a favor for Stephen, who wishes to hear it.

Having arrived in the morning and then gone straight to bed, the carpenter had begun work early, wakening Jack with his hammering. He shut the work down and went back to bed, waking when he wished much later, just a few minutes, though, after Dr. Stephen Maturin arose, having dreamt of holding a pretty girl's hand in Ireland. Owing to a problem with his landlord, Stephen had spent the night in the ruins of St. Damian's



chapel. As he gazed at some ants stealing crumbs from one of his scant meals, he watched a large, two-pound toad, smiling at it, as he began to think of his future with Jack Aubrey's *Sophie*. In his mind, he wondered if, indeed, he was truly wanted at all. Still, he decided to make a call at the hospital and inquire about the work of a naval surgeon. And, then, he thought of James Dillon- and how he had said he had not known him. Were there not hundreds of men with that name?

Regardless of Maturin's lack of remembrance, there was a James Dillon who, at the moment, was on the *Burford*, shaving and trying to sing "*Christie Eleison*." From the quarterdeck, he now spotted the *Sophie*, noting that she was a fourteen-gun sloop, despite her small tonnage. The *Sophie*, indeed, was a Spanish prize with an elm-tree pump, a rare bit of equipment used to wash the deck- that was, to any mariner who saw her, a sight to remember the *Sophie* for.

Dillon comes aboard as Jack scans a perfect sky for trouble, the pure white clouds deflecting his view of a rising glass warning him of unfair weather. While speaking with Dillon, he tells Lamb, the carpenter, to improvise rather than bother the shipyard, taking Brown's lesson on economy to heart.

Dillon then goes below to look at his quarters, changing into his working uniform and reappearing to have some coffee with his Captain. During their conversation, Captain Harte sends him a draft of able-bodied seamen, a great boon for the *Sophie*. But later, Jack, who has been delayed, must settle for some long twelves, heavier guns than he would have chosen. Realizing he must take the *Sophie* out to sea, he sends Mr. Mowett to alert Stephen that he will not be back to port in time for dinner. And, for the most part, their little overnight excursion went fairly well. Observers on the land would see nothing reflecting badly on their seamanship and zeal.

However, Mr. Mowett did not reach Stephen in time to tell him that the engagement was called off and Stephen watched, with some concern, as he saw the *Sophie* sail off into the distance. The pity of it all was that this was after he had discussed with Florey the demands of the naval surgeon's job and, even more importantly, the reality of Jack's offer, which Florey suggested was quite real. Furthermore, Florey had promised him some instruments from the hospital- saws, bone-rasps and other instruments from a distant era of medicine.

Jack carried his conversations with Jack and Florey with him, as he retreated to the town to mournfully reflect on his misfortune. Perhaps he would have had news of the cancellation of the meeting sooner had he been in the coffeehouse. However, owing to his penury, he had to choose between coffee and paying the midshipman to cart him over to the *Sophie* for his appointment, and he was not there. When he did hear it and found that he had an appointment with Jack at the Crown when he returned, his sense of destiny and future returned, and he went back to Florey to assist him in his medical efforts to pass away the time.

Jack at sea, in the meantime, was having a bad time with his guns. The new twelve-pounders, when fired, recoiled fearfully and were too much for the little ship. Among



other things, the seams of the ship had opened up, and there was excess water in the well. It was sad because these weapons were formidable and an asset to the fighting power of the *Sophie*. After ordering the bosun to the chain-pump, Jack retired to look at the massive papers on his desk. There, he perused the ship's log, noting careful, though generally boring entries, chronicling their convoy work, a rather lot of small amounts of flogging- 12 and 24 lashes- but not the massive lashing dished out in some quarters. Afterwards, he went up to the quarter deck, analyzing the rigging and sails of the ship, trying to understand the forces of nature and physics that could maximize her performance and service- an analysis similar to that of a rider on a horse approaching a hedge. He came back to the cabin thinking how the first use of his prize money would be a visit to Vienna and the opera.

When Dillon came to his quarters to speak about a rising wind, he went up the quarterdeck himself, just in time to witness an accident that forced his men to bring the sail down to the deck- and sent the *Sophie* racing to the harbor for repairs. There was mumbling by some of the men- over the sails and disarray of the rigging, and the desperate pumping after the incident with the twelve-pounder. Jack manages to replace the yard with some sails from the *Genereux*, which the crew scavenges successfully. Jack leaves with Brown's duetto to show to Stephen before the evening's voyage. Upon arriving at the Crown, he meets Stephen, giving the new ship's surgeon a few guineas as an advance on his pay. He makes arrangements with Stephen to move his gear, including his rather bulky violincello, a chest and a few books.

On board, Mr. Dillon and Jack discuss the sailing dynamics of leaving the harbor, and the seemingly endless length to a long and somewhat brutal day of mini-disasters and momentous beginnings.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we find out a great deal more about Jack and Stephen and some of the problems with the new ship. We learn, for instance, of Stephen's true poverty, as he evades his landlord by changing his lodgings to some ruins overlooking the town- and how he gives up his morning coffee so he can pay for his ride to the *Sophie*.

In one sense, *Master and Commander* is all about command and this chapter is about assuming command of a British naval ship. Though not a large ship and on a rather boring, humdrum assignment, the *Sophie* is still a real fighting vessel. The challenges Jack faces, and the way he handles them on his first day of command, will make an indelible impression on the crew.

Quite frankly, Jack does not do too well on his first day. Although he takes a crack at the cumbersome paperwork, he is obviously not too keen on it and does not know the ins and outs of it. There is a caution in dealing with Mr. Ricketts, his purser, who he believed was a bit too smooth in handing him papers to sign and giving him a terse explanation of their contents. He catches him in a bit of fraud when he has rated his



young son an Able Seaman. His warning to Ricketts is in his intonation, as we see the beginnings of Jack's subtle ways of command.

In fact, we see Jack as a nimble, political fellow in many ways. For instance, in the way he deals with Brown, first flattering him with his easy compliance to his suggestion that he not encumber the shipyard and his rapid, visible assumption of placing the ship's economy above any cloying need that he could handle himself. Secondly, he complements Brown by seeking his book of musical composition. Both these elements have a function in reality, but also in the navy politick. Where Jack has probably the most visible problem is with the twelve-pounders and a non-functioning sail and rigging that confounds towards the end of the voyage.

There is a slight foreboding tone to this chapter, particularly at the end, as some of the sailors complain about Jack's performance, one calling him 'the fleet's own brazen smiling serpent,' a dangerous comment, foreshadowing crew unrest, an ever-present danger in the Queen's Navy, which is at the height of its power and despotic and cruel with those who oppose it, even slightly, from within.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Taking in great breaths of air after leaving his cramped quarters for the open air, Jack surveys a sea and sky of an ambiguous, gray nature. He turns to Dillon and makes mention of the necessity of assigning the men their watches and their permanent quarters. Were there any men from the Charlotte? One, Dillon replies, recalling the terrible fire on the Charlotte, with its eight hundred men and a blaze so strong you could hear it a mile away. Accompanying the blaze were the reports of Charlotte's gun, firing mechanically and randomly from the heat. Only a hundred men were saved, because many of the boats from nearby ships hung back, realizing that the Charlotte's magazine might blow up at any time- and, although these were battle-hardened men, they were not hardened necessarily against the random firing of guns.

Seeing what looks like a beautiful blue sky, with a little violet tucked away towards the West, Jack decides to get a wider perspective by going up the ratlines. He decided to go the unconventional route, which was through a square hole besides the mast, called the lubber's hole. This route was more direct but seldom used except by novices and men of dignity. By doing this, he managed to scare the dickens out of a Polish sailor, before climbing even higher to ultimately settle himself in the cross trees. Now, he could see forever. The sky was perfect, the scene so exquisite and beautiful. Tears come to his eyes. Finding himself basking in the pleasant warmth of the sunrise, he chastises himself for his hedonistic delights and begins to head towards the deck.

Now it was four bells, and Stephen was wakened to the sounding of "Up all hammocks!" and the rushing of men and loud voices urging them to wakefulness and vigor in fulfillment of their duties. In the midst of this chaos, the elm-tree pump was vigorously worked, clearing water from the bilges. Stephen wondered if he had wakened in the midst of a sudden emergency, pulling himself up suddenly and nearly taking off his head on a broad beam. The steward inquired after his well-being, asking him about breakfast, when Jack walks in, reiterating the offer for breakfast- bacon and eggs, coffee and even a beefsteak. When Stephen realizes he is unshaven and remarks to Jack that the sailors must cut themselves often at sea, Jack remarks that the problem isn't cuts from shaving- but hernias at sea. While discussing the final order for breakfast, Stephen is told he will meet Mr. Dillon at the evening meal.

After breakfast, Mr. Dillon calls the men to muster and reads them the Articles of War, articles which dwell on a great many capital crimes- for a superior officer not encouraging the inferior officers to fight, for cowardly yielding to the enemy for quarter for withdrawing in a time of action, raising a weapon to or striking an officer, etc. In the book, the crew takes quite readily to these declarations, finding comfort in the firm and consistent words that govern their actions.



After the reading, Maturin and Dillon meet each other, neither revealing the truth- that they do, indeed, know each other. Indeed, they have reason to be careful with this knowledge for their link together is political and controversial, both having been members of the United Irishmen, an organization of Irish Catholics, Presbyterians and dissenters who longed for a representative government in Ireland. There had been an uprising, which had led to a crushing defeat with some of its top leaders pardoned but the rest, restlessly hunted by the British.

While Dillon goes off with Jack, Stephen is shown the ship by Mr. Mowett, where he faces the reality of a forty foot drop, looking down at a mass of moving ropes suggesting a ladder as the only thing between himself and a drop to the deck. He freezes for awhile and is aided in his upward journey on the ratlines by other friendly hands, proceeding to the very lubber's hole which had been graced by Captain Aubrey somewhat earlier in the day. Quite aloft and nervous, Stephen receives training in the forestays and hanks, in the lower mast and the topmast, in the strange platforms and cross-trees that collaborate to make the ship function in the world of wind and sail. Complemented for his seafaring knowledge, Mowett reveals that he is about to go again for his lieutenant's examination but had been stumped before by a Captain who asked him the fathom depth of the main crowfoot and the length of the euphroe. Accordingly, Stephen, still aloft with Mowett, watches a gaggle of sailors racing up to the topmost shrouds. Upon there, Mowett describes how they will adjust the various sails- the lee sheet first, then the weather sheet, culminating with hoisting of the halliards. As a dessert offering for his lesson, Stephen learns that a brig is a sloop.

Mowett guides Stephen down after reciting a poem of his own, showcasing the stern gallantry of the bosun in his relentless barking to the crew. He cautions Stephen not to look as he descends to the deck. Meanwhile, Jack and James Dillon are working on the watches and the quartering of the men. They call for Mr. Marshall to help them out as Mowett descends with Stephen into the Midshipmen's quarters, marveling at its crampedness as Mowett launches into another quatrain about the Midshipman's berth. Another poem prompts Midshipman Babbington to ridicule Mowett's relationship to his oceanic muse.

From the Midshipmen's quarters, they cross over to the galley, where a man lies in chains for being rude. Then to a room where seventy-seven men, including the Marines, both eat and sleep with about twenty-eight inches or less between them. Stephen, noting the lack of ventilation and men crowded together, warns of the deadly dangers of gaol-fever or the plague, implying that most of these men could be wiped out by an infection with such an opportunity to wreak its damage.

Stephen makes a good report to Jack who introduces him to the wonders of grog. He laments of having spent the morning on assigning watches. He tells Stephen his blunder with Dillon that morning when he referred to "those damned Irish Papists." Realizing that Dillon was Irish, he had tried to deflect the comment to mean the Catholics alone, but realized that he had done his new officer some injury. Stephen asks him if he truly hates Papists. Jack replies that he does, pointing to the recent rebellion. Stephen replies that the United Irishmen were truly an eclectic bunch and not just a



band of Papists. However, Jack does not care so much about the details but that he might have upset Dillon, who he believes would be a good shipmate and will have a hard enough time dealing with a new crew on a fresh ship.

At dinner, Stephen was silent by choice. They ate turbot, from which they scraped off the breading, and then were served a rather scary looking ham. At one time, Dillon inquired whether or not he had known Stephen. Stephen said no, saying he was sometimes mistaken for his cousin. They toast each other- first with Jack's poor excuse for wine and then with real port. When everything has taken on a cozy air, Jack asks Dillon to tell about the famous incident with the *Dart* for which Dillon, though unpromoted, attained such notoriety.

Dillon began his narrative, relating how the *Dart* was a cutter with eight four-pounders but only a small crew of thirteen and a boy, a well-equipped fighting vessel without many fighters. He had brought with him a Captain Dockey's wife and sister. The *Dart* was somewhat west of the Egadi Islands when they were attacked by three French privateers, each carrying a six-pounder and a four-pounder and each loaded down with forty or fifty men. One being still at a distance- and the fear being that they would surround the *Dart*, attacking it from both sides, Dillon chose to attack the two separately. The deck was soon cleared for action, and the ladies joined the Seaman in filling up the cartridges with powder and carrying them to the crew.

Dillon missed an attempt to ram one of the French vessels but then succeeded, the boom cracking against the foreyard of the vessel. The French ship now crippled, the *Dart* moved along side her, striking with their broadside and igniting her foresail, forcing her to surrender. Warning the privateer not to move or they would sink her, the *Dart* now chased the other vessel, pummeling her with the four-pounders until she went down, her sail still set, sunk into the deep. The third got away for the *Dart* had been shot through the mast and was wounded. But she made it back to the crippled privateer, whose sole concern, in their absence, had to put out her fires. With only one wounded, none dead on the *Dart's* side, and thirteen dead and twenty-nine prisoners on the French side, it was quite an achievement for Dillon and his *Dart*. Jack and Stephen toast James' accomplishment. James then takes his leave for his duties on deck.

Chapter 3 Analysis

There is an important incident, which is a great key to understanding Jack's sentiments regarding his service. After Dillon has related the story of the *Dart*, Jack remarks how the *Dart's* maneuver so much resembled the preferred tactics of Lord Nelson. He relates how he served with Nelson at the Nile and actually dined with him twice. Stephen hungrily asks him for more information on Lord Nelson's actual character- as Nelson is a great icon for serving British officers at that time.

Jack relates to Stephen how Nelson once interrupted him in dinner, when he was relating the gist of some naval tactics to a soldier. Nelson said, "Never mind maneuvers, always go at them." (p. 115.) He also relates how one night Nelson was out on a frigid



cold deck, and he was offered a cloak. Nelson declined saying that his zeal for King and Country was enough to keep him morning. Jack is so fond of Nelson that he not only emulates him in great ways, but makes the point that he always try to ask for the salt in the exact same manner as Nelson did.

To understand Jack's character, it is necessary to realize that he is a patriot, a committed Naval officer and a man determined to rise in the ranks- with honor. By placing him besides Stephen Maturin, O'Brian also showcases his ignorance and prejudice, but also his willingness to learn and grow. This is somewhat indicated by the exchanges between Stephen and Jack on the subject of the Irishmen's rebellion and the papacy. Still, at this point, Stephen doesn't push his special understanding and knowledge too far most of the time. When he does, it is often, because his interests are so arcane and unfamiliar to Jack, Jack doesn't exactly understand what he is saying- and with the 18th century jargon of seafaring, medicine and science that O'Brian loves to throw around, neither will the reader, without extra work.

Another important, serious meeting takes place between Mr. Marshall, the Master, and the purser, Mr. Ricketts, an incident placed there by O'Brian to emphasize to the reader that things are not just smooth sailing on the *Sophie*. Forces are in motion, questioning the quality of Jack's leadership. As they discuss the ship. Ricketts points out some of the problems with the new command- the guns that caused so much havoc, the wrecked sails and rigging that required a quick journey back to port on their initial voyage, the crowding of the men from the draft. Yet Marshall defends his new Captain. Ricketts is determined to make a point. The Captaincy of a ship is more than seamanship and requires a steady, rock solid type of leadership. Ricketts is concerned that Jack may not have the stuff that will last.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The crew now is practicing beat to quarters. Many of the sailors have practiced this hundreds, even thousands of times, but not under Jack's regime, which had changed much of the old regime. It was an unruly, crowded deck as Jack watched calmly as Dillon barked orders at the men. Stephen was amazed at the seriousness and speed of the men. Jack explained that it was to simulate an emergency- certain men manning each gun, a man to sponge down the gun, a man to board the ship at the capital moment, a fireman and a sail-trimmer to adjust the sails during battle.

Stephen watched with awe as the men swirled around him in a purposeful, deadly haze of activity. After it's over, Jack promises Stephen a decent amount of space in his cabin, but is amazed when Stephen asks if he could be flogged by the Master. To him, it is extraordinary that Stephen does not, among other things, realize the difference between a warrant officer and the Master and Commander, a commissioned officer. No, he tells Stephen, you will never be flogged.

Withal, things go well, until the crew starts to work with the guns. Things go way too slow, with the crew not used to firing the guns independently, Jack decides to use some of the gunpowder so that the crew can get a better feel for the guns. Jack then instructs his men to loose the guns from the tackles, giving them mobility; levels the gun so that it can shoot horizontally; pulled out the tompion that more or less corked the gun; then ran the guns out.

Now, the men began to load the gun with powder, the sponger taking care to keep the powder from blowing away during the priming process. Finally, the gun was pointed and fired. The recoil was hard, around eight feet, as the cannon ball raced to the ocean four hundred yards away. At Jack's orders, the sponger soaked the inside of the gun with water from the fireman's bucked- and the process began all over again, with one ball rolling across the deck before firing. The interval between two shots was 3 minutes and 45 seconds, causing Jack to pause with some distress. More work proved the worse- the *Sophie's* true average rate of fire was very low. At one point, when the process seemed finished, Stephen asked Jack while the ships in the convoy were so close. He responded by looking, then barking orders to his crew at lightening speed.

In fact, it was Stephen's curiosity, which triggered a blaze of activity on the *Sophie*. Although perhaps not realizing it, an Algerian ship had attempted to take the cat, a Norwegian ship in the convoy. Stephen is offered to join in the fight, but chooses to take his place in the cockpit, where he can exercise his healing virtues. Jack checks in with Stephen briefly, permitting him to use an extra room for reading his manuals, thinking that his research might intimidate the men, who think him to be a trained surgeon.



Arriving back on deck, it is clear that the Moorish ship now commanded the cat and was about to leave with her. She now fires two guns eighteen-pounders or more, one striking the *Sophie's* bower anchor. Another ball now hits the ship, hitting a mast at the very end of its run down the deck after knocking down a marine. The guns now ready, Jack gives the order to aim at the Algerian's masts. As Stephen begins to close the marine's gushing artery, an eighteen-pound ball strikes the *Sophie*, a little above the water line. Her guns strike back at the Moor, the *Sophie's* now swirling with smoke. The Norwegian ship has now advanced to almost a half a mile away during the confrontation with the Moor. Jack now chases the Algerian, finally a shot connecting with the galley's mainsail. Sometime later, the *Sophie's* broadside connected with the galley, producing a large hole in the Moorish ship's side somewhat above the water line. She was alive, but crippled, allowing Stephen to go after the cat.

Taking a moment to attend to Stephen, Jack appears in the cockpit. He explains that the shot that was just fired was a shot over the bow of the Norwegian. The Moors in the cat have now called for surrender and have hung out their white shirt of defeat. Stephen takes the chance to look at Jack's ear, which had been bleeding profusely. Stephen's patients are doing well, all except the gunner, who will need a skull operation. The galley looks like it will get away.

After Jack and his men board the cat, they think that the Moors have tossed all its men aboard, making the ship a prize. Jack and his men begin to count the prize money and divide up the share in their heads. The ship's carpenter visits the Captain, saying that warrant officers would like Stephen to share in their portion of the prize. But then Dillon comes in and quashes the pleasant fantasy. The Norwegians are safe, after all, having hid in the forepeak. That angers Jack, possibly because of a lack of valor on the Norwegians' part, but also because that quashes any hopes of prize money.

Having accepted his fate in regards to the Norwegian ship, Jack goes to visit Lord Keith, Admiral of the *Blue* and Commander-in-Chief of the *Mediterranean*. But when he goes to meet the Admiral, he has a big surprise in store for him. It seems that one of the key nurturing influences of his youth, a person named Queenie, a woman who baby-sat for him, bathed him and who even took him to her bed when he was having bad dreams, is now married to the Admiral. The Admiral comes in when Jack is giving her a fat, slobbering kiss. Although initially annoyed, having recently just been married, the Admiral becomes good-natured when he realizes who Jack is and his relationship to Queenie.

Upon relating this incident to Stephen, Jack relates some facts about his early career, particularly in relationship to Lord Keith that are quite telling. Apparently, Jack was somewhat of a hell raiser as a midshipman, so much so his Captain, a Captain Douglas, turned him "before the mast," which means that he stripped Jack of his midshipman status and turned him into a common sailor, berthing with them, eating with them and being knocked around by the Master of the ship or other officers. This immediate offense was over a girl named Sally, who he hid in the ship, but Jack admitted to many areas of neglect and disobedience to his Captain.



Another incident that Lord Keith became aware of was when Jack called out a lieutenant, one Lieutenant Carrol, who he detested as a knave and a fool. Although he wasn't reprimanded for challenging the Lieutenant to a duel, he was asked to apologize. Refusing to apologize, he was taken before several post-captains and two admirals, one of which was Lord Keith. There he was punished for petulance.

Queenie, his friend and ally, is now married to a sixty-year old man and, according to Stephen, in a cryptic exchange with Jack, fully capable of performing his conjugal duties. Perhaps because of his relationship to Queenie, perhaps for other reasons, the Admiral releases the *Sophie* from convoy duties, allowing them to attack the enemies of Britain, the French and the Spanish. This means prize money, Jack's paramount interest.

Invited to the gunroom to dine with Dillon, it is a somber affair until it is announced that the *Sophie* is now free to act as a warship in the Crown's interest. Stephen agrees to come along but he takes exception to the term, "surgeon," since he is a mere physician. In an exceptionally comic exchange, his colleagues point out that even though, technically, a 'sloop' has only one mast, in the Navy she can be three. Now, in the case of the *Sophie* (which has two masts,) she is technically a "brig," but when a Captain steps on her, she automatically becomes a "sloop." Or Jack, technically he is only a "Master and Commander," but is commonly called a "Captain," which is incorrect. Dillon warns Stephen that the Navy, indeed, is a place of symbols and one shouldn't be thunderstruck by a word slightly misplaced or misused.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter reveals a lot about the men and mission of the *Sophie*, how they have been restrained from taking action against their enemies and how various events now serve to release this pent-up energy. You can see how Fate rolls through the events in this chapter, accelerating the freedom and power of Jack's command.

The first bit of good fortune is that the crew is practicing beat to quarters, the actions of sailors taking their battle stations and taking incisive, strategic action against their enemies with their ships, their guns and prospective boarding parties. Just beating to quarters is breathing life into the crew, while Stephen watches, fascinated.

In Stephen and Jack's conversation, Stephen's lack of understanding of the command structure of a ship amazes Jack. Their realities are just so completely different. Stephen's total fascination and commitment to studying natural phenomena and applying his medical techniques to his many on board emergencies crams his mind with astounding detail, yet he knows so little about the command structure of a ship that he is fearful of being flogged by the ship's Master, a non-commissioned officer. Jack, whose mind is ever focused on prize money and achievements that will push forward his promotion to post Captain is obsessed with entirely different details and priorities. And this is why their friendship is so captivating- they bring a depth of wisdom from entirely different areas. Jack is a man of action. Stephen is a man of science.



Paradoxically, it is their love of music that cements their friendship- and a common humanity and concern for life's demanding adventures.

Yet, despite Stephen's pervasive intellectuality, it is not unusual for him to slip into the midst of the fray, in this case, his observations of the convoy triggering the realization of its invasion and ultimately gaining the *Sophie* the prestige of catching at least one prize. They would have been able to claim the Norwegian ship, the prospective prey of the Algerian, if the Norwegians had truly been killed or had vacated the ship. But, instead, they had hid, angering Jack and depriving him of his extra moment of glory.

After the capture of the Algerian, Jack must call on Lord Keith, the Admiral. There, he is treated to another bit of luck when he finds that his childhood protector, Queenie, has become the Admiral's wife, giving him a special connection to the Admiral. Although matters of career are not discussed at length in this encounter, Jack, upon telling Stephen the story, is quite clear in depicting his background as rather detrimental in assisting his promotion. Jack, a midshipman while very young, was "turned before the mast," stripping him of his rank and condemning him to the life of a regular seaman. Lord Keith had been the witness to many of his rebellious antics, just skimming along the edge of serious and final discipline in this harsh period of corporal punishment and hanging. He wonders if Lord Keith remembers, indulging himself in feelings of self-doubt and recrimination that we saw prior to his commission as Master and Commander of the *Sophie*.

This is Jack's fate- to twist and turn in the riggings of the harsh political realities and rigorous demands for disciplines of the British Navy, always wondering, always despairing of his ability to acquire the coveted prize of post-captain.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

In the beginning of this chapter, we look at a copy of the *Sophie's* log, its typically boring details including the strange death of Henry Gouges, who died holding a drought of grog on his fiftieth birthday. This preceded a remarkable bit of seamanship in which the sailors of the *Sophie* road out giant waves from a southeasterly storm. As Stephen, who has been quite terrified by the storm, mounts the deck, they see a ship in the far distance.

As the ship approaches, they find it to be a plague ship, initiating a fearful confrontation between Jack and Stephen, for Jack refuses to let Stephen help the survivors. Stephen is appalled by his lack of compassion even after hearing his tale of potential quarantine at Mahon. The log does not note that Stephen waved his fist at Captain Aubrey nor probably that of the Captain, who at one point threatened him with hanging if he disobeyed his order.

Sophie spots a strange sail westward and begins the chase. It is a decent-sized placer, French or Spanish polacre, a three-masted Mediterranean ship- and a potential good catch. After a time, the distance between them began to close, the *Sophie* running seven knots to the other vessel's six. At one point, the polacre alters its course and disappears from sight. Jack decides to proceed in silence, the bosun giving the order in a strange, horse whisper. Upon going below deck, Jack finds Dillon and Stephen playing chess, while the purser reads to them from the Gentlemen's Magazine. Jack is embarrassed at interrupting him. Jack, having run up the masthead, locates the quarry, only a half a mile away.

The French vessel, *L'Amable Louise*, filled with corn and other goods, is sent to Mahon with nine of Jack's men, the Lieutenant being in charge. Now, forthcoming prize money will permit an advance from the prize agent and Jack can distribute some of the guineas to the men, for a careless leave on shore. This will fire up the men with enthusiasm for their attack.

However, as the ship turns out to be Danish and not an enemy, Jack and the Danish Captain share a glass. The Dane then tells Jack about a French ship not to far away. Upon encounter, the French ship, *The Citoyen Durand*, easily surrenders, surprising the crew of the *Sophie*. Two facts give occasion to the easy surrender. One, she was loaded with gunpowder, making her vulnerable to a sudden explosion, if attacked. Two, the *Citoyen's* Captain had brought along his pregnant wife with him and the warning shot from the *Sophie* had scared her into labor. Her husband, the Captain of the French ship and its chief boarder, James Dillon, were both aghast at the woman's harsh screams. Dillon returns to the *Sophie* to tell Jack about the pregnant woman.



Upon hearing Dillon's news, Stephen is sent over to the ship as much of the gunpowder is transferred to the *Sophie*. Dillon is asked to take the French sloop to Mahon, its gunpowder cargo being too dangerous to entrust to a midshipman. The French Captain is permitted to remain with his ship, but so must Stephen.

While headed towards Mahon, Stephen successfully delivers the child in a slightly prolonged, but not abnormal delivery. The captured Captain shares some cakes, intended for his baby's christening with Stephen and Dillon who, although enemies, are responsible for saving his wife and baby's life.

Stephen and Dillon now have a chance to talk about their interest in the Irish cause. It seemed like Stephen, who was close to one of the perpetrators, Lord Edward, tried to warn him of his folly in pursuing revolution. Stephen, in his conversation, shows himself to be somewhat of a pacifist and, in fact, an anti-nationalist. While Dillon was in service at the Cape, Stephen found himself in the thick of the Irish uprising, a horror which he has not forgot.

Dillon speaks briefly of his concerns about Aubrey. Stephen speaks about Aubrey's provinciality. Perhaps to take back some of what he is said, Dillon says he is sometimes too free in conversation, touchy and not rational. Still, he has admitted that he is not too happy he has been passed over as Captain and now has to be working for a prize-happy Captain, a non-patriotic motive for war that he does not admire. Stephen defends Aubrey saying that his raw courage is likely to take them to commendable and memorable action. Then Dillon explains his political view to Stephen. He does not want separation from England, just an independent parliament. He is, in general, dismayed at the tone of his conversation with Stephen.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Jack's luck begins to accelerate with the capture of two French ships, *L'Amable Louise* and *The Citoyen Durand*, successes that will begin to change his fate. The Aubrey/Maturin saga is filled with this element of fate for it is clear that only some kind of divine intervention, some largesse of providence, will change the mediocre road carved out by Jack due to the relentless indiscretions of his youth. The wine, women and his outright insubordination to officers he did not respect had, to this time, woven this somber tapestry of a lower echelon Captain of Master and Commander rank without any clear prospects. Only fortune's strange smiles can turn him back on a road to glory and post-captaincy. This chapter unveils the beginning of this happy prospect.

Fate also intervenes somewhat fortuitously for Stephen as he is given the task of staying on the *Citoyen Durand* to care for the Captain's pregnant wife. From time to time, you see a glimmer of humanity between the French and the English, as in this kindness which Jack, in fact, bestows upon the beleaguered French Captain, whose ship was so filled with gunpowder that he dared not fight the *Sophie* for fear of being blown apart. Besides, Stephen's assignment on a ship that is under Dillon's command, gives them both the time and the privacy to look at how they stand, as members of a



besieged Irish organization, in a Navy ruled by their oppressors. Dillon, who was physically removed from the heaviest time of oppression, reveals himself to be an Irish patriot, but also a loyal British subject, seeking only an Irish parliament, rather than demanding separation from England. Here we see some of the reasons for the mostly silent antagonism that Dillon feels for Jack.

Dillon is a highly motivated, patriotic British subject, who has staked a good deal of his reputation and honor in the interest of some measure of Irish independence. Due to this,

he was passed up for a promotion even though he displayed great gallantry in one of his battles. He is bitter about this and resentful, even contemptuous, of working for a Captain who is more obsessed with prize money and personal glory (in Dillon's view) than he is for less pecuniary objectives.

To some extent, Dillon's view of Jack irks Stephen, who knows that there is more to Aubrey than just prize money and personal honor. Looking carefully at Jack and Stephen's conversations and Aubrey's actions in the field, it seems clear that Jack Aubrey has great patriotism. Still, he believes he has the ability and the right to survival and promotion in a very elaborate dance involving the traditions, protocol and etiquette of being an officer in the British Navy.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Stephen visits Mr. Florey, the surgeon, who has a large house on Mahon's cliff, over and above the harbor. Later, Stephen writes in his journal how Dillon appears to have become a real Catholic. He is alarmed by Dillon's diffidence to Aubrey and wishes them friends. In the midst of this, Jack interrupts Stephen's musing, demanding that he dress for a party at Mary Harte's. His request is interrupted by the entrance of a Montpellier snake. Upon its entrance, Jack jumps onto a chair, eventually coming down when he is persuaded by Stephen that the beast is not venomous. After the snake incident, they visit Mr. Brown from the dockyard where they play a Mozart B Flat Quarter.

Mrs. Harte was having a very big, grand party. Jack introduces Stephen to the Hartes after which many of the officers gather around Jack, noting his prizes. During the party, Jack begins to lose his intimidations and Mrs. Harte, for his protection, has him escorted from their party. When he got to the *Sophie*, he was eager to head her out to sea.

Once at sea, there was a ceremony to administer punishment, with the officers properly classed in gold-laced hats with swords by their sides. There were many- all accused of drunkenness, all of that during the sea voyage. Stephen watches the affair, including the weeping, crying and incontinence of a new man, John Surel, and thought of how strange this scene would appear to those not familiar with it.

Jack is dismayed at the Midshipman's academic, navigational exercises and they promise him they will do better. Plus, Stephen has a new patient, named Cheslin, a hare-lipped man of the starboard watch. James is amazed that he volunteered. Stephen says he will not allow the man to die because of the ship's prejudices.

Stephen is called to the gun-room to see a remora, a nine-inch fish- so strong they said it could actually keep the ship from moving. Ignoring the claim for the remora's alleged zoological powers, Stephens carries the bucket to its quarters when land was spotted and called out by the masthead.

Chapter 6 Analysis

The dance of character is always the main dish in O'Brien's novel, but it becomes quite novel when a Montpellier snake interrupts Jack's visit to Stephen. Jack jumps onto a chair until Stephen convinces him that the snake his harmless. But the thought of this stout, but powerful man, scared out of his wits by a snake- does suggest some vulnerabilities in Aubrey's generally fearless bravado.

In a way, Aubrey's character is what this novel is mainly about. Aubrey is powerful, but fat and given to physical difficulties because of his lack of gastronomic discipline. He is a loyal and trusting friend, but is rakish with women and reckless with his affairs; he is



intelligent and witty, but very ignorant about things outside of his immediate circle of awareness; he is remarkably brave, but terrified, almost to the point of being silly and feminine, over a small snake. Aubrey is fascinating to learn about, because he has so many sides to his character.

Aubrey's behavior at the party seems cordial and careful, but a little too much liquor converts him into a braggart and buffoon, so much so that Molly Harte makes him leave for his own good. Who is Jack Aubrey anyway?

Yet, somehow it is the sense of duty, the fierce sense of honor as an officer of the Crown, the intense patriotism of the man that somehow binds him altogether and creates someone generally brave, generally trustworthy, generally powerful and generally courteous- with small holes punched here or there so he leaks occasionally somewhat like a ship which has taken a cannonball here and there somewhat below the waterline.

Certainly, Aubrey is altogether when it is time to flog men. He accepts the need for punishment, with its sense of ceremony overlaid by the horror of seeing your friends' and shipmates' backs torn apart by the lash. Stephen, whose interior life is much more pacifistic than Aubrey, finds it quite bazaar and ruminates on its strangeness as he watches. And all this severity is mostly directed towards inebriated men, one of them becoming incontinent during the brutal lashing.

Stephen, whose sense of duty is more linked with healing than killing or beating, attempts to save a man despised by most of the crew. We find out later the man is a "sin eater," a man who absorbs a person's sins after he is died and subject to the humiliation and contempt the Romans conveyed to Jesus. His crew shows the man little mercy or compassion, even when he is gravely ill. But Stephen has nothing but profound contempt for their narrow-mindedness and stupidity and uses all his ingenuity to bring the man back to life.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

The *Sophie* has approached Cape Nao and Jack complements Mr. Marshall, the navigator. It is time to practice exercising the guns. Stephen, who would have refrained from being near this painfully noisy and bad-smelling exercise, came up to the deck to take advantage of the elm-tree pump and was shanghaied by Jack's martial enthusiasm. When the gun crew was ready, each man hoped he would be a part of the team that hit the bobbing cast. The first hit was in two minutes and five seconds. Several more hits occurred and Jack was satisfied, and Jack and Stephen rest from the evening's activities by playing one of Dockyard Brown's pieces.

Dillon spots a group of four ships- the *Gloire*, a French privateer, protector of the other ships; the *Xalac* and *Parlac*, both with six guns, one of which bears an illicit cargo of quicksilver and the *Santa Maria*, a vessel captured by the *Gloire* and carrying French Royalists escaping to Gibraltar.

In the dark, the men sneak up on the *Santa Lucia*, taking her totally by surprise. The other ships in the convoy could not gather wind as fast as the trim *Sophie*. They then catch up with the *Gloria*. The two ships exchange fire, the French ship firing inaccurately. Upon the smoke clearing, the Captain of the *Gloire* aims at Jack with a musket. Eventually, the *Gloire* passed out of range and, abandoning her responsibility to the other ships in her charge, began to run away. There was very little damage to the *Sophie* and, while they repaired her, they waited for Dillon to return with the *Santa Lucia*, which he did, but also with another ship. They then prepare to attack the remaining ship, a Spaniard, which is hiding somewhere by the shores of Cape Almoraira. They sneak up close to the quarry, then send out the boats. To protect their interest, they blow up the fort overlooking the bay. By doing this, they successfully take the ship. Now, off the borders of Spanish territory, Stephen asks to be let off to visit a friend. The sin-eater, who has been assisting him, has been putting 'creta alba,' (white chalk,) into their food.

Dillon and Stephen, on shore, talk about Jack. Dillon is afraid the lure of prize money will corrupt his men, leading to drunkenness and plunder and ultimately to mutiny. Stephen disagrees that the men do not understand Jack's motives and defends the case for the natural intuitions of uneducated men.

Let ashore in enemy territory, Stephen is not really staying with a friend. He just wanted to be outside, alone in nature. Stephen is ambivalent about Dillon and worried about him being alone at shore. Now at shore, Jack hears the *Sophie* fire a warning. There are strange sails at sight. Two ships. Men-of-war. Frigates- with thirty-six guns. French? Spanish? But one of the ships breaks out the blue ensign of England. A secret mark proves it. It is the *San Fiorenzo* signaling the Captain of the *Sophie*.



Captain Neal of the *San Fiorenzo* is a stickler for formality and Jack, with his facial burns and wounds, looks quite a mess. He is given a stern order by Captain Neal. He must take on fifty prisoners from Neal's ship. Neal is looking for the *John B. Christopher*, an American ship, and must go about his urgent business. Neal is looking for two United Irishmen- a Catholic priest, Mangan and Patrick Roche.

Ricketts and Marshall are alarmed. The *Sophie* must leave immediately, abandoning Stephen to the forest, in the middle of Spanish territory, where he could be shot as a spy. While getting some sleep, Jack is awakened by Dillon's and Marshall's voice. He hurries onto the deck. Dillon believes he has seen a ship. No one else has seen it. Yet, moments later, she is there and it is, in fact, the *John B. Christopher*. The American ship accepts their boat, although there are some anti-English derisive curses from the ship. But the real challenge came when Dillon was threatened to be denounced by Father Mangan. Dillon pretends not to recognize both men, letting them both escape.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Here, in Chapter 7, we see Jack at the heights of the fortunes of war, the chapter beginning with one of Jack's endless drills for battle at sea. Stephen, only wanting to take a shower at the elm-pump, becomes an unwilling spectator to the unpleasant smells and sounds of this exercise. Yet, he must feign an interest, because this activity is at the very heart of Jack's enthusiasms.

From the standpoint of the Admiralty- a theme turned over and over by the book- Jack is given the right to these martial excursions, whose prime objective is to take prizes while uprooting and upsetting the enemy, because he is lucky. To the Admiralty, as related later by Lord Keith himself, Jack's indiscretions and rebellions of his youth, in all likelihood, has disqualified him from the honor of promotion to the coveted next step of post-captain.

In his work, O'Brian tends to present his characters in a straight-forward manner. The narrator is omniscient, but does not have a lot of personal opinions. If there is an interior dialogue, it is more about what the characters are thinking or feeling than interpretive comments, which he leaves to the reader. The fact is that Jack's luck is not just blind luck and certainly not the luck of the Irish (he completely misunderstands Dillon and Stephen, both Irishmen in this story.) It is luck based on total focus on obsession on a set of goals and total preparation for every opportunity to meet those goals.

When Dillon sights four ships, it is certainly a lucky sighting. However, the odds are certainly more in Jack's favor, because he has just been rehearsing for war, as he always does, and is ready for this engagement. Nor is it luck that Jack has managed to tolerate Dillon's critical and condemnatory distance and comments. Jack has done this, partially out of respect for Dillon, partially out of prudence, because Dillon is a fabulous tool in his arsenal. Although Jack is capitalistic in his intent for prize, he is also a very serious patriot, but Dillon cannot understand how the two motivations can co-exist. And, it is another example of Jack's character. He is willing to defer even retributive feelings,

which also occurred when he met Stephen at the concert for the first time, for the long time attainment of some kind of victory, in war, in love or in friendship.

So Jack is not all luck. He is mostly about ambition, determination and preparation, an unbeatable combination of qualities that turns somewhat fortuitous events into golden opportunities. Jack, in many ways, is a maker of his own fortune.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Jack lays out his confusion regarding how he may have managed to offend his Lieutenant James Dillon. But this is a kind of ghost, internal dialogue- for Stephen has been left behind in Spanish territory. Without the comfort of friendship, Jack momentarily thinks of the comfort of a woman. But this also is just an apparition of the mind.

Marshall notes that Jack's liking of Dillon has caused negative reactions in other quarters. He informs the Captain they are about two hours from land. When they are about an hour away from their destination, Jack calls on Barret Bonden, a young sailor, who he offers the possibility of becoming a midshipman. But Bonden doesn't want it and recommends George Luckock, a friend of his. Later, Jack tells all the Midshipmen to write home, and even tells this to young Ricketts, forgetting that his father is actually aboard the *Sophie*.

The *Sophie* eventually returns to rescue Stephen. Stephen, feeling quite welcome, shares breakfast with Jack, informing him of the anger in Spain against him. In fact, a warship is being sent to attack the *Sophie*. The name of the pursuing vessel is the *Cacafuego*. Stephen tells Jack about his life in Spain and how he danced in Catalonia, a traditional dance that follows Church services.

Stephen is concerned that Jack has prematurely landed the prisoners. Jack says he has the support of his officers and that the scarcity of provisions made it a necessity. Later, Dillon relates to Stephen his story about reviewing the passengers of the *John B. Christopher* and purposely failing to identify the Irish refugees. While he is telling Stephen this, he is preparing a "ruse de guerre" (a disguise of war) for the enemy, disguising the *Sophie* as a Danish ship.

While Dillon is speaking with Stephen in the jolly-boat while inspecting the disguise, Stephen falls over into the sea. Many people, including Jack, jump into save him. But it was Stephen's lead-soled boots that helped bring him down five fathoms. Stephen was saved but it did not stop a vigorous discussion, conducted by some of the crew, about the value of learning to swim, an ability rarely by seamen in that time. In illustrating the correct way to swim, the purser knocks over a bottle, creating a wave of activity that ultimately spreads gravy over the Master's lap.

In his cabin, reading *Steel's Navy List* and feeling the lowliness of his rank, Jack ponders his concern for the strange behavior of Dillon and Marshall. The ship has strange currents wafting through it. Furthermore, the Midshipmen were upset. They had very little actual sleep since the prize excursion. They were also covered with ink, a casualty of the letters they were ordered to write to home. Ricketts, who had thought he might be transferred alone to another ship, finds that his father will be transferred with him.



More men than usual await their punishment by flogging. Gloom pervades the *Sophie*. The *Sophie* beats to quarters. A thirty-two gun xebec-frigate is upon them. They have put on a face like a Danish ship and they hail the frigate at the same time they put up a yellow quarantine flag.

When they encounter the officers on the Spanish ship, they ask for help for their men who might have picked up the plague in Algiers. The Spanish officers decline to help them and threaten to shoot them if they board. The Spanish ship turns out to be the *Cacafuego*, the very ship that threatened to fire on them. Dillon tells Jack he would have taken the *Cacafuego* surprise, but Jack didn't think it would be honorable.

Admiral Keith, back at Mahon, tells Jack that he will probably never rise to post-captain due to his record. Nonetheless, Jack has taken more than twice as many prizes as anyone else in his command. So if he has nothing else, at least he has luck on his side—and, as such, he will be able to get another cruise. He now must report to Captain Harte, a meeting, in his furious state of mind, after talking to the Admiral, which he quickly regrets. Yet Harte, on the other hand, is quite congenial and complementary, inviting him to dinner and asking him to consider sending Harte's "money-man's" son to sea.

Stephen watches two praying mantis' mate and watches the male's head being bitten off and eaten by the female, while the headless mating dance continued. Jack, coming above on his friend, invites Stephen to dinner at the Harte's. The dinner will be awkward because of Jack's relationship with Captain Harte's wife, Molly.

When Jack and Stephen get there, Mrs. Harte introduces Stephen to Latilda, who was her schoolmate. At some time, Stephen dives to the floor beneath the Harte's table to retrieve a napkin and finds that Pitt's boot is planted on Mrs. Harte's right foot and Jack's on the other.

Mr. Ellis, the Harte's "money man," talks disparagingly about the Irish rebellion as being motivated by fear. He had a friend named Bentham, who had invented a whipping machine, giving a toast to the rod, to discipline. Jack invites him to his weekly flogging.

Pitt, who evidently disliked the banker, rudely laughs and leaves. Jack, about to leave, is delayed by Mr. Ellis. Ellis wants Jack to take his son out to sea. Jack says perhaps it should be for a month or two, but they should talk about it later. Jack tells Stephen he quite disliked the dinner, particularly Colonel Pitt. Stephen is not impressed by the banker, Ellis. Later, Stephen finds, with great pleasure, they are going to Alexandria— but without much chance of seeing it or anything else.

Chapter 8 Analysis

There is no question that the sea is a lonely place. And this explains why, when Stephen is gone, Jack is conversing with his phantom. Who else can he really speak with—especially with his First Lieutenant having become a strange, inexplicable thorn in his side? Yet, with all his concern for Stephen, he did not think for a moment about



stranding him on land when his duty demanded that he leave. This is another part of Jack's character- he is very clear-cut about his decisions, and they generally are based on a strong sense of duty and honor even at the risk of his life and ship.

Of course, when Stephen returns he is quite happy to converse with him, discovering that Stephen, with his perfect Catalonian diction, has acted, in a sense as a spy for the British Navy and, in particular, for the *Sophie*. And, Stephen is not the only intelligence source that Jack has mobilized, for he also regularly uses Mercedes' aunt to scout out his opportunities, another example of how Jack prepares himself for his "lucky" chances.

Although Jack is prepared to defer any antagonism towards Dillon, he is, indeed, baffled and obsessed with his negativity. In this chapter, this negativity seems to diffuse throughout the whole ship, and O'Brian paints a memorable picture of the emotional landscape of the *Sophie*.

This is part of O'Brian's genius. He not only offers you an intimate story of command and adventure. Besides the joys and frustrations of command, he also allows you to experience the emotional nuances of man and environments of several hundred years ago, fascinating the reader with his eye for tiny, but significant minutiae- the midshipman nervous about their letter-writing, getting ink all over their clothes; the men waiting for their flogging; Jack sitting around reading about promotions in Steele's list, pages that may never see his name with post-captain.

Then a strange incident occurs, proving how lucky Jack's preparations anticipate all contingencies. When approached by a Spanish ship, they feign themselves to be a plague ship, beating the odds against a much more powerful vessel. Yet, it is a kind of desperate ruse and when Dillon asserts they could have fired, Jack is somewhat appalled by his lack of conscience. But Dillon, with a somewhat vague undercurrent, is implying that Jack did not really do the brave and necessary thing.

The ship was the *Cacafuego*, whose sole mission was to do Jack in, a ship that greatly out-gunned the *Sophie*, although, with proper maneuvering there was an off-hand chance she could take the large ship. Yet, Jack's decision is not just based on a desire for victory. It is based on the idea that his way of escaping from the enemy, telling them that he was a plague ship- could not and should not be the basis for an ambush.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Stephen writes how troubling it was to be near the classic shores of Greece and Egypt and not be able to visit them. Yet, the voyage was not without its naturalistic rewards- turtles, gulls, pelicans, a great white shark- among other wonders. Yet, during the voyage, the bad feeling between Dillon and Jack smolders unsettlingly. Still, with the ship restored to its greatest sensitivity between wind and sail, its progress is remarkable. Stephen and Jack make way, on their journey, sawing away happily on their respective instruments.

Jack and Stephen discuss the promotion to post-captain. Jack explains that his current title as "Captain" is a courtesy and not an actuality as it would be for a Captain of post rank. Also, it is a sure path to the Admiralty, unless death intervenes.

Jack has invited the new midshipman, Henry Ellis, and Dillon to dinner. During dinner, the boy recites a bit of Mr. Mowett's verses. But then, Mowett himself appears, announcing a ship off the Starboard bow. Dillon takes a look but the ship is far away. Nonetheless, a sailor identifies her as the *Dedaigneuse*, and Henry Ellis is thrown overboard. He seems to be dead but Stephen has him hung upside down, bleeds him and blows smoke into his lungs, reviving him.

The *Dedaigneuse* approaches but Jack insists on hearing Mr. Mowett's poetry. With the *Dedaigneuse* breathing down on them, Jack puts Lucock on a raft. The French ship fires round after round at the raft, then stops. After that, it seems as if the frigate has disappeared. Finally, they put in at Minorca, the wind having cheated them of a fast passage. By that time, they were down to a quarter ration for water.

Back at Mahon, Jack laments the absence of Molly Harte and has to keep company with Mr. and Mrs. Ellis, who he detests. Furthermore, the prize money has not gone well with his men, and some were in prison and some not recovered from their alcoholic indulgences when the *Sophie* was ready to cast off. Plus, the purser, Mr. Ricketts, wishes a transfer, complaining that Jack is putting them in danger. Finally, Jack returns in the evening from an attempt to visit Molly Harte.

Chapter 9 Analysis

To Stephen, the world of nature and science, even that of history and world culture, take precedence over the spiritual emptiness of a world totally and exclusively dedicated to the values and mission of the British Navy. But since nobody around him really shares this deeply felt view of his, Stephen's aloneness is a continuing feature of his existence. Perhaps that is why he keeps a journal.



Despite his dissatisfaction with the limited perspective of his work at sea, Stephen has a huge victory when Henry Ellis, the young son of Captain Harte's money manager, is thrown off the ship and appears to have drowned. In an almost miraculous act of showmanship, Stephen literally hangs the child upside down, bleeding him and blowing smoke into his lungs to get him to expunge the water. Despite his lack of knowledge of surgery, Stephen has awesome abilities in the area of healing.

Jack, in the meantime, who has longed to be with his mistress, Molly Harte, who has fled from Mahon, must spend time with Henry Ellis' parents, who he despises. Jack's life is woven into unpleasant company because of Molly's husband and Molly herself, who he must please. His relationship with Molly is a singularly awkward situation, because Captain Harte is his direct superior in Mahon, and the prospect of being set up for a court martial or some other unpleasantness is always possible, because Jack is not exactly the model of discretion. Still, one of the reasons that Jack is successful is his willingness to be political, to deal as effectively as he can with the society that encompasses officers of the British Navy.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Stephen writes of an occasion when he came back to Ireland after an eight-year absence and his own wet-nurse spoke to him in Irish, and he remembered nothing of the language. This strange absence of comprehension would now apply to his understanding of Jack and Dillon. Their seething petulance towards each other may ultimately result in the destruction of the crew, the ship and Stephen's priceless collection of naturalistic artifacts. As a physician, Stephen is also distressed on how he must constantly provide medications to Jack and Dillon, simply to correct for their excesses in food and drink.

Leaving Ciudadela, the *Sophie* surprisingly heads to Cape Salou where she will pick up a 200-ton Spanish prize. The rendezvous seemed almost providential, so perfectly timed was the capture executed. Does Jack Aubrey have some special intelligence?

After dinner, Stephen and James discuss the difference in the national habits between different cultures and nationalities. Dillon speaks of how he has given Englishmen provocation for a duel that would certainly have been returned in Ireland. At that time, Jack appears on the quarterdeck.

Stephen is summoned to view the coast with Jack, where he points out details of the coastline.

One of Stephen's patients, Tom Simmons, has died. Is it because of the daily ration of a large tumbler of liquor? They commit his body to the depth of the ocean. The crew is in a desperate mood. After awhile, at dinner, Jack announces that the *Sophie* is disguised as a snow, a merchant ship with two large masts and a smaller trysail mast, with the objective of creating another "ruse de guerre." They used a rope to create the illusion of the third mast.

The *Sophie* spots a tartan. It is a small merchant ship. Although they hoped for better, they go after it. Once captured, Marshall and several others board her. It is a Spanish vessel, masking as Italian. Marshall knocks the spokeswoman down in anger at her lying. Marshall takes over the prisoners and then is given possession of the prize ship.

At a distance, there is a great commotion, the sound of gunfire. Another ship, a Spanish privateer, the *Felipe V*, probably headed to investigate the sounds of battle passes near the *Sophie*, showing her colors by mistake and triggering the *Sophie's* attack. Within twelve minutes, the *Felipe V* has fallen to her guns.

Now, the cause of the commotion is apparent, so a virtual fleet of eight or nine gunboats is headed their way. The gunboats are deadly but somewhat out of range. Still, they fire at them, somewhat to hide themselves in the smoke. The *Felipe V*, which is now under



the command of James Dillon and the *Sophie* slip away from them and, after a time, they watch the gunship fleet slip back to Barcelona.

Stephen and Jack are playing but Jack's heart is not in it. He confides to Stephen how his thoughts are on Colonel Pitt, who has somehow intruded into his relationship with Molly, as well as Dillon's challenge to his bravery. Stephen replies by discoursing on the many conflicts of loyalty a man may experience simultaneously.

The *Sophie*, somewhat disguised, heads for the port of Barcelona, intending to take on the gunships. En route, the *Sophie* spots the *Cacafuego*. Meanwhile, Dillon, Jack and Stephen share coffee together in a rare moment of mutual relaxed camaraderie. After breakfast, the *Sophie* clears for action.

The *Cacafuego* shoots at the *Sophie* but creates no real havoc. Pulling up close to the Spanish ship, the *Sophie* fires right up through the deck of the larger ship. Amidst terrible fire, the Spaniards try to board, but fail three times, their men and ship facing the terrible devastation of the *Sophie's* guns. Yet, though still basically intact, the *Sophie's* sails and rigging have been shot to pieces. How long can she last under persistent fire? Jack, therefore, gives the order to board. After a furious fight, the Spanish Captain is killed and his senior officer offers his word to Jack. Dillon has been killed in the struggle.

Chapter 10 Analysis

In this chapter, two distinct sub-plots reach a climax. The first sub-plot is the ever-increasing glory of Captain Jack Aubrey's prize acquisitions. In Chapter 10, this culminates with his capture of the *Cacafuego*, the very ship that has been chasing him and that he had once eluded by pretending to be a plague ship. But even before that eventful moment, Jack and his men capture a small Spanish ship, a tartan, disguised as an Italian vessel and a French ship, the *Filipe V*, which Dillon takes charge of. So, there is a building to this point where Jack captures the enemy that has been targeting him since he left the Spanish coastline.

The second sub-plot is the love-hate relationship between he and Dillon. If there is love, it is indeed on Jack's side, for he admires and respects Dillon's bravery and professionalism and, it would seem, wishes for his friendship rather than the subliminal strands of contempt surfacing from time to time in Dillon's comments. Indeed, Dillon, who has very little respect for Jack, has mentioned to Stephen that, according to the Irish manner, he has given great provocation for Jack to issue a challenge, an event that could conceivably affect the entire survival of Jack's command of the *Sophie*.

In this chapter, the Dillon/Aubrey relationship comes to a quick and brave climax- by Dillon's tragic death. This is almost a blessing, because the relationship is so affected by Dillon's misapprehension of Aubrey and his extreme subjective criticism that the whole affair could come to quick, violent climax at any moment. Still, there were some signs of softening between Dillon and Aubrey towards the end- and that could have made the situation better. Dillon also was filled with guilt and apprehension, because he

was, in effect, blackmailed not to turn in the Irish prisoners. His own sense of honor had been tainted by his own actions.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Aubrey writes a letter to Captain Harte, telling of his capture of the *Cacafuego* and the death of James Dillon and young Ellis. Subsequently, Jack weeps at the funeral but his overwhelming sadness is overtaken by the realization of the consequences of taking the Spanish ship. With congratulations reaching him from other Captains and other ships, Jack knew it was now possible to be commissioned as post-captain.

Jack goes back to the Crown to see Mercedes and to repay her aunt for the intelligence about the Spanish ships. He then is taken by bosun of *Superb* and some men, per his request to its Captain, to the Governor's residence. Stephen, meanwhile, is at the hospital, having dinner with Mr. Florey, the surgeon. They had been dissecting a small dolphin. Florey warns Stephen about the potential dangers for Jack from Captain Harte, owing to his affair with Lady Harte. The most likely even would not be a direct confrontation but setting him up for an act of disobedience that could result in a court martial. Some time later, at a dinner with the ship's clerk's family, the subject of Molly Harte's indiscretion came up again.

Jack attends the concert at the Governor's residence. Molly Harte is present, many of the crowd having turned against her. They now proceed to the music room, Jack to his seat and Mrs. Harte to her place near the harp. Stephen sits near him, informing him about the orders for Malta being at hand. A short while after, upon examination, it appears that Jack has picked up some kind of serious illness from Molly Harte and must go on a drastic diet to recover. They are sent to Malta, their awaited cruise suspended for a while. However, later on, Captain Harte informs them that they are not going on a cruise at all and are on a convoy mission. Stephen warns Jack about Harte's attempt to provoke Jack's insubordination as a form of vendetta for his association with his wife. In the middle of the discussion, Jack begins to play. His fiddle's neck suddenly snaps in his hands.

Upon leaving Mahon, the *Sophie* is cheered by the ship, *Amelia*, a formal salute that warrants the officer of the *Sophie* standing at attention and reciprocating the cheer. After they are at sea, the men suffer from a lack of discipline. Jack disrates one of the bosun's mates and promotes the speechless black named King, with a strong arm, to do the flogging. They see some merchantmen by the coast, but their orders prevent them from taking them directly. Jack decides to burn them instead. The flames attract the attention of a French squadron, led by Rear-Admiral Linois. The squadron begins to follow them relentlessly. Jack decides to run between two of the ships. One of the ships is near, but she doesn't fire. When it does, the *Sophie's* maintopgallantmast and foretosale fall almost simultaneously. The death shot will be next. Jack surrenders.



Chapter 11 Analysis

This chapter begins with Aubrey's letter to Captain Harte, telling him of young Ellis and James Dillon's death. It is the finishing of a great tale of insubordination, anger and emotional discipline that were woven into the Aubrey/Dillon relationship. If Dillon had lived, it would have been quite possible that the series would have been over before it begun, because Dillon was a man who harbored vindictive and aggressive feelings towards Aubrey and was not a master of them- and, to a degree, did not understand the torrent of feeling that lay beneath his own emotional surface. Stephen had heard him speak about his impulsiveness in speech and seen him walk treacherously along the path of insubordination when challenging Aubrey about his command decisions.

So, the funeral was not pleasant for Aubrey since, unlike Dillon, he harbored many respectful and complementary feelings for Dillon alongside his feelings that Dillon and falsely implied derogatory elements in his character and the direction of his command. Yet, during the funeral, even then, he feels a rippling of personal power, brought on by the capture of the *Cacafuego*.

Following the funeral, Stephen has an interesting conversation regarding Jack and Molly Harte, confirming what a dangerous line he is walking with having an affair with the Commandant's wife. Worse, Jack appears to have picked up a very indiscrete disease from Molly Harte and must take extreme health measures to flush the infection from his system. A fateful moment occurs when Stephen tries to warn Jack about the dangers of this relationship when they are beginning to play their instruments. Jack's fiddle elements snaps in his hands.

This chapter comprises both the heights and lows of *Master and Commander* and, as such, is a testimony to the strength of O'Brian's storytelling. The height of his story is Jack's taking of the *Cacafuego*, the very ship that Stephen warned him about after his somewhat prolonged stay in Spanish territory. This was a powerful ship and adversary, and its capture would very well lead to his promotion to post-captain, the major career focus of Aubrey's hopes and dreams. Yet, the irony of this chapter is that at the very flush of his victory, Fate will intervene, bringing him close to the wake of total career disaster when he forced to surrender to a French ship. Since the surrender of a British ship automatically generates a court martial, Jack's career is once again tossed back into the lap of Fate and O'Brian's twist and turnings of the plot take us back to square one as the book quickly winds towards its final chapter.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Jack is a prisoner, staring out of the stern windows of Captain Christy-Pelliere's ship, the *Desaix*.

Jack has been lucky again, for he could not have found a more agreeable captor. Captain Pelliere speaks English perfectly, has English cousins and has taken a remarkably personal interest in Jack, refusing, indeed, to even accept his sword of surrender. Instead, he asked Jack to keep his sword. In addition to that, he has supplied Jack with a gigantic, sumptuous breakfast.

For the doctor, however, his breakfast with the *Desaix's* doctor is not in that category. Dr. Ramis is most careful with his breakfasts, consisting of milkless cocoa and bread with a tiny smattering of oil. There is an admirable relationship developing between Stephen and the French doctor, despite the food scarcity. In fact, Stephen has read, with admiration, Dr. Ramis' tome, "Specimen Animalium," which Stephen uses as a fulcrum for an investigation into the nature of emotion.

Stephen believes that emotion and its expression are basically the same thing. But what happens if one suppresses, say, the arching of a cat's back or the physical actions of a happy, rambunctious dog? How can such things be measured? Dr. Ramis is curious.

To address this problem, experimentally, they will take their pulses before and after expressions of rage, an experiment that the servant who brought them their hot water would observe, its mysterious content reaching the kitchen. Subsequently, Stephen's observations about the lack of emotion on the face of the captured prisoners is interrupted by Dr. Ramis' servant.

The English have brought a fleet of ships into the besieged bay. The flagship is the *Caesar*, carrying eighty guns. Jack and Captain Palliere observe the scene on the deck, Jack remarking to his captor on the probability of the English attacking. Nevertheless, the two Captains decide to continue breakfast, an event unfortunately interrupted by a shot from the *HMS Pompee*, which destroys the stern windows of the *Desaix* and the Captain's wine bin.

Now, the *Pompee*, an English ship, moves beyond the *Desaix* to attack the *Formidable*, the French flagship. Soon, all the French ships are coming under attack. Jack, after having told Babbington and Ricketts to go below, watches the panorama from the wardroom quarter-galley. In the middle of this great battle, the *DeSaix* races for and arrives at shore. The English ships, at one point, partially owing to the wind, did not continue to fare well. The *Hannibal*, one of the English ships, raises her flag with union downward, a covert distress sign.



Captain Palliere takes Aubrey ashore to find quarters for Jack and his crew. Arriving at the quarters allocated to the officers, he meets with Captain Ferris, Captain of the *Hannibal*, who seems to have aged considerably. Ferris asks about the wounded and killed on the *Desaix*. During their conversation, Stephen comes by and Jack introduces him to Captain Ferris.

Stephen is soaked in blood and offered clothes by Ferris. He has been assisting Dr. Ramis and reports a hundred men killed and a hundred wounded, how he had to strike his colors. He begins to sob. Stephen volunteers to help the wounded of the *Hannibal* and Ferris fetches him some clothes. Ferris asks Stephen to prescribe something for his despondency *after* he attends to his crew. Ferris then relates the certainty of a court-martial. When Jack downplays any real danger, Ferris objects, saying a court martial will be perilous no matter what. The next day, Jack tells his crew that they will be exchanged with the prisoners of the *Hannibal* for French prisoners.

Jack now reports to Admiral Saumarex who seems, like Captain Ferris, to have rapidly aged. The Admiral says very little but asks for a report on the French ships. Jack finds, although he still possesses his sword, that he must give it up until after the court-martial. Under parole, the officers of the *Sophie* and the *Hannibal* have sworn to not act against France or Spain during their liberty in enemy territory. They are not allowed to go near the port or to help repair the ships.

Jack's promotion, if it were to come to be at all, would not happen until after the court martial. He wished to speak with Stephen about his apprehensions, but Stephen is busy in the hospital, taking the time, though, to tell Jack that he is too fat and must do persistent exercise. Some time after, alone and perched beneath a boulder, Jack sings a few Naval songs, when an ape throws something at him, shaking his fist at Jack. Soon after that, Babbington runs up to him. The brig, *Pasley*, is coming into the Port. Both he and Jack run up the hill to see better, Jack laboring with the effort.

It is the beginning of a giant confrontation between the British fleet and a combined squadron of Spanish and French ships. Watching from a hill, Jack despairs that he must only be a spectator to the battle. While Stephen and he eat ham they had stuffed in their pockets, watching the ships firing at each other in the turbulent sea, Stephen mentions that he has heard that he, too, may be court-martialed. Jack explains that the court martial is for the Captain, the officers and the ship's company and that, although there is an inquiry, Stephen himself has nothing to fear.

In the midst of their conversation, there is a staccato-like flashing. The roar of the winds cuts off any possible concomitant of sound but there looks like there is a heavy battle flaring in the far distance. Suddenly, there is an explosion of light, indicating that a ship had blown up, bringing back Jack's memory of the explosion of *L'Orient* in the battle of the Nile. Then, again, there was a second, even larger explosion. Stephen and Jack stayed on the Rock until morning, but there was little to be seen. After Jack accompanied Stephen back to the hospital, he has some coffee and goes up to the rock.



Later on, Jack finds his lieutenant, Dalziel, and some other officers flying down the hill, calling out that the *Calpe* was coming. It arrived in the person of Hineage Dundas of the *Calpe*, who was receiving a great deal of the crowd's attention as Jack broke through the line to hear his story. Soon later, Jack was at the hospital, announcing an enormous victory.

As they drink together, Stephen is informed how Captain Keats took his ship, the *Superb*, between two Spanish ships, firing at each of them, leaving a smoke cloud. The smoke cloud impaired their vision so much that the two ships fired at each other with such ferocity and such devastation that both ships ultimately exploded with a brilliance that had been viewed from the shore. Meanwhile, Keats took on the *San Antonio*, Keats ultimately taker her as a prize. Jack was ecstatic.

The court martial took place on the *Pompee* in its great cabin. Jack had to wait for his case to be called. Finally, his turn came, and he marched into the cabin with his officers. Jack, when asked to describe the circumstance of his surrender, answers in a strangely aggressive voice, containing elements of rage and resentment.

After Stephen's examination, which confirmed, more or less, Jack's story, the court is cleared. When Jack returns, he forgets to duck entering the cabin. As a result, he bangs his head with considerable force against the wood above the door. They heard the droning of the judge advocate who, honorable acquits Jack and his men. Captain Stirling returns Jack's sword, hoping that it can be drawn again in service of England.

Chapter 12 Analysis

Even when captured, Jack's luck ripples through the unfortunate event, giving him a sympathetic and friendly captor, Captain Palliere. The French Captain even insists that Jack retain his sword and wear it, a sign of deep respect and even affection for his British prisoner.

Even though the story is rushing towards its end, O'Brian finds the time to entertain the reader with the hilarious antics of Stephen and the French Doctor Ramis, whose work Stephen has read and respects. Their debate over the restraint of animal behavior connected with certain emotional expression- leads to their own testing of the theory in front of one Ramis' shipmates, which leads to speculation about his sanity. Yet, the two, Stephen and Ramis, are so infatuated with their experiment, they don't consider the consequences of their actions before an audience that had no concept of the substance or purpose of their inquiries.

It is not just Aubrey who is a prisoner, but other British Captains, all of which are treated quite well by their captors. Yet, as Fate would have it, a British fleet appears, winning the prisoners back and speeding the moment Jack fears most, his inevitable Court Martial, a requirement by the British Navy for Captains whose ships are captured.

In the Court Martial, Jack's demeanor is not perfect because, it would seem, he feels cheated of the honor due to him by his numerous victories and because, given the



circumstances, his surrender of the *Sophie* was necessary. But despite his negativity (he even soundly bumps his head when entering into the makeshift courtroom,) the truth of his cause prevails and his sword and honor are returned to him. This is helpful to the reader because, without it, there might be very little left of the Aubrey/Maturin saga.

Master and Commander is a brilliant study of character, drenched with the color, courage and brutality of life in the British Navy. The complexity of the characters and the situations that challenge and engage them are a tribute to the masterful narrative of Patrick O'Brian, who is a great storyteller, unafraid to enrich his characters with forgotten elements of language, commerce, art, science and even cuisine of an era formative of a future of more powerful ships, a more humane form of discipline, a more democratic intent but with a population of human beings no more interesting, paradoxical and determined than O'Brian's fabulous assembly of characters.



Characters

Captain Jack Aubrey (Master and Commander)

Jack Aubrey is a fine, but controversial British Navy officer. He is handsome but with a weight problem, sometimes tending towards obesity. He has a tendency to over-eat and also sometimes drinks too much, making him a frequent candidate for Dr. Maturin's medical assistance.

When promoted to Master and Commander of the *Sophie*, a small, but powerful warship, Aubrey turns the formerly Spanish brig into a conspicuous, prize-collecting machine for the British Admiralty. His background is so pock-marked with episodes of disobedience and rebellion so much so that even a potential ally, Lord Keith, argues he will never make post-captain, the next and most necessary upgrade on the high road to the Admiralty itself.

As an officer, Jack is patriotic but very ambitious, when it comes to prize money and promotion. Through his youthful indiscretions, with women and with drink, he knows the scorecard is against him. But Jack has one thing going for him. He is truly a predator, a bird of prey and his whole mission is to seek out French and Spanish ships and take them and their cargo back to British ports. His superiors, like Lord Keith and Commandant Harte, who are aware of his background, give him credit, but only for being "lucky." Jack has this perpetual lucky streak that drives him continually up the prize winning ladder, making him a hero in the eyes of his men and other Captains in the British Navy. To further add to his controversial standing, he insists on having an affair with his Commandant's daughter, an affair which Captain Harte is well aware of. Even there, his love life doesn't go in a straight line for there is a Colonel Pitt who becomes involved with Molly Harte as well.

It is perhaps as a loyal friend, a well-appreciated and brave Captain and as a comrade-at-arms to his friends and even enemies that Aubrey excels. When dealing with the strong animosity of his first lieutenant, he shows as much kindness and restraint as can be expected. When dealing with Stephen Maturin, who becomes his best friend, he shows loyalty and consideration beyond the scope of duty. Further, no one can underestimate his daring and initiative in dealing with the French and British. Perhaps his youthful indiscretions will mar his future, but Captain Aubrey is always on a learning curve and never afraid to make bold moves in his captaincy.

Dr. Stephen Maturin

O'Brian initially describes Dr. Stephen Maturin in an extremely uncomplimentary way, as a "small, dark white-faced creature," wearing a "rusty black coat," perhaps somewhat from Aubrey's point of view. Owing to Maturin's powderless "grizzled" wig, his age is indeterminate. He could be in his twenties or his sixties. Actually, Stephen is more or



less Jack's age, but it takes more than the first encounter to actually determine who or what Stephen actually is.

In fact, Stephen is actually a very competent physician and committed naturalist, who early in the book, befriends Jack Aubrey, after having deeply offended him at a chance meeting during a concerto in the Governor's palace in Mahon. His disapproval of the accuracy Jack's beating time at the concert deeply offends Jack in addition to his rude manners. Dr. Maturin's appearance and unfriendly comments to Jack Aubrey are not endearing, but , after apologies are exchanged, the two find a remarkable congeniality, despite fundamental differences in character.

Dr. Maturin has grown to adulthood during the dawn of naturalism, when the life of a true naturalist could, indeed be- a relentless, daily thrill of discovery. His fascination with reptiles, birds and insects consumes many of his spare moments. Still, his interests exceed far beyond pure naturalism into the realms of medicine, language, history and culture. Stephen's interest, in the past, has extended to the cause of the United Irishmen, an organization now being targeted by the Crown. Although Stephen has more or less left the cause, as has his other shipmate, Lieutenant James Dillon, it is a potential source of trouble for him. His own affiliations, still somewhat belie his rather anarchistic and cynical view of conventional politics and government. He is not the focused and dedicated patriot that Dillon is.

Lieutenant James Dillon

James Dillon is a brave British officer, in his own way, completely loyal to the British Crown, but seriously conflicted by his commitment to an Irish parliament and his disdain for his commanding officer, Jack Aubrey.

The distain may have been triggered by Jack's first comments to him, putting down the Irish cause and disparaging the Papacy. Whereas Jack realizes immediately that he has insulted Dillon by his anti-Irishmen comments, he tries to soften these comments by some anti-Papist humor. Unfortunately, Dillon is both a Catholic and an Irishmen. He is an old acquaintance of Stephen, whose relationship Stephen actually denies when he first hears of him as being the new lieutenant for Aubrey's ship. But when he actually sees him, he recognizes him immediately. He is slim, a medium height, has dark red hair with green eyes, fair skin, bad teeth. The only change is that, instead of having the appearance of one about to laugh or smile or tell a joke, Dillon has a colorless air to him. The attack by the British on the United Irishmen has taken the smile out of him.

Passed over for promotion despite his courageous actions against the enemy, Dillon takes his new assignment as the new lieutenant on the *Sophie* less than cheerfully. The fact that Aubrey, his new Captain, appears to be both aware and appreciative of his experience, does not remove his reluctant assumption of his new post.

In fact, surprisingly enough, having won Aubrey's respect for his actions on the *Sophie* and their prize-winning performance, he insists on needling Aubrey about his decisions,



almost accusing him of cowardice. Aubrey is generally astonished and hurt by his behavior, baffled by how a man he likes and respects so much could hold him in such contempt.

Admiral Lord Keith

Admiral of the Blue and Commander in Charge of the Mediterranean. He has a desire to help Jack because of his wife's affection for him. On the other hand, he is well informed- and actually a personal witness to- Jack's unfortunate reputation as a disobedient, unruly member of Her Majesty's Service.

Alfred King

An able-bodied seaman who comes on board with one of the young midshipman, one of Jack's deals. One of the few blacks aboard the *Sophie*, King is powerful and capable, but cannot speak. Due to his formidable appearance and strength, he is eventually put in charge of flogging to intimidate the men.

Barrett Bonden

Barrett is coxswain and Captain of the maintop, an important position for an able-bodied seaman. Barrett is young, but very competent. Still, he turns down an opportunity to become a rated Midshipman.

Captain Christy-Palliere of the DeSaix

Christy-Palliere is the very accommodating French sea Captain, who refuses to take Jack's sword when he surrenders his ship. Christy-Palliere has English relatives and treats Jack as a friend and peer, not as an enemy. He delights in showing him drawings has made when in England and treats him to an over-hearty seaman's breakfast.

Charlie Ricketts

Ricketts is the son of the purser. Has been at sea since he was very young. Jack, at one point, forgets that his father and he are related, insisting that he write to his father.

Cheslin

Cheslin is a patient of Stephen's, who is being persecuted by the ship's crew. His former profession was being a "sin eater," someone who took on the sins of the dying. This is a position that automatically brings on him contempt by those who believe in this practice.



He is, for this reason, anathema to the crew. To protect him, Stephen takes him on as an assistant.

Colonel Pitt

Pitt is a rival of Jack's for Mrs. Harte's interest. A tough-minded Army officer who takes umbrage at Mr. Ellis' discussion of flogging at a dinner party at Mrs. Harte's.

Commander Harte

Harte is the head of all the British naval Captains in Port Mahon. Not the friendliest man. Treats Jack with a certain amount of disdain, but that could be partially because of Jack's relationship with his wife, who is an important part of his standing in the society of Mahon, with an influence that seems to extend to Jack's ease of finding a crew for his new command. He is a short man, perhaps jealous of Jack's taller stature.

David Richard

A cousin of Mr. Williams' wife, Richard is a young man who wants to go to sea. Maybe not the most likely candidate for that career, but one of the most eager.

George Lucock

Lucock is the foretopman, larboard watch. He is recommended to Jack as a potential Midshipman, even though he has been recently disciplined.

Henry Ellis, Acting Midshipman

Mr. Ellis' son, Henry becomes part of the crew of the *Sophie*. He ultimately will suffer a very near death experience and be saved by Stephen and then, ultimately, die along with James Dillon.

Mercedes

Mercedes, described by O'Brian as a "dusky peach," is Jack Aubrey's favorite employee at the Crown. Indeed, she is a vivacious lady with a great deal of interest in Jack and his career, in making him feel comfortable and cared for. When we meet her in the book, she addresses him initially as "Teniente," a term rapidly turning into "Capitano," when he hears of Jack's promotion. Mercedes actually figures somewhat in Jack's eventual good fortune. It turns out she has an aunt, who becomes an important source of intelligence for Jack's prize quest for Spanish ships.



Midshipman Mowett

One of Jack and Stephen's favorite crewmen, Mowett is quite knowledgeable about the ship. In fact, he gives Stephen his first tour of the ship. But he is also a good friend to the other midshipmen and a poet as well. His poetry ranges from the majestic to the sarcastic and somewhat obscene.

Mr. Brown

Brown is head of the naval shipyard at Mahon. Advises Jack of the wisdom of being as economical as possible, using his own resources to fix his ship. Surprisingly, Mr. Brown is also a composer and a figure in the small musical coterie of Mahon.

Mr. Ellis

Captain Harte's "money man," Ellis is a banker. A pedantic disciplinarian whose ideas alienate some of those present at Mrs. Harte's dinner party. Ultimately, he will send his son off with Jack., obliging Jack, when home, to spend some unpleasant time with him. Jack intensely dislikes him, one of the few characteristics he seems to share with his rival, Colonel Pitt, who leaves a dinner party somewhat early because of the obnoxious Mr. Ellis.

Mr. Baldick

Mr. Baldick, about fifty, with brown hair and a silver-stubbed face, was the former lieutenant of the *Sophie*, has wound up in the hospital. He hated the former ship's surgeon, who kept him from using his favorite medicine, Ward's drops and Ward's pills, and put him on a water cure. He runs down for Jack some of the men who are still on the *Sophie*. Although he is in the hospital, he still drinks heavily.

Mr. Florey

A surgeon working in the hospital, Florey is a colleague of Stephen. At one point, he joins Stephen in a naturalistic experiment, dissecting a dolphin. He was the doctor that lent Stephen a lot of medical equipment for his first sea voyage as ship's surgeon.

Mr. Ricketts

The purser of the ship, Ricketts is responsible for handling the expenses and income of the ship. Perhaps not the most honest man. In fact, he has falsified some information about his son, who is on board. Helps Jack accomplish duties that Jack does not have a natural feeling for.



Mrs. Molly Harte

Married to the Commandant, Captain Harte, Molly Harte is a talented, dashing woman whose behavior, from the standpoint of the little world of Port Mahon, is quite scandalous. Although not actually pretty, she conveys a sense of beauty by her dress and demeanor. In this book, she has an affair with Jack Aubrey and Colonel Pitt almost simultaneously. Besides her amorous traits, she is a skilled harpist and a fabulous dinner host. She despises her husband and has taken to music and drink to get away from him.

Queenie

Queenie is Jack's friend and caretaker, when he was very young. A Hebrew and Greek scholar, now married to Admiral Lord Keith. She takes a great interest in the grown-up Jack, emphasizing their former friendship, starting from when Jack was a small child, to Lord Keith. It did not help much, though, that when Jack was first seen in Genoa by Lord Keith, he was kissing his wife (out of friendship, of course)

Sir Harry Neale

Sir Harry Neale, now Captain of the *Resolution*, was a 1st lieutenant during Jack's midshipmen days. He is still Jack's superior officer. He insists on Jack taking certain prisoners, angrily insisting that it doesn't matter whether Jack is inconvenienced or not.

Tim Simmons

Simmons was one of the more unusual casualties of the *Sophie's* crew. His death, after drinking a quart of rum, made Stephen highly upset about the rations of hard drink provided to the crew.

William Marshall

Master of the *Sophie*, a non-commissioned officer, Marshall was considered by many to be a Master Navigator. Jack is very happy with his work.

Watt

Watt was the bosun of the ship. Very able sailor and proficient in his duties.



Objects/Places

Port Mahon

Port Mahon was the main seaport and capital of Minorca, located in the Balearic Islands. At that time, Port Mahon is still under control of the British. This is where Jack is headquartered under the command of Captain Harte, Commandant of Port Mahon.

The Crown

Built in the mid eighteenth century; the Crown resembles the famous Portsmouth Inn of same name; has a replica of its famous scarlet and gilt sign outside the door. Gibraltar landlord runs a Minorcan. The cuisine is definitely non-English and the establishment smells like sardines and wine. This is where Jack Aubrey headquarters when he comes back to Port Mahon.

Sophie

Sophie was Jack's ship is an old Spanish ship, with a quarterdeck, unusual for a brig. It has an elm tree pump, which is mostly used for washing the deck, although Stephen uses it for his own personal hygiene.

Epaulette

A patch, also called fondly a 'swab, a coveted mark of rank. Jack's epaulette, marking is rank of Master and Commander, is fixed on Jack's left shoulder by naval outfitter. In the book, Jack (to Stephen) and Molly Harte (to Jack)both speak of 'wetting the swab,' which means toasting the promotion with a drink.

Joselito's Coffee House

Where Stephen Maturin hangs out in the morning- the site of Jack and Stephen's conversation which marks the beginning of their twenty book friendship. Here, Jack notes Stephen's familiarity with the cuisine and language of Catalan and learns of his many talents and interests. .

Cello

The cello was Stephen Maturin's instrument.



Fiddle

The fiddle was Jack's musical instrument of choice, broken once in performing with Jack.

Captain Harte's House

Large house rented to him by a Spanish merchant; official rooms are on the patio. This is the site of his first private visit to Molly Harte, where she tries to help him with his need for a crew.

Pallas

The *Pallas* was a ship that sailed off with much of *Sophie's* crew, because Jack was late in reporting, a fact driven home by Commandant Hart, who is distressed by Jack's tardiness.

Hospital in Mahon

The hospital was the location of Mr. Baldick, the *Sophie's* former lieutenant and where Doctor Florey practices. When Jack visits Baldick, he thinks how much the place stinks like a brewery.

Genoa

Genoa was the headquarters of Lord Keith, Admiral of the *Blue* and Commander in Chief of the *Mediterranean*. This is where Jack discovers that Lord Keith is married to Queenie, his old caretaker as a child, someone who cares for Jack immensely.

L'Almable Louise

Louise was a French ship, carrying corn and general merchandise- Aubrey's first plump prize.

Cagliari

Cagliari is the capital of the Italian Island of Sardinia. Jack's first order was to take a convoy to that destination.

Shipyard

Old Ships, timber yard, sails, cables, rigging pots of paint- presided over by Mr. Brown, a composer as well as a Navy Officer.

Burford

The *Burford* was Dillon's old ship.



Themes

Ambition

Ambition is one of the major themes running through *Master and Commander*. In one sense, the entire work can be looked at as an essay of ambition.

The very essence of Jack's character, that sets him apart from many others in the book, is the unique character of his ambition. In a sense, Jack's ambition, which is to be post-captain has been grossly blocked by the indiscreet behavior of his youth, which involved women, hard drink and rebellion against senior officers.

In order for Jack to move forward, his road to success has to be conditioned by practical reality. He cannot move forward by social connections alone; nor will he necessarily be given the normal opportunity to meet enemy warships in battle in response to direct commands given to the favored of the fleet; nor will he be able to move up because of his superior social standing. In fact, his ambition is curtailed in every way.

Jack's solution to this is to become a pirate. Not a pirate in the ordinary sense; nor even a legally sanctioned pirate, in the sense of a privateer- but, rather, a naval ship that goes after enemy ships and takes them as prizes, tying up their commerce, compelling them to move needed forces in other directions to protect their trade and suffering them to lose access to private resources.

Jack's solution conflicts with the ambitions of other characters in *Master and Commander*. For Stephen, it constrains him from seeing the natural and classical world, when that may be available if another course were chosen. For Commandant Harte, it curtails his control over his younger subordinate, who is one of several who stand between himself and his wife. For Dillon, it is an affront to his patriotism, which demands that battle be for honor and for strategic advantage, but never for personal gain.

Loyalty

Another continuous theme in *Master and Commander* is loyalty. As one could say that *Master and Commander* is a book-long examination of ambition, you could also say it is an examination of the many faces of loyalty.

Jack has deep loyalties, but not the "by the book" garden variety. Jack does not give automatic loyalty to his superiors, and he has paid deeply for it in his youth by his attitude towards superior officers. Even during the assumption of his first command, although he no longer is instinctually disobedient, he doesn't mind having an affair with his direct superior's wife or going to as many lengths as possible to contravene Captain Neal's commands to handle his prisoners. When challenged by the necessity of a required, but unfair court martial, inquiring into the surrender of the *Sophie*, he loses his



sense of proper demeanor in front of many superiors. At this point, although found innocent of all wrong doing, he comes close to the edge of insubordination.

Still, Jack's obedience to the rules of conduct of an officer in the British Navy are generally quite above board. He is a believer in the rules and objectives of the Navy and a loyal servant of the British Empire. Unlike Stephen, perhaps, his thoughts on the subject are not quite as well supplemented by a study of philosophy and history.

Stephen, although also in the British Navy, is a somewhat disaffected Irish patriot, whose sense of patriotism is somewhat attenuated by his slightly anarchistic tendencies. Although perhaps not so bound by a formal kind of patriotism, as with Dillon and with Jack, Stephen has a fierce loyalty to Jack as a friend. He is a believer in Jack, defending him earnestly against the incriminations of James Dillon, another friend. Stephen is also loyal to his concept of science as a part of the advancement of man. He puts himself out for the study of plants and animals, sacrificing his time and other interests to the study of nature. In some ways, Stephen seems more like a naturalist than a Doctor or a servant of the British Empire, so, in O'Brian's work, loyalty is not just to King and Country.

Perhaps Dillon is the most challenging example of a man caught in the vice of conflicted loyalties. He is caught between his loyalty to the Crown and loyalty to his homeland, Ireland; between his loyalty to the rules of the British Navy and his antagonism to his immediate superior, Captain Aubrey. Stephen himself is dragged into the midst of both of these conflicts, trying to help Dillon think objectively. At one point, when Dillon illegally holds back on reporting some Irish refugees, Stephen tries to tell him that he was caught in the middle helplessly, and he did his best, considering the circumstances. But, no doubt, Dillon's conscience and sense of honor is still on the line.

Class

It is inevitable that in a book about the British Navy in the 1800's that the subject of class would be a recurring theme.

The most dominant theme of class in *Master and Commander* is probably on the *Sophie*, where the officers reign over the crew with audacious and unrelenting power. This power is fully supported and enhanced by the *Articles of War*, which treat most types of insubordination as a capital offense. For lesser offenses, a public flogging is the preferred methodology.

A poignant illustration of this class consciousness is demonstrated by Aubrey's amazement when Stephen questions him about the possibility of being flagged by the ship's Master. First, of all, Stephen doesn't seem to realize that the title of 'Master' refers to a non-commissioned officer, quite different that Aubrey's title of *Master and Commander*. Second of all, Stephen doesn't seem to realize that his being flogged at all is clearly out of the question.

In terms of Aubrey's social life, he is clearly accepted in the upper circles of British social class. At one point, he is introduced as General Aubrey's son. Obviously, Molly Harte looks at him as a rising star, which she wishes to help rise on the Mahon horizon, and makes her own efforts to further his career because of her power as the wife of the Commandant.

In British Navy life, there is the class of rank, but there is also social class. Jack, in a way, has a bit of both. Where Jack has fallen is in the area of the code of a good British officer, because his background is scarred with bad habits and disobedience to fellow officers. So, there is a kind of class consciousness due to reputation.

Dillon has fallen into this latter area, principally due to his association with the United Irishmen. He has the reputation, somewhat undeserved, as being a potential, straight out rebel against the Crown. This reputation or notoriety has blocked advantages due to his rank and reputation as a kind of naval hero.



Style

Point of View

The point of view is from the standpoint of an omniscient narrator, a somewhat sloppy one in some respects. The narrator does not handle transitions well and, often, from a stylistic sense, there really is no transition from one scene to the next. One moment you are in a tavern, the next moment you are at sea. It's almost as if the text is written in notes. Also, the narrator very freely uses the technical sea jargon of the period, with little or no explanation, leaving it to the reader to figure it out for himself. Various other terms—describing medical instruments or drugs, items of cuisines, names of places or current political or naval figures—are often mentioned but not explained.

This gives the reader the concept that, whoever is narrating this is very much locked into the time of the historical narrative and, in some sense, he is rendering things rather casually. Still he has an uncanny way of getting into the very soul of his characters and complementing their dialogue and actions with very intimate and penetrating insights into their deepest thoughts and feelings. The result of this gives the reader a sense of undeserved authenticity and a willingness to accept the omniscience, which is unmediated by an explanation of the source of this great wisdom. The narrator knows all about the sea, ships and men's characters and can probe into their most intimate thoughts seamlessly. Why not accept him?

He does a rather good job of narration, and he is so good at it that, by the time you are immersed far enough in the text, you are willing to accept whatever he says. After all, the story is that exciting, and the characters are that real. So, it's worth the unquestioned leap of the imagination.

Setting

The first setting is a concert hall in the Governor's mansion in Port Mahon, capital of Minorca. The concert hall hosts the historic meeting of Jack and Stephen, a friendship which will endure for many other books. Port Mahon houses a number of settings for the novel, including the shipyard, the hospital, the coffeehouse where Jack and Stephen have their first talk, the Crown hotel where Jack receives notices of his commission as Master and Commander, the port itself, as well as the street and surrounding landscape of Port Mahon.

Of course, a lot of the action takes on Aubrey's ship, *The Sophie*, during its voyages and prize-hunting exploits at sea. The intricacies of setting the yards and rigging, the running out of the guns, the utilization of its unique elm-pump, the preparation for boarding parties, the raising and lowering of the colors are all events interwoven into the plot of *Master and Commander* and contribute to its verisimilitude.



At one point, Stephen winds up in Spanish territory, exploring the countryside while he waits for Jack to return. He takes part in a church dance and sleeps out doors. Most of this is related second hand to Jack, but there are a few shore scenes, one in which he is put aside. Another setting is Gibraltar, where Aubrey is headed as a prisoner, but winds up a free man after the success of the British fleet in a sweeping naval victory.

Language and Meaning

O'Brian has no sympathy for the ignorance of his readers. He expects them to know or to research the contents and language of his historical narrative. Not only does he not explain the language of the period, but he even utilizes Latin in his medical descriptions of animals or medicines without really explaining anything. As mentioned before, the narrative is also in a kind of note style, where transitions are blurred or missing altogether.

In a way, although not completely, the narrative resembles examples of ship's log that he includes in his story. But it is not annotated with longitude and latitude nor with the emphasis on navigational objectives or the weather conditions. Yet, it has that flavor about it, although, on reflection, this book is not written at all like a ship's log.

In a sense, the narrator provides the story in a kind of cinema verite style. Like the Director, Jean-Luc Goddard, the narration moves quickly in-and-out of scenes- in that that unsteady, New Wave style. Many of these scenes are incompletely documented, some seemingly suffering the camera's attention for a very long time, stuffing the screen with trivialities of cuisines and small remarks on new animal species or the intimacies of small battles at sea. Yet, there is deceptive power in the realism of this seemingly random, hand-held approach to narration- because, in the end, the reader becomes a total believer in its reality and, whether it's the smell of sardines, the sight of a praying mantis mating or the blood of a dissected dolphin, the reality inevitably sucks him into believing in his time travel. Now, the reader is a participant himself, the unwitting victim of O'Brian's deceptive style. He is there, unquestionably, an invisible time-intruding visitor to a Balearic Island port more than two centuries ago, sniffing the salt air and watching barrels of cargo being lifted aboard an archaic sailing ship, whose reality darts out of a paper page, captivating him with its creaking noises and cries of battle.

Structure

The book is twelve chapters with long, extremely episodic segments, divided into small and large scenes without sometimes any transition. It contains some elements of letters, a ship's log, a journal by Stephen Maturin and an impressive amount of authentic-seeming dialogue.

This book has a logic but not a suspense curve or profound plot structure. The characters are remarkably developed, and there is a decent continuity. The themes, revolving around conflicts of character, the question of Jack's promotability, the intrusion of the United Irishmen's conflict onto the day-to-day issues of a small warship, the



capture of prizes, and the conflict between Jack and other crewmen, officers and superiors flows on without much suspense, but always with fascination. In a sense, the structure of the book revolves around characters, who are so fascinating in themselves, that one does not seem to need to a great question or issue to be resolved.

So, in short, what we have is a set of chapters that flow in chronological order but without the inner architecture of most, high-powered adventure novels. We have, rather, a set of fully-satisfying adventures with such capably drawn characters, we are quite satisfied, from beginning to end. Yes, in truth, we feel that we have been on a voyage to a world that has disappeared into the folds of time, only to be resurrected by an author who may deserve to be quarantined for the contagious nature of his narratives.



Quotes

"The listener farther to the left was a man of between twenty and thirty whose big form overflowed his seat, leaving only a streak of gilt wood to be seen here and there. He was wearing his best uniform- the white-lapelled blue coat, white waistcoat, breeches and stockings of a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, with the silver medal of the Nile in his buttonhole-and the deep, white cuff of his gold-buttoned sleeve beat the time, while his bright blue eyes, staring from what would have been a pink-and-white face if it had not been so deeply tanned, gazed fixedly at the bow of the first violin."

Chapter 1, p. 11

"He held the letter up to the light, and there, as firm, comforting and immovable as the rock of Gibraltar, he saw the Admiralty's watermark, the eminently respectable anchor of hope."

Chapter 1, p. 17

"My poor *Sophie* has no surgeon, and there is no likelihood of finding her one. Come, sir, cannot I prevail upon you to go to sea? "

Chapter 2, p. 39

"In canvassed birth, profoundly deep in thought,

His busy mind with sines and tangents fraught,

A Mid reclines! In calculation lost,

His efforts by some intruder crost,"

Said Mowett. "Upon my word and honour, sir I am rather proud of that."

Chapter 3, p. 99

"Jack returned to the quarterdeck, 'Silence fore and aft,' he cried through the low, excited murmur. 'Silence. Cast loose your guns. Level your guns. Out tompions. Run out your guns. Mr. Dillon, they are to be trained as far for'ard as possible. Mr. Babbington, tell the gunner the next round will be chain...'"

Chapter 4, p. 125

"Well, gentlemen," he said, after they had drunk the King's health, "I have news that will please you, I believe; though I must ask Mr. Dillon's indulgence for speaking of a service matter at this table. The admiral gives us a cruise on our own down to Cape Nao. And I have prevailed upon Dr. Maturin to stay aboard, to sew us up when the violence of the King's enemies happens to tear us apart."



Chapter 4, 142

"The sooner we are at sea the better,' muttered Jack Aubrey, looking anxiously into the dim light against Mahon quay."

Chapter 6, p. 177

"Mr. Ricketts, where is your dirk?" said James Dillon sharply.

"Forgot it, sir. Beg pardon, sir," whispered the midshipman.

"Put it on at once, and don't you presume to come on deck improperly dressed."

Chapter 6, p. 180

"We will send the people to their breakfast, Mr. Dillon,' he said. 'And then clear for action. If there is to be a dust-up, we might just as well have full bellies for it."

Chapter 7, p. 219

"Jack was over the shattered bulwark straight down on to a hot gun run in and smoking, and its swabber thrust at him with the pole. He cut sideways at the swabber's head; the swabber ducked fast, and Jack leapt over his bowed shoulder on to the *Cacafuego's* deck." 'Come on, come on," he roared, and rushed forwards striking furiously at the fleeing gun-crew and then at the pikes and swords opposing him-there were hundreds, *hundreds* of men crowding the deck, he noticed; and all the time he kept roaring, 'Come on!'"

Chapter 10, p. 311

"Well, Aubrey," he said, without getting up, "we are to congratulate you upon your prodigious good luck again, I collect."

Chapter 10, p. 317

"The president cleared his throat again in the dead silence, and speaking in a clear, seamanlike voice that combined gravity, formality and cheerfulness, he said, 'Captain Aubrey; it is no small pleasure to me to receive the commands of the court I have the honour to preside at, that in delivering to you your sword, I should congratulate upon its being restored by both friend and foe alike; hoping ere long you will be called to draw it once more in the honourable defense of your country."

Chapter 12, p. 384

Topics for Discussion

What kind of class structure exists in the world of *Master and Commander*?

Is the technical language of *Master and Commander* an obstacle to its full enjoyment?

Are the characters of *Master and Commander* drawn realistically?

Is Captain Jack Aubrey too full of ambition to be a good British officer? Is he blinded by his desire for promotion and for prize money?

How would you characterize the relationship between Stephen Maturin and Jack Aubrey?

Do you think the theme of music, which is interwoven throughout the story of *Master and Commander*, adds or detracts from the realism of the plot?

How do you think Aubrey should react to slightly veiled attacks on his character by Lieutenant James Dillon?

What do you think of the battle scenes of *Master and Commander*? Discuss one of these battles in depth.

What are Jack's strengths as a leader? What are his weaknesses?

There are a number of scenes in which prisoners are brought face-to-face to their captors. How, on the whole, are prisoners treated by both sides in this book. Do you think the way prisoners are treated in *Master and Commander* is realistic?