

Post Captain Study Guide

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Plot Summary

Jack Aubrey and his particular friend Stephen Maturin are in the naval service of England during the early 19th century. Aubrey is a master and commander of some repute and hopes for rapid promotion to post captain. Maturin is a surgeon of wide renown; he is also a secret agent working for the naval intelligence service. When war with France is declared, Aubrey and Maturin retire to sea and fight against the common enemy.

When the novel opens, England and France declare a cessation of hostilities. As military men, Aubrey and Maturin thus have much free time and Aubrey rents a small estate for a period of one year. Aubrey and most of his men, along with Maturin, retire to the estate and fox hunt and pass the time. They discover that their next door neighbors consist of a family of eligible girls and they begin to make social calls upon them. Relatively quickly Aubrey becomes enamored of Sophia while Maturin becomes enamored of Diana. As time passes, Maturin's composure is quite affected by Diana, though she rebuffs his advances. The idyllic scene comes crashing down when Aubrey learns that various business arrangements have stripped him of his wealth and left him heavily in debt, facing incarceration in the debtor's prison. Aubrey and Maturin, each for their separate reasons, desire to leave the country and so they travel to Toulon.

They spend some time in Toulon with an old friend and then learn war is about to be declared. Rather than face arrest, they sneak through the countryside with Aubrey—obviously an Englishman—disguised as a dancing bear. After making an arduous passage, they reach Gibraltar and take voyage home on a merchant ship. The ship is engaged by a French privateer and, after a very hot engagement, is captured. Before the prize can be taken to a French port, however, it is recaptured by an English squadron. Aubrey is given command of a bizarre experimental craft and stationed in the channel. As Sophia is beyond his reach, he instead ardently courts Diana which is devastating to Maturin. During this time Aubrey has some military successes. Maturin and Aubrey then have a serious falling out and tentatively declare a duel of honor which is postponed due to sailing schedules.

After several weeks Aubrey takes his strange ship into action against a French vessel sheltering in a safe harbor. His ships unfortunately grounds on a spit; rather than accept defeat, however, Aubrey audaciously leads his men in boats and they capture the French vessel, then winch their own ship off the banks. They start out to sea, taking a prize on the way, and then return to England where Aubrey recovers from serious wounds and rehabilitates his friendship with Maturin. Aubrey and Maturin are then posted to a crack ship, H.M.S. Lively, and spend time on station duty. Diana, contrary to everyone's expectations, runs off with a rich merchant man. Maturin intervenes decisively on Aubrey's behalf with Sophia and helps them to rehabilitate their courtship and reach an unofficial understanding. Aubrey is then ordered to intercept a Spanish treasure fleet. With a squadron of four frigates, a very hot but brief action is enjoined and the Spanish ships are taken. Aubrey, putatively wealthy beyond believe, believes he will now marry Sophia in proper style and cheerily drinks to her health.



Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

Jack Aubrey and his particular friend Stephen Maturin are in the naval service of England during the early 19th century. Aubrey is a master and commander of some repute and hopes for rapid promotion to post captain. Maturin is a surgeon of wide renown; he is also a secret agent working for the naval intelligence service. When war with France is declared, Aubrey and Maturin retire to sea and fight against the common enemy.

At dawn Charwell chases a French frigate. The pursuit has lasted through the night. Charwell's consort, damaged by storms, lags behind, and Captain Griffiths weighs the situation carefully. The French frigate is much larger and clearly more than a match for Charwell. Captain Jack Aubrey and his particular friend Doctor Stephen Maturin, passengers aboard Charwell, watch the scene develop with a certainty of imminent action. Captain Griffiths appears to waver in his determination to press home the attack—but at the last moment the French frigate sends up a peculiar array of fireworks and flags and immediately thereafter an English cutter is seen to approach at rapid speed. Charwell falls off and receives a boat from the cutter—the joyous news is announced: England and France are at peace these past few days.

A few days later Maturin and Aubrey are ashore in England. They discuss the implications of peace on personal terms and consider that many of their friends and associates are now unemployed. Aubrey, rich from a series of naval victories described in a previous novel and here alluded to in general terms, decides to rent a neat gentleman's residence in the country near Polcary Down. Some time later Maturin and Aubrey are fox hunting near the recently-rented residence. As the hunt develops they are joined by a beautiful young woman but before introductions can be made, Jack—not the horseman he believes—is thrown and dragged.

Meanwhile at nearby Mapes Court, Mrs. Williams, a widow, holds a rigidly penurious and socially proper house of three daughters and one widowed niece recently returned from India. The three daughters, Sophia, Cecelia, and Frances, have little in common except beauty. Their cousin, Diana Villiers, is even more distinctive and beautiful. Sophia, twenty-seven, is particularly lovely and also quite intelligent—but painfully proper and fairly naïve. Diana comes from a rich and powerful family based in India. She married young and for love, her dead husband having been poor. An unfortunate series of accidents and military misadventures have left Diana a widowed orphan without prospects and unencumbered by money. She has returned to England where she has engaged in a familial struggle with her proper and easily scandalized aunt, Mrs. Williams. A visiting naval admiral calls upon Mrs. Williams and spreads various gossip including a brief biography of Captain Jack Aubrey. Aubrey is a master and commander, not a post captain, and has enjoyed several brilliant naval exploits which should ensure him a solid income. Even yet, however, his father is a political general in the minority



party who is not widely respected. The three girls titter about meeting such a respectable officer as Aubrey.

Chapter 1 Analysis

The novel, the second in a series of novels which eventually extend to twenty, opens with a nautical chase. The chase ends when a fast cutter appears and brings the news that England and France have ceased hostilities; peace is established. This puts the historical novels in the context of the Treaty of Amiens, early 1802. Aubrey, a naval officer, is cast ashore without a job as are many hundreds of other officers and many thousands of sailors. Ashore, officers receive only half-pay; this is not a concern for Aubrey because his prior military exploits have presumably rendered him a rich man. He therefore rents a small estate and retains many of his ship's company as servants. Maturin joins him at the estate as a guest. They spend their days drinking, riding, feasting, and fox hunting. Polcary Down, the rented estate, lies next door to another estate known as Mapes Court. The owner of Mapes Court, Mrs. Williams, is a penurious and small-minded widow with three daughters including Sophia, the oldest, who is in her late twenties. They also have a guest, Diana Villiers, a niece and cousin respectively. The eligible bachelors Aubrey and Maturin are thus introduced to the beautiful and available Sophia and Diana; their various relationships will persist throughout the novel—indeed throughout the entire series. The chapter functions as introductory matter. As Aubrey is unknown to the Williams family, the author uses the relatively intuitive device of utilizing gossip delivered as dialogue to inform the reader of Aubrey's and Maturin's previous history—also considered in the previous novel. The tone of the novel, as well as the writing style, are also established and carried throughout the remainder of the text in a remarkably consistent style.



Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

A few days later Maturin and Aubrey are invited to dine at Mapes Court. Aubrey presents himself well but eats and drinks too much—Maturin appears in threadbare dress and covers himself with crumbs. After the guests leave, Mrs. Williams publicly concludes that Aubrey must match with Sophia and curtly invites Diana to remove herself from consideration. Later Mrs. Williams calls on Aubrey and establishes courteous and neighborly relations. Various social engagements ensue with feasting and musical performances of an informal sort. Diana begins to subtly court Aubrey; Sophia more openly and honestly gains his attentions. Maturin finds Diana's mean-spirited intelligence profoundly attractive. Another fox hunt involves all parties—Sophia demonstrates an inability to pursue the hunt with abandon; Diana has no such shortcomings. Aubrey and Maturin are both drawn to Diana's brash cocksureness. Aubrey then announces a formal ball. In confidence, Diana asks Maturin to sell a jewel and obtain cloth and threads to make a suitable dress.

The ball is held; Diana is gorgeously attired but Sophia, wealthy, is resplendent. Maturin holds a private conference with Diana; she tells him bluntly that she is not interested in his advances but looks to Aubrey as the prize. Maturin protests that surely Sophia must be Aubrey's partner but Diana scoffs at the idea—she claims Sophia is too ignorant and timid for Aubrey. The lengthy conversation leaves Maturin hurt and yet confused. Later in the evening Aubrey and Maturin compare notes, each secretly aware of the other's desire for Diana.

Chapter 2 Analysis

Chapter two is largely devoted to the development of Sophia and Diana's characters and personalities. Sophia is intelligent, demure, and eminently proper. Diana, herself a widow, is worldly, experienced, and presents herself as more-or-less sexually knowledgeable and available. Of the two, Sophia is the more proper and ladylike whereas Diana possesses that dash of bold forwardness so attractive to young men. Diana's character, however, is also flawed—she is vain, uneven, and prone to periods of meanness. She is also in a position she finds untenable—under the care, and therefore pressure, of the stodgy Mrs. Williams. Aubrey finds both women attractive and interesting, and Mrs. Williams privately declares that Sophia and Aubrey must be aligned. Simultaneously, the otherworldly Maturin finds Diana's rough and wild nature intoxicating. The presentation of a lovesick and love-struck Maturin, cruelly rejected by the world-class beauty of his desire, is imminently enjoyable and profoundly believable. The Maturin-Diana affair will span the next several novels and, ultimately, end in a series of minor disasters. The Aubrey-Sophia affair likewise spans many novels—the entire remaining series—and is a persistent source of happiness for Aubrey. The

chapter consumes several months of chronological time and advances the plot at a fairly rapid pace.



Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

Maturin writes lengthy entries in his diary. He uses peculiar personal shorthand with personal observations in Catalan and scientific observations in Latin. He is smitten with Diana and finds her on-again-off-again attitude baffling and incredibly attractive. He is disgusted by his own adolescent yearning for her. The days pass and Maturin and Aubrey often play piquet, with Maturin generally emerging the victor over the distracted Aubrey.

Both Aubrey and Maturin hold occasional conferences with naval and intelligence officers, respectively. Maturin meets with Sir Joseph; Maturin is obviously held in quite high regard by the admiralty intelligence service—a connection to which Aubrey is entirely ignorant. Aubrey considers purchasing an expensive violin but is not quite sure of the tone. On one return trip from the admiralty to Polcary Down Aubrey cautions Maturin about highwaymen—the peace has released many thousands of sailors into a life of despondency and desperation. Maturin checks his holsters to find a teratoma—an excised tumor—and a preserved rodent; alas no weapon.

Mapes Court remains in fine spirits with the girls wondering about future arrangements and Mrs. Williams feeling confident Sophia will soon be married to a successful naval captain. Various letters arrive and the postman proves a competent gossip. The letters are then delivered to Polcary Down where Aubrey receives quite shocking news—his agent has failed utterly and absconded with all funds. A second letter informs him of additional bad news—further financial setbacks. Aubrey is entirely ruined. Far from being a wealthy man, he is in fact under a crushing burden of debt. Aubrey meets furtively with Sophia to tell her the news—against Maturin's advice. He then proceeds quickly to the admiralty where he requests a new command. Alas, the peace is causing ships to be moored rather than sailed and this, added to Aubrey's clash with superior officers, means no command is to be had. News of Aubrey's ruin spreads and Mrs. Williams takes her daughters away on a prolonged vacation. Maturin continues to court Diana furtively, as does Aubrey. Maturin and Aubrey hold various discussions—Maturin is aware of Aubrey's focus on Diana; Diana refuses to take either of them seriously but yet does not reject them completely.

Maturin, driven to despondency, arranges to leave the country. He is then joined by Aubrey at the last moment when debt collectors appear and threaten Aubrey with incarceration. They thus flee together for their separate reasons. Aubrey receives a last-moment letter from Sophia, who expresses her continued affection and good intentions regardless of her domineering mother's interference. Aubrey is confused and devastated.



Chapter 3 Analysis

Chapter 3 presents a major turning point in the novel's plot and propels the primary characters toward a new setting. First, Maturin is entirely smitten with Diana and discloses his deep feelings to her; she rejects him out of hand and in point of fact is quite cruel. Aubrey continues to court Sophia but also begins a casual dalliance with Diana. Although the physical extent to which they enjoy is not disclosed, Maturin notes on several occasions that Aubrey smells like Diana long after leaving her company, indicating at least a certain amount of physical contact. In any event, Diana's complete rejection of Maturin leads the good doctor into a lasting depression of spirit which he counters by taking huge doses of opium. Eventually, he decides he must leave the country rather than continue the torture of scrabbling after Diana even as she pushes him away.

Meanwhile Aubrey suffers several simultaneous and calamitous setbacks. His business agent has defaulted and absconded with all available monies. Also, court rulings have gone against him and he is ordered to pay back prodigious sums of money (later in the novel described as more than eleven thousands of pounds sterling). Thus, Aubrey within a day goes from being a putatively wealthy gentleman of means to a penniless bum fearing arrest for debt. The news spreads quickly and the penurious and wealth-conscious Mrs. Williams takes her daughters and flees the area to prevent further intrigue between Sophia and Aubrey. Aubrey, thus financially ruined and fearful of imminent arrest, decides he must leave the country also. The two men thus travel to Toulon, France, for different reasons.

The historical aspects of the novel are many and varied, but always interesting. For example, on one voyage Aubrey cautions Maturin about highwaymen, noting that the many of the tens of thousands of unemployed seamen have turned to a life of petty crime. These types of historical details make the novel preeminently enjoyable and provide a realistic and gritty texture of setting. Needless to say in the event, Maturin does not have his pistols upon his person but rather is carrying objects of wonder to the natural philosopher.



Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

Aubrey and Maturin arrive in Toulon where they are entertained by their old friend the French captain Christy-Pallièrè. Maturin spies about Toulon while Aubrey confides his love troubles to the French captain. Christy-Pallièrè confides his own troubles to Aubrey. They are sumptuously entertained for several days as they reminisce about various naval actions, including the capture of Sophie, Aubrey's first command, by Christy-Pallièrè's ship *Desaix*. They also discuss common acquaintances and various relations. When Aubrey mentions their intention to continue on to Spain—Maturin's home—Christy-Pallièrè rather strangely and subtly suggests that a direct route would be preferable to one extending through French ports. Aubrey is confused but pensive and passes the news to Maturin. Earlier in the day Maturin had met with an equally elusive intelligence contact and his interest is piqued. Later in the evening he receives a cryptic encoded message informing him that Bonaparte will declare war in the morning and has ordered the immediate arrest of all English in the country.

Maturin disguises Aubrey as a bear by gluing a preserved skin over his body and mounting the head upon the top of it. Maturin poses as a bear trainer and leads Aubrey on a monumental 350 mile trip on foot through the middle of France. Aubrey, tormented by ticks and lice, has difficulty breathing through the hide and suffers terribly from the heat. The unlikely pair makes slow time but eventually reaches the border of Spain and enters unmolested. Maturin's personal estate is astride the border and they both relax from the arduous trek. Incidentally, Aubrey loses about fifty pounds of weight during the brutal voyage.

Chapter 4 Analysis

Aubrey and Maturin stay with an old friend; a French captain introduced in the previous novel. Toulon is a suitable destination—it is close to England and fairly Anglicized but is beyond the reach of English law. Furthermore, they have a place to stay and find the climate and locale enjoyable. Additionally, Maturin spends much time mapping the French port and tallying French forces; in fact, he is taken to be spying but preserved from arrest by Aubrey's earnest and ill-informed assertion of innocence.

By any account, however, the primary development of the chapter is the resumption of military hostilities between England and France, coupled with a surprise mass arrest of all Englishmen in France. Historically, this places the events of chapter 4 during May, 1803, indicating that Maturin and Aubrey have spent perhaps one calendar year at Polcary Down. The remainder of the chapter considers Maturin's disguise of Aubrey as a dancing bear. Maturin's appearance lets him pass as a Spaniard, but Aubrey's yellow hair and enormous frame is evidently too English for normal disguises. The description of the arduous bear-trek is lengthy and accurate but contributes little more than tone to



the development of plot. Eventually the pair reaches Spain and takes refuge in Maturin's large estate. The image of Aubrey as bear is of course intentional—he is described in similar terms throughout the novel. Although Maturin retains the disguise, it does not again appear in the text.



Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Aubrey and Maturin reach Gibraltar and take passage on a returning Indiaman. Aubrey is delightfully surprised to learn that the first lieutenant of the Indiaman is Tom Pullings. Pullings, a stout sailor and exceptional junior officer, has taken private company work as no military service has been available for the past few years—Pullings has previously served under Aubrey in various successful operations. Aubrey, Maturin, and Pullings exchange news and gossip.

The Indiaman Lord Nelson is commanded by captain Spottiswood and crewed by a sparse set of rough-looking sailors. The ship has several passengers beside Maturin and Aubrey, including two young women. As the ship travels from Gibraltar to England, a finback whale is seen. As all eyes watch the whale the lookout fails to see a ship on the horizon. Soon Lord Nelson is closed by a French privateer—the Bellone. A chase is enjoined which runs throughout the day and next night. In the morning the French ship has closed and action is imminent. Aubrey volunteers his services and is sent to command the forward battery; Pullings commands the center battery. Maturin retires below and sets up a makeshift surgery. Aubrey is pleasantly surprised at the efficiency of the ragtag gun crews—even so, they are very undermanned. The ships close and begin exchanging fire. Aubrey drives his battery quickly, finding the limited responsibility of simply directing fire of three guns somewhat liberating. The exchange becomes very hot and Aubrey is knocked down when one of his guns explodes. The Bellone closes and fires grape, then lashes spars with grappling irons. Aubrey leads his gun crews forward to repel boarders and the mêlée swirls over the ship. The French boarders suffer heavy casualties and are repulsed; the Bellone drifts off heavily damaged. Aubrey returns to his guns and a continuous desultory fire is exchanged. Aubrey yells profane orders at a person who he believes to be the ship's boy—in fact it is one of the female passengers carrying shot. Meanwhile Bellone's boats have snuck through the heavy smoke and circled around Lord Nelson—they board her unopposed on the quiet side. Aubrey responds but in the confusion is thrown down a hatchway and loses consciousness.

Aubrey regains consciousness and discovers Maturin watching over him. He is informed that he has been in a coma several days. Lord Nelson has been captured with the loss of thirty-six killed and wounded. The British officers are given their parole and spend days on deck. Pullings, cruelly wounded, has recuperated. Aubrey is devastated to learn that shortly he will be in French prison. A few days later, however, and the two-ship flotilla is enjoined by an English frigate. Bellone leads the frigate away on a chase and Lord Nelson continues on to port. A few days later an English cutter attempts to claim the Lord Nelson but is repulsed with heavy damage and great loss of life. Aubrey watches the entire action with a sense of dread. Later still, Lord Nelson is chased by H.M.S. Seagull, a heavy but notoriously slow brig. Hour after hour the chase rages and then shooting is enjoined at long range. Aubrey and the other English prisoners are sent



below and spend the evening and night locked up, listening to the endless guns. In the morning Lord Nelson enjoys a lucky, crippling shot and thus escapes entirely. Once again Aubrey is disheartened. Then fortune smiles on him—an entire flotilla of British frigates rounds the cape and Lord Nelson is recaptured without resistance.

Chapter 5 Analysis

The chapter is nearly entirely devoted to a prolonged naval engagement or, more properly, series of naval engagements. Aubrey and Maturin take passage on an Indiaman—a comfortable merchant ship outfitted with a few cannon for protection. The ship is seriously under-crewed by military standards. The fortuitous circumstances of Pullings being the lieutenant are somewhat forced and contrived but allow that character to rejoin the developing narrative in a fairly natural way. Throughout the novel, in fact, Aubrey and Maturin gradually accumulate many of the crew from the previous novel. The first event involves the capture of the ship by a French privateer. Aubrey is assigned to a battery of cannon and serves them well but in the end the unequal force is telling. The captured officers are treated well but Aubrey realizes his capture likely means many years of inaction—a particularly galling fate after his narrow and tortuous escape from France. Later, the captured ship is chased by English ships and Aubrey has momentary hopes, then further disappointment. Pullings' familiarity with one of the chasing ships adds a realistic touch to the narrative; an indication of the fraternal and closed community of the English navy. In response to Aubrey's question of which ship might prove faster Pullings' dry response—"Much of a muchness, sir" (p. 154)—is subtly humorous and memorable. Later the French privateer is drawn off by an English ship and, finally, the Indiaman is fortunately recaptured by an English squadron. Aubrey and Maturin are thus spared a lengthy parole of inaction.

The chapter features the hard-hitting and brutally violent depictions of naval warfare common throughout the series. The author's ability to describe naval action in precise terms, using contemporaneous terminology, has garnered singular praise for the novels and has ensured their enduring popularity. Interwoven in the violent attack is Aubrey's cursing at one of the ship's passengers—a young lady whom he mistakes for a ship's boy. The account of the amazed and reproachful looks is peculiar at first and hilarious later when the lady announces that Aubrey had called her unspeakable things. The reader is left to piece together the two vignettes for the full effect, and a re-reading of the earlier passage is as rewarding as it is mandatory. Fortunately for Aubrey, a serious head wound has erased his memory of the difficult event.



Chapter 6

Chapter 6 Summary

Aubrey reports to the Admiralty. He meets with Lord Melville and they exchange formalities. Lord Melville insinuates that various undesirable positions are possibly open—unfortunately Aubrey's late return prevents him from obtaining a ship command as they have all been handed out. Aubrey carefully requests a sea command of any sort. Later, Aubrey sneaks about the town in order to avoid various constables desiring to arrest him for debt. He meets with Pullings and Maturin and holds various small conversations. Over the next few days Maturin and Aubrey live together and discuss Aubrey's probable future; Maturin's slovenliness irritates and disgusts Aubrey.

Aubrey later attends a party at Lady Keith's house—his particular friend. He makes various political connections and then meets a Bristol merchant, Mr. Richard Canning. Canning is a Jew, a powerful business man, and incredibly wealthy. Aubrey likes him at once and Canning is very informed about naval matters. As the evening develops, Canning reveals that he is building and outfitting a large privateer—nearly a frigate—and as much as offers the captaincy to Aubrey. Aubrey begs leave to consider. Aubrey later meets Mrs. Williams and Cecelia, among the guests, and they make small talk. Aubrey relates his recent escape through Spain and Mrs. Williams is stunned to learn that Maturin is in fact landed and wealthy. Diana Villiers then enters the party and is courted by various gentlemen including Canning. Maturin arrives and makes the social round. Aubrey eventually sequesters Diana for a long talk—she asks him to join her the next day but, afraid of being arrested for debt, he begs off and Diana feels insulted. The party ends.

Aubrey walks about alone in the night, feeling ashamed of being wary of arrest. He mulls over the previous months' events and compares Sophia to Diana; Sophia emerges as clearly preferable yet Diana is close and rather available. Then Adam Scriven, a failed writer, emerges from the darkness and attempts to rob Aubrey. Aubrey reacts by smashing the man and taking his weapon. Scriven drops unconscious and Aubrey feels rather peculiar about simply abandoning him. He takes him up and carries him back to the lodging where he delivers him into Maturin's care. Maturin treats Scriven who eventually regains consciousness. Aubrey intends to turn him into the law but Maturin intervenes. A lengthy interview ensues and Scriven tells his story to Maturin. Fortuitously, Scriven knows a great deal about debt and the laws regarding arrest for debt. He advises Maturin and Aubrey about how Aubrey can best avoid prison.

A few days later Aubrey returns to the Admiralty and receives a new command. He will captain the Polychrest. Polychrest, spitefully known among the yards as the 'Carpenter's Mistake', is a highly peculiar vessel designed and built to convey a giant experimental rocket weapon. The weapon proved disastrously ineffectual and the Polychrest, entirely unlike any other ship afloat, has been converted into a makeshift gun platform. Everything about the vessel is bizarre and difficult; yet Aubrey accepts



command and arranges for Maturin, Pullings, Babbington, and a few others to be assigned. Meanwhile Maturin meets Sophia and urges her to blatantly inform Aubrey of her affections; she declines as is proper for a young lady. Later Aubrey and Maturin have a minor falling out over Diana whom they both actively court. Aubrey is rather more successful and Maturin is shattered by Diana's rejections. Maturin briefly considers refusing the appointment to Polychrest.

Chapter 6 Analysis

Aubrey eventually returns to England and hopes for a ship command in the now-resumed hostilities. With his benefactor Lord Melville in power, he can rightly expect something. Unfortunately his prolonged flight through France, his trek through Spain, and his slow return to England have proved a notable delay—all available ships have been assigned. He fears to remain at large, however, because he is still wanted for debt. The novel hereafter describes in various details the peculiar and Byzantine laws regarding arrest for debt in England at the time. For example, Aubrey cannot be arrested on Sunday, aboard a ship, or in various other restrictive geographical zones. Most public places, however, offer no protection.

The party at Lady Keith's is described in tedious minutiae. Subsequent to the brisk naval action of the previous chapter, this makes slow reading and is perhaps one of the weakest segments of the novel. The segment introduces Richard Canning, however. Although a fairly minor character in the novel Canning does cause major disturbances; he reappears in subsequent novels and is generally a disruptive force in Maturin's life. Canning's attention to Diana heavily—and rather obviously—foreshadows later events. Aubrey's attention to Diana is obvious, and Maturin feels slighted and hurt. Aubrey and Canning take an immediate liking to each other—this feeling of mutual support persists throughout the next novel, as well. Meanwhile Maturin frets about Aubrey's advances upon Diana and a definite strain enters into their friendship.

After the party, Adam Scriven is introduced. This character is somewhat peculiar in that an inordinate amount of detail is given for him—he is perhaps the most-described character in the novel and yet is entirely a minor character without much appeal and vanishes entirely from the narrative within just a few pages. He does, however, have solid knowledge about English debt law and advises Aubrey and Maturin appropriately. All in all, the chapter to this point is one of the longer chapters in the novel and also the weakest in the entire text.

The chapter concludes with Aubrey's appointment as captain of Polychrest. The ship is an amusing accident of circumstances. It was designed for the single purpose of carrying a secret weapon of heroic dimensions. The weapon was deemed an utter failure and the shell of the ship is salvaged—somewhat—as a frigate of sorts. It is without any of the normal function and grace of a frigate and features numerous odd attachments and design features. Aubrey takes the command but is sniggered at by other officers—Polychrest is unofficially called the 'Carpenter's Mistake'.



Chapter 7

Chapter 7 Summary

Maturin writes in his diary and considers his disastrous devotion to Diana. He is visited by Pullings who announces he has been promoted to lieutenant on Aubrey's advice. Maturin celebrates with Pullings and they exchange news. Later, Aubrey joins them at the lodging for a celebratory supper—but he has been followed. After a successful dinner, the sailors drink and make small talk. Scriven joins them and Aubrey discusses his pressing need for more sailors. Scriven draws up a poster which vaguely promises vast fortunes to any who will sign with Polychrest and Aubrey; in the ensuing days the poster is successful and several men sign on. Pullings presses a few more seamen and Aubrey locates some more men from various sources. Barrett Bonden and Joseph Plaipe enlist—they had previously sailed with Aubrey, Maturin, and Pullings on *Sophie*, Aubrey's previous command. Later still, Pullings' family arrives with a vast array of supplies and foodstuffs. Maturin finds Mrs. Pullings' cooking to be exceptional. That evening another celebratory dinner is held and Aubrey attends—toward the end of the evening, however, the constable and some strongmen rush the accommodation and attempt to arrest Aubrey for debt. A general scuffle ensues and—humorously—the various strongmen are knocked about and then pressed into Aubrey's crew. Aubrey escapes and in the early morning Polychrest stands out.

Aubrey finds the motion of *Polychrest* nervous and irritating. His master, Mr. Goodridge, is an exceptionally able seaman and leader of men. His first lieutenant, however, Mr. Parker, is cruel, incompetent, and almost deaf. Aubrey and Goodridge survey the ship over the next hours and days and find it bizarre and crank. The green crew has difficulty handling the vessel and they find she has a remarkably irritating tendency to slip backwards during maneuvers. Over the next days the crew becomes acquainted and Aubrey learns a little of his officers. He fears that Parker's cruelty and ignorance will cause difficulties with the crew. The marine captain, Macdonald, is cordial, bluff, and likable. The other officers are largely unexceptional but capable. There is much discussion of the unique and ridiculous features of the strange ship. Later, *Polychrest* sails by *Franchise*, captained by Aubrey's old friend Heneage Dundas. One day the ship's boy becomes drunk and insolent and Aubrey has him lashed to a carronade. Over the days the ship's crew becomes established; Maturin and Aubrey have conversation and Aubrey fears that Parker's constant hazing of the crew will lead to mutinous feelings. Maturin philosophically objects in principle to the entire structure of military life. They play music, cards, and perform all of their routines of friendship. Ultimately achieving station, Aubrey ventures to Cumberland and receives his orders from Admiral Harte. Harte is a greedy man and in the past Aubrey has cuckolded him—the relationship is not easy. While Aubrey is away Parker disciplines the hands with extreme cruelty—Maturin intervenes which causes a stir; such intervention is not proper in the navy. When Aubrey returns there is a brief argument but Parker is lectured. Aubrey demands Maturin apologize which he does. The incident seems to blow over; later



Aubrey and Maturin discuss naval discipline and Maturin deplures the mistreatment of the men.

Chapter 7 Analysis

Polychrest lives up to her nickname; the ship handles poorly, makes outrageous leeway, and feels nervous and jumpy. Further, the ship is seriously under-crewed. She features carronades in place of long guns—capable of execution at close range but entirely useless at longer ranges. Her pitiable speed and laughable dexterity ensure that any close action will be most difficult to enjoy. In short, she is not suited for warfare. She is perhaps the most memorable ship of the series, certainly the most distinctive, save perhaps only H.M.S. Surprise. Polychrest is perhaps based partially upon the historical ship H.M.S. Project and features some traits found on H.M.S. Dart. Scriven draws up a recruiting poster full of hyperbole; it is moderately successful and that peculiar character forthwith disappears from the narrative. Aubrey's and Maturin's friendship continues to suffer due to Aubrey's advances upon Diana and her continued rejection of Maturin. Much of the chapter is devoted to an enumeration and consideration of the officers of Polychrest—interesting but not critical to the text. The chapter also features various scenes where Maturin and Aubrey exchange conversation, develop personal philosophy, and play music or cards together. Similar scenes are common among all the novels of the series. The chapter also comments on the first lieutenant Parker's propensity to cruel hazing—clear foreshadowing of problems to come. Another interesting contrast can be seen in an exchange between Aubrey and Maturin; Aubrey criticizes and condemns Maturin's actions and demands an apology which is forthcoming. Later, in chapter 10, Maturin demands an apology from Aubrey which is refused.



Chapter 8

Chapter 8 Summary

Maturin calls on Sophie at Mapes Court. They exchange news and small talk. Sophia expresses her devotion to Aubrey but refuses to be more forward than is proper in approaching him. Sophia confesses that her mother has arranged a suitor, a Mr. Bowles. He calls on Sophia daily but she finds him repugnant and tries every device to put him off. Maturin confesses his affection for Diana. Sophia cautions Maturin that Diana is a difficult case. Maturin departs and then calls upon Diana—she is staying with her older cousin, a gentleman with mental deficiencies. Diana, as did Sophia, informs Maturin of an argument they had about Aubrey. Diana rather suggests that she moved away from Mapes Court because of the row; she is condescending and fairly cruel to Maturin.

Maturin returns to the ship and exchanges news with Aubrey. Meanwhile Aubrey readies the ship and prepares for departure. He declines an invitation from Diana. Aubrey's crew is then joined by Preserved Killick, his shrewish steward. Killick arrives with a much-needed bounty of foodstuffs, courtesy of Sophia. A few days later Aubrey entertains Canning aboard ship in grand style. The dinner is superb and a great success, Canning is hauled away fainting drunk and Maturin argues poetry and philosophy with Macdonald. In the early morning Polychrest warps to sea and stands to her station—the crew is alarmed by her handling and incredible leeway. While on station they sight a blockade-runner but do not pursue due to their rigid orders. After lying on and off they pick up a small craft under fire and chase; it contains a government agent but he has been shot through the breast and dies aboard ship. Aubrey returns to the fleet and reports the action—he is criticized by the rapacious Harte for not taking the blockade runner, orders be damned.

Days later Polychrest rigs for discipline. The list of defaulters is long and Parker is tediously cruel. Aubrey orders flogging for some. The crew hates Parker and is unhappy; the ship is a horrible design and difficult to handle. Aubrey is depressed. One day Maturin takes a small boat and voyages to a sandy isle; as the tide comes in he goes for a swim and is rescued, or manhandled, by the boat's crew. Stephen returns to the ship and smells Diana's perfume on Aubrey. He is annoyed and hurt. Over the next weeks Polychrest stays on and off station and Aubrey often goes ashore to visit Diana.

Chapter 8 Analysis

Aubrey's finances have prevented him from courting Sophia and he has turned his attentions toward Diana. Maturin realizes that Sophia is eminently more suitable for Aubrey and thus takes great pains to convey information between the two. Maturin is entirely devoted and sympathetic to Sophia and demonstrates his real friendship for Aubrey in persistently promoting his interests to her, even as Aubrey knowingly pursues



Diana. Chapter 8 also sows the plot seed of Diana's eventual disgrace; her argument with Sophia results in her expulsion from Mapes Court. She is thus thrown entirely upon her unstable cousin for support and respectability—not a pleasant situation, and one that will end in her social ruin.

The chapter also presents an instance of Aubrey's devotion to duty over his personal desires. He is presented with a choice between personal wealth and professional duty—he foregoes wealth and personal gain to prosecute his duty. On the occasion, he is censured by his commanding officer for being too punctilious. Consider that had Aubrey taken prizes instead of pursuing enemy craft, he could likely have drawn down his enormous debt and moved toward rehabilitation in the eyes of Mrs. Williams, Sophia's protective mother.

The chapter also further develops the sullen and unhappy nature of the crew. They are constantly hazed and treated shabbily by Parker. Aubrey's frequent absences allow such treatment—he is off pursuing Diana. His penchant for going ashore while on duty is widely noticed and poorly regarded by many. This foreshadows events which will develop in the pivotal chapter 10.



Chapter 9

Chapter 9 Summary

Polychrest guards a convoy—she is the slowest ship in the batch and makes entirely amazing leeway. The merchant ships are happy to see her leave, as she turns to detached cruising. Aubrey musters the crew and observes that he is very shorthanded and that much of the crew are lubberly fellows. With eighty-seven men and boys, he is thirty-three short of complement, or nearly 1/3 short of crew. After the disappointing and sobering muster, Aubrey, Goodridge, and Parker set about to redesign the ship's sail and rigging plan. For several days, various complicated operations are carried out which result in a peculiar and atypical sail plan. Aubrey is pleased when Polychrest's new rigging greatly improves handling. One day Maturin is watching a great shark circle the boat when Bolton, a crewman, falls from the rigging and enters the sea. Without thinking Aubrey dives in and rescues the man—his twenty-second rescue. Maturin is amazed at Aubrey's ability and they discuss the philosophy and reality of saving lives. Maturin determines to learn how to swim.

A few days later a strange sail is raised, then another and another. As they close the squadron they discover a few merchant craft—fair prizes—attended by Bellone, crippled by storm. Bellone veers off and Polychrest gives chase. The men and officers wistfully eye the escaping prizes. Eventually gunnery is enjoined and Polychrest's superior weight of metal quickly tells. Bellone closes and attempts to board but is driven off. Polychrest delivers more cannon shot. Both ships are heavily damaged and difficult to control. Macdonald loses an arm during the fighting. A long chase ensues as the hours pass by with constant desultory shooting. As they close the coast, a Spanish frigate appears and attempts to ward off Aubrey; he stands on and drives Bellone aground. He then returns to the fleet and delivers his report; once again Admiral Harte criticizes his lack of prize money.

Chapter 9 Analysis

Polychrest's laughable sailing ability is demonstrated by the merchant fleet she escorts. In other warships Aubrey has commanded, the merchants are slow and ponderous. Compared to Polychrest, however, they are fast and nimble. The chapter again presents an instance of Aubrey's devotion to duty over his personal desires. He is again presented with a choice between personal wealth and professional duty—he again foregoes wealth and personal gain to prosecute his duty. On this occasion he again is censured by his commanding officer for being too punctilious. At least, however, he has the satisfaction of driving Bellone onto the rocks. Aubrey then demonstrates his natural skill as a sailor by refitting Polychrest at sea. Rather than being tradition-bound, he rigs the ship with peculiar and atypical sails and rigs and greatly reduces the ship's sail area; he finds the changes entirely suitable.



Most of chapter 9 is devoted to the intricate particulars of the engagement between Bellone and Polychrest. The prolonged naval engagement is interesting and exciting, and forms the very fabric which has made the series of novels enduringly famous. Though exciting to read it does little to promote the plot. Another notable event in the chapter finds Aubrey diving into shark-infested waters to rescue a seaman from drowning. Maturin's philosophical response meets a rather blasé rejoinder from Aubrey, and the scene is quite enjoyable.



Chapter 10

Chapter 10 Summary

Polychrest returns to the channel and Maturin goes ashore for a rendezvous with Diana. As typical, she treats him first kindly then shabbily. She talks about Canning. Maturin and Diana both pretend that Aubrey is not a man of concern to them. Maturin then calls on Sophia who is a houseguest of Admiral Haddock. Sophia and Maturin exchange news. Maturin again advises her to be more forward with Aubrey but she demurely declines. Maturin then embarks on a months-long intelligence voyage; upon his return he is tanned and hale but delivers a cover story of having been in Ireland. He rejoins the ship and meets Smithers, Macdonald's young replacement. Smithers makes wisecracks about Diana, unaware of Maturin's interest. Maturin defends her honor and then a card game ensues where Maturin wins over a year's wages from the young gentleman. Maturin then finds Aubrey much diminished and somewhat sickly—captaining Polychrest has not agreed with him. The crew has become sullen and angry over the constant hazing inflicted by Parker. Maturin advises Aubrey that his constant visits to Diana ashore are exciting negative commentary among the service. Aubrey becomes very agitated and insults Maturin gravely.

Maturin selects Heneage Dundas as his second. The engagement cannot be arranged before the ship sails, however. Stephen arranges to borrow Macdonald's pair of cased Joseph Manton dueling pistols. Meanwhile Aubrey is much reduced by circumstances and suffers depression and anxiety. He does, however, keep visiting Diana. Over the next weeks Maturin feels the isolation of being condemned by the ship's captain. Goodridge is nearly the only person who remains entirely friendly and they exchange obscure scientific theories. Polychrest is ordered to attack a French port and destroy a particular ship. Maturin and Goodridge study charts and discuss the port's particular layout in great detail.

Chapter 10 Analysis

Diana's treatment of Maturin continues to be at least consistently erratic—she apparently values him little. Her insistence upon positive commentary about Canning foreshadows their eventual absconding. The simultaneous interest of Aubrey is of little import to either Diana or—in point of fact—Maturin though it will lead to serious consequences: the plot reaches its thematic climax during chapter 10 with the acrimonious break between Maturin and Aubrey. In point of fact, the split is transient and after several months of separate lives the two men reconcile without a duel although the dueling foreshadows events in the subsequent novel.

Prior to and after the insult of honor, Maturin continues to be largely Aubrey's true friend in that he supports the captain so far as possible. Maturin's prolonged intelligence trip is to secure information about Spain which is of interest to the Admiralty. In short, the



desire to know whether Spain will enter the war and, if so, on which side. The information gathered by Maturin and others sets up the action in the latter portion of the novel. Maturin returns from Spain with a heavy suntan and uses a cover story of having been in Ireland—Aubrey immediately realizes the tall tale as, probably, do many of Maturin's associates. While Maturin is away Aubrey continues to pursue Diana with great damage to his professional career. His constant absence from the ship is widely remarked and, more significantly, gives first lieutenant Parker a free reign of terror over the crew. Parker, an aged man without prospects of success, is a petty tyrant with a foul spirit. His unrestrained hazing of the crew leads to mutinous resolve upon their part. The chapter ends with the conclusion of Maturin's voyage and his rejoining the ship.



Chapter 11

Chapter 11 Summary

Maturin overhears constant murmuring among the crew and eventually realizes that a mutiny is afoot. He executes his duty by reporting the mutinous plan to Aubrey, without disclosing names—the exchange is professional and very cool. Aubrey summons the various officers, excepting Parker, one by one and asks pointed and candid questions. He then reviews the ship's position—they are nominally two days from the French port. Aubrey musters the men and delivers a rousing talk, stating bluntly he knows of mutinous feelings but intends to entirely dismiss them—the ship will run to the port this very night and attack. Men are expected to attend their stations. He culls out the presumed leaders of the mutiny and by a device isolates them. The crew is roused to a high state of passion and expectantly waits for the attack. The weather cooperates and the ship runs down the coast, gliding into the port a full tide before could be reasonably expected.

The port is a difficult silted harbor with complex configuration. Aubrey has never been in the port and relies upon Goodridge to navigate. Polychrest enters the complicated channel, shrouded in thick fog, and makes for the port—but Goodridge has made a mistake and the ship runs down the wrong channel and grounds on a sandbar. Soon enough the harbor guns open on Polychrest. Aubrey realizes a vast keedge will be required to free Polychrest and looks about for a solution. He sees the distant French corvette—the *Fanciulla*—riding at anchor. In a remarkably audacious move, Aubrey piles most of his tiny crew into the boats and makes for the distant French ship. They draw fire the entire distance but arrive nearly sound and swarm up the enemy's sides. A fierce action ensues and the English take the deck against nearly insurmountable odds. Babbington is shot down and Aubrey receives several wounds.

Aubrey cons *Fanciulla* toward Polychrest and warps a heavy hawser onto the grounded ship. *Fanciulla* anchors and uses the capstan to drag the grounded ship free. The entire time the harbor guns fire into both vessels. Freed, Polychrest makes speed toward the open water. As the two ships leave the harbor they drive through a flotilla of merchant ships, sinking one, driving many ashore, and even capturing one that fouls with *Fanciulla*. The three ships leave the harbor behind and reach open seas; Polychrest is sluggish and full of water—the carpenters cannot save her. The ship is abandoned in good order and Aubrey watches from *Fanciulla*'s deck as Polychrest settles and sinks. He then collapses into unconsciousness in a vast pool of blood.

Chapter 11 Analysis

Previous discussion involving Maturin and other characters reveal that he is able to understand several languages, even if he does not speak them fluently. This foreshadowing comes into play in chapter 11 as Maturin overhears, and understands,



plots of mutiny being carried out in non-English languages. He is still entirely estranged from Aubrey but as a conscientious surgeon and a true friend, he feels rightfully compelled to deliver the news to Aubrey. The captain is not entirely unaware but the immediacy of the plotting comes as a surprise. His response is professional and competent. Instead of floggings or worse, he determines to resolve the situation through immediate and fierce engagement with the enemy. No other course of action would be so suitable; Aubrey is clearly an exceptional leader of men. He manages to isolate the ringleaders by physically separating them from their friends. In order to quell their fears he also culls out a few of his most-trusted crew. This allows all to know that Aubrey is aware of the ringleaders but that he is not planning on singling them out for extreme measures.

The chapter then presents an intricate and complicated engagement. Previously, Maturin and Goodridge have discussed the French port at considerable length and tedium. The rationale for these discussions becomes evident as the ship sails into the complicated port. Heavy fog and night obscure the area—Aubrey is unfamiliar with the geographic locale and relies upon Goodridge entirely. Thus, when the ship grounds it is not reasonably Aubrey's failure—a neat trick of construction. As usual, the determined and resourceful captain turns disaster into a splendid victory. The action described is very fierce and violent and is the most intense segment of the text. Babbington and Aubrey, for example, are seriously injured. After cutting out Fanciulla Aubrey uses the corvette as a kedge to draw Polychrest off the sandbank. The ships stand out to sea and the carpenter reports Polychrest is unsalvageable. Aubrey thus rescues the ship from the French port and then loses it on the open sea in fairly shallow water—when it settles, the shortened masts clear the surface. He has time to take off the crew and significant items. When the bizarre and peculiar Polychrest finally slips below the water, it is actually a relief—the 'Carpenter's Mistake' has been well spent. Maturin treats Aubrey's wounds; the fierce and close victory has effectively obliterated the divide between the two men—their subsequent relations are normalized and when they meet again in the future it is on entirely different emotional terms.



Chapter 12

Chapter 12 Summary

Aubrey writes a letter to the parents of Babbington, praising the midshipman's resourcefulness and bravery. Aubrey then reports to the Admiralty to deliver his after-action report. He is sickly but recovering from serious wounds sustained in the combat; the newspapers are full of glowing descriptions of the action. Aubrey meets with Lord Melville who praises the action and Aubrey's intelligence and courage. Lord Melville then delivers the pleasing news—Aubrey is made post captain. He nearly swoons with the happy news. He is effusive in thanks, then wanders down the hallways and meets Pullings who congratulates him heartily.

Aubrey returns to his hotel and sleeps. In the morning he asks the boundaries of the area in which arrests for debt are not permitted, and then goes for a walk. He enters a cathedral and pumps the bellows so the priest can play the organ, then he attends a wedding as an uninvited guest. He receives a letter from Pullings, returns to his lodging, and writes Maturin a lengthy and happy letter—he has been appointed temporary command of H.M.S. *Lively*, a crack frigate. He quickly packs and reports to his new command, going aboard at once. He is followed closely by Maturin, also boarding. Maturin is wearing a tight-knit wool body stocking which embarrasses Aubrey. Maturin also brings aboard a glass beehive, a scientific experiment of sorts; he intends to feed them with sugared water. Much to Aubrey's dismay, Maturin's bees are released in the captain's cabin and occupy it for most of the next several months.

Lively's crew is well disciplined and functions smoothly. Her officers are independently wealthy and most are intelligent, all capable. They are also all members of the party in opposition to Aubrey's political leanings. The next day Aubrey makes sail and is nearly speechless after the crew's amazing display of proficiency. The ship's sailing qualities are also incredible. Later, punishment is called and a group of defaulters are dealt with, fairly leniently, after a particularly long discussion of alleged wrongs. After several days the ship settles down to a standard routine. Aubrey is happy that dinners are routine and ample; the chaplain queries him about fighting actions. Maturin makes a pun which is widely enjoyed. Later, Parker comes aboard—he has been made captain of *Fanciulla*; he offers Aubrey effusive thanks for the recommendation. *Lively* transports an officer's sister on one voyage. As they stop at England, Aubrey announces he will not go ashore; Maturin makes up a shopping list and goes ashore.

Chapter 12 Analysis

An interesting structural device is used within the narrative to good effect—Aubrey writes a letter to Babbington's parents, and the included letter summarizes much of the previous chapter's events. Similar letters are included elsewhere in the novel but they are not as significant. The change in structure gives a refreshing texture to the narrative



and is an enjoyable fictive device. When Aubrey reports to the Admiralty he is worried and seemingly depressed; this after-action heaviness is typically exhibited by Aubrey and he comments on it after earlier actions in the novel. He need not worry, however—his enormous and impressive success has ensured his promotion. What arguably should have occurred previously is finally realized and Aubrey is made post captain, which is the novel's title.

Post captain is an archaic term once used in the British Navy to distinguish an actual rank from an acting position—that is, a ranked commander in command of a ship was still referred to as a captain even though his rank was commander. A post captain, conversely, was of the rank of captain. Further promotion from post captain was automatic and based solely on seniority—thus a post captain could reach a rank of admiral simply by outliving enough senior post captains. The term 'post' captain probably was used because captains assigned a vessel were gazetted, or 'posted', in the Naval Gazette. Ships assigned to post captains were of necessity 'post' ships, or rated vessels. Thus, once Aubrey is made post captain he is not offered the *Fanciulla* as it is a sloop—not a rated vessel. On the other hand, Parker is promoted from lieutenant to commander and is awarded command of the sloop; he is referred to as a captain but is not a post captain. This confusion between possible meanings of 'captain' is treated early in the novel when Admiral Haddock explains to Mrs. Williams that Captain Aubrey is a commander and not a captain but can nevertheless be properly referred to as captain.

Aubrey's acting appointment to *Lively* is a stroke of good fortune—the ship carries him on several successful voyages in the current novel, and in the subsequent novel in the series. The ship's normal captain is wealthy and sits in parliament. As he is required to be present in parliament to vote and so forth, he vacates his position on *Lively* for a temporary period of time. During this time the Royal Navy appoints an acting captain—Aubrey—so that the ship will not remain idle in port. Such temporary assignments were common and normal. The transient captain was more or less expected to respect the customs and usage of the ship, and the crew would be aware that the captain's term was relatively short. Thus, the normally rambunctious Aubrey is very restrained in his initial period aboard the ship.

The novel is decidedly funny in the portrayal of the happenstance simultaneous boarding of Aubrey and Maturin. Maturin shows up in what amounts to a full-length wool body stocking looking somewhat like a bipedal flaccid worm. Not only that, he halloos and sings out at Aubrey in a most un-Navy-like fashion. Aubrey endures the situation as the ship presents honors to the new captain and is later horrified to discover that Maturin has brought aboard tens of thousands of bees which are promptly released in the captain's cabin.



Chapter 13

Chapter 13 Summary

Maturin visits the hospital and sees several patients. He then walks to Diana's presumed location only to discover her cousin's home is shut up. He learns the man had suffered some sort of collapse and that Diana has not been seen for some time. He sneaks into the deserted house and looks about; the scent in Diana's dressing room brings back painful memories. The next day Maturin tours the sickbay of Lively. He later lectures Aubrey on the manifest intelligence of bees; Aubrey is discommoded by the bees' possession of his cabin. Over the next weeks, Aubrey causes Lively to exercise the great guns—the previous captain being somewhat lax in this regard. In order to have the powder and shot replenished at government expense rather than his own, Aubrey causes Lively to cruise close to the French coast and the gunnery practice is all directed at minor French fortresses and observation towers. Lively is then ordered to escort a flotilla of troop transport ships. Maturin and Aubrey briefly discuss Sophia, and Aubrey expresses regret at the shabby way he has treated Sophia.

Chapter 13 Analysis

Chapter 13 is fairly short and functions as a transitional segment of the text, resolving several threads but also setting up the remainder of the novel and the subsequent novel's primary developments. Maturin travels ashore and manages to cajole Sophia into taking a trip (which occurs in the next chapter) with Aubrey that results in their understanding, if not engagement. His trip to Diana's house apparently wraps up his positive feelings about her, leaving him with merely the memory of desire—even though this proves elusive.

The exercising of the great guns is accomplished in such a way as to cause the Navy to bear the expense. The custom of the time allowed for only a very limited amount of powder and shot for training purposes. Aubrey desires the crew to be very proficient and would normally therefore have to bear the burden of training cost himself—he has no funds, however. Thus, he causes the crew to 'practice' by shooting up insignificant French positions along the coast, qualifying the shooting as an engagement. As an official action, the navy bears the costs of expenses. Note the crude sexual humor subtly inserted into the text—when Mrs. Miller is asked if she minds a 'bang' she replies "'Oh no, I love it'" (p. 467).



Chapter 14

Chapter 14 Summary

Later, Maturin calls on Sophia and informs her that it is not unusual for women connected with the navy to be offered transport on naval vessels. He urges her and Cecelia to request transport on *Lively*; Sophia declines the proposal as too forward. Sophia then delivers the devastating news that Diana has run off with Canning. Maturin, saddened, again urges Sophia to request transportation. Maturin returns to the ship and writes a lengthy discussion of his spurned affections. He is pleased a few hours later when Admiral Haddock escorts Sophia and Cecelia to *Lively* where they request transportation. Aubrey of course concedes and they return ashore to prepare. For the next few days Aubrey is insufferable and the crew organizes his cabin under his minute directives.

Aubrey takes Sophia on her journey and then returns to trivial duty. Maturin detaches himself from the ship and takes a prolonged voyage to Spain, operating as a secret agent. He returns to London safely and reads a stack of letters—Sophia is entirely grateful and announces an understanding with Aubrey. She also notes that her mother is entirely opposed. Aubrey's letter contains the same delightful news. Maturin falls asleep and wakes happy. He travels to the Admiralty and meets with Sir Joseph. Maturin informs Sir Joseph that Spain will shortly enter the war on the side of the French—the purpose of his secret mission. He also delivers news of a gold shipment from the River Plate bound for Cadiz, and requests that Aubrey be dispatched in the armada to intercept the Spanish treasure ships. Sir Joseph, delighted, immediately agrees. Later that night, Maturin attends the symphony. He is irritated when a late party enters an opposite box without dousing the hallway lights. After a few moments he realizes that Diana and Canning sit in the box. Diana, consciously on display for Canning, moves with an artificial and languid grace. Her crafted performance leaves Maturin sickened and confused.

Lively and three other frigates are dispatched with great haste; Maturin has been rated a captain pro temp. Aubrey explains this is to reward Maturin—he will share in any prize money at a much higher rate than he would as a surgeon or guest. The squadron weathers a storm and then the scattered ships rendezvous on station and begin many days of patrolling. Soon enough they catch sight of the four Spanish treasure ships. They close and send aboard an envoy who attempts to negotiate a peaceful surrender; such is not the case and a heated battle is soon enjoined. One Spanish ship receives a critical broadside and literally explodes into fragments. Two other Spanish ships are captured; the fourth strikes her colors and then flees. *Lively*, the best swimmer, is dispatched to capture her. Several hours of chase ensue and then *Lively* overtakes and captures the last Spanish treasure ship. Aubrey assumes the Spanish gold will be divided as a prize of war—his fortune is made. Presumably no longer a debtor, he invites the Spanish captain to dinner and toasts Sophia.



Chapter 14 Analysis

The chapter wraps up the novel with a series of stunning victories for Aubrey. First he receives Sophia aboard ship and treats her as royalty. Their successful voyage results in an unofficial understanding if not an engagement. Aubrey then commands Lively in a successful way and earns the respect and trust of the crew. Meanwhile Maturin performs another intelligence mission and learns of a shipment of gold from the New World to Spain. As usual, Maturin looks out for his particular friend Aubrey and arranges for Aubrey to participate in the capture of the Spanish treasure ships. Maturin's estimate of their worth is one million pounds; Aubrey's calculation indicates that each character is enriched personally by the prize for around seventy-five thousand pounds—an incredible sum of money. This would be reduced somewhat, of course, by the explosion—hence total loss—of the Spanish ship Mercedes. Whatever the actual amount, the money would in fact allow Aubrey to be debt-free and eminently suitable to Mrs. Williams. In point of fact, various legal machinations are used in the next novel to allow the English crown to seize the money and thus Aubrey's dreams ultimately are not realized. Once again the action described is fierce and rapid, and forms a fascinating segment of the text. It follows an unsuccessful bid by Maturin and others to cause the Spanish captain to 'come over' to the English side peaceably. Maturin's arguments are based upon contemporaneous political issues and social considerations—another interesting and accurate historical touch.



Characters

Jack Aubrey

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

Aubrey begins the novel as a commander without a ship, on half-pay waiting for something interesting to happen in a time of peace. By the conclusion of the novel he becomes a post captain without a permanent assignment, but commands H.M.S. Lively. Aubrey's father is involved in politics and is an abrasive and vocal member of an unpopular minority; Aubrey therefore has difficulty with his various appointments. Just as Aubrey is a master at sea, he is nearly incompetent while ashore—he has engaged in a number of poor fiduciary choices and finds himself in debt and penniless. Aubrey therefore spends his days ashore in fear of debtor's prison.

Aubrey is infatuated with the beautiful young Sophie Williams and he dotes on her with vigor when he can. By the end of the novel he is entirely devoted to Sophie but, without sufficient funds, unable to wed her due to her mother's stern demands of a suitable dowry. Throughout the novel, Aubrey frequently worries about Sophie or her cousin Diana—his other potential love interest. It is interesting to see Aubrey agonizing over past decisions regarding Sophia because typically his self-esteem is a sure thing and he is rarely afflicted with internal doubts.

Aubrey wears his blonde hair in a long queue and dresses in the traditional ship captain's uniform with a single epaulette as is appropriate to a junior captain. Aubrey is very athletic, possessed of an almost super-human vigor, great strength, and an incredible constitution. He is also particularly fond of food and drink, and Maturin often cautions him against becoming overly corpulent. Aubrey is handsome and fairly useful, though his good-looks are marred by a variety of scars and combat-related wounds including an ear cruelly sliced apart in an old encounter and later cruelly re-wounded.

Stephen Maturin

Maturin is one of the principle protagonists of the novel and shares the spotlight with his particular friend and confidant Jack Aubrey. Maturin is a quiet man who much prefers the closeness of a study to the attention of others; his personal expertise lies in the area of medicine and he is also a natural scientist of some repute. He is an unchallenged and undoubted master in his element of medicine and science and his medical opinions often are surprisingly modern and apparently always correct. Maturin has performed



several miraculous cures through advanced techniques and is considered, by the crew, to hold life in the palm of his hand.

Maturin has hereditary holdings of considerable extent in Spain though he rarely visits that country. Although possessed of some financial means, he cares nothing for the finer things in life and champions political causes that are obviously doomed simply because they are philosophically correct. In one scene in the novel, Maturin produces a substantive amount of money to give to Aubrey by rattling around through pots and drawers.

Maturin, in addition to being a physician and scientist, is an agent for the secret intelligence service of the Admiralty. This relationship explains why Maturin is so often able to obtain choice assignments by request, why he is allowed to travel upon Royal Navy vessels without properly enlisting as crew, and why he is so often found to be involved with various Royal Navy activities. Maturin's connection is also a common plot device used to secure benefits for Aubrey and to place Aubrey and Maturin together in the novel.

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

Sophia Williams

Sophia is one of two secondary protagonists in the novel and the only wholly sympathetic female character presented in any detail. She is an exceptionally beautiful and very devoted youngish woman who wins the love and shares the affection of Jack Aubrey; Aubrey and Sophia became tentatively if unofficially engaged in the final segment of the novel. Although Sophie is rather rough around the edges, being raised in the country and largely uneducated, she has a natural grace and sympathetic bearing that carries her successfully through social engagements. In several places through the novel, uninterested characters comment on Sophia's good looks and grace, and she is actively courted by an eligible bachelor. Sophia's mother constantly badgers her about Aubrey's unsuitability as a spouse and notes his infamous lack of money. Nevertheless,



Sophia is committed to honesty and is in love with Aubrey and will hear nothing bad about him.

Unlike her mother who is stern, penurious, and abrasive, Sophia seems to see wealth as simply a means to an end which can be achieved through other means. Sophia's natural disposition is trusting, open, and honest. She is held in particularly high regard by Maturin who sincerely desires her well. Throughout the novel Sophia thinks constantly of Aubrey but will not approach him more than is proper for a demure lady. For example, it takes Maturin's blatant and stern prompting to get her to make a normal request from Aubrey.

Diana Villiers

Diana is one of two secondary protagonists in the novel, though her role is often antagonistic to Maturin. She is exceptionally beautiful; indeed, physical beauty and sexual allure are clearly her dominant features and she easily controls most men through her physical charms. Even the resolute and indifferent Maturin is brought short-of-breath by Diana's lissome body. Aubrey pursues Diana throughout the first portions of the novel when Sophia is apparently put beyond his reach; he does this even knowing that Maturin is likewise spellbound by Diana. The common interest in Diana leads to an eventual rift between the two men, but one that is healed in time.

Diana's early history is treated in some detail in the novel. She was born in India to influential parents and spent the majority of her early life there, marrying a fairly mundane English gentleman. Upon his death, simultaneous with her father's death in combat, the young widow found herself without means and returned to England where she relied upon the generosity of her relatives, including her cousin Sophie Williams, for assistance. While staying with the Williams, Diana meets both Aubrey and Maturin. Although she finds them both attractive she is rather given to Aubrey's direct and manly approach, though she is intrigued with Maturin's boundless education and deep intellect. His monetary means, however, are insufficient to capture her complete attention and she eventually engages the wealthy Canning in a sexual affair. The development of the relationship between Maturin and Diana forms a central plot element in subsequent novels in the series.

Richard Canning

Canning is a vastly wealthy and very influential man in the East India Company. As a Jew, he is unable to sit in Parliament; he instead exerts political influence through controlled subordinates. He is married and moves through a lofty social circle. Canning is interested in the Navy and operates several privateers. During the novel he builds a giant privateer—nearly a frigate—and offers the command to Aubrey. Canning meets Diana Villiers and is successfully wooed by her, or she by him. Their subsequent affair is fairly scandalous. In most respects Canning is a typical man of the times, differing only in being overly-jealous of Diana's attention. For example, Aubrey finds him altogether



likable and open whereas Maturin, because of his infatuation with Diana, finds him controlling.

Sir Joseph Blain

Sir Joseph Blain is the head of the Naval Intelligence office during the period of the novel. As such he is fantastically knowledgeable about virtually any topic tangential to politics, the military in general, and the Royal Navy in particular. Sir Joseph is a thoroughly patriotic and entirely reliable man, not given to histrionics or political trends. He instead is completely focused on pursuing goals which further the interests of England. He shares a close friendship with Maturin; aside from both being involved in secret intelligence work, both men are avid naturalists and scientists. Sir Joseph also admires Maturin's dedication to the work and not the remuneration. At the conclusion of the novel, Maturin makes a present to Blain of a peculiar insect which is half male and half female.

Admiral Harte

Admiral Harte is a political opponent of Jack Aubrey. Aubrey conducted a much-discussed and scandalous sexual affair with Molly Harte, Harte's wife; Aubrey, ever over-confident of his own social wit and race, was sure the affair was discreet. Harte's antipathy toward Aubrey is vented whenever occasion allows, and the politically connected Harte forms a formidable barrier to Aubrey's career. Harte is a minor character in the novel.

Killick

Killick is Jack Aubrey's steward and has been a faithful servant for several years. Killick is keenly aware that his personal fortunes are inextricably linked to Aubrey's success and ensures that Aubrey is always presented in the most favorable circumstances attainable. Beyond professional interest, however, Killick is a loyal friend and defender of Aubrey and goes to great lengths to provide hot coffee, good food, plentiful drink, fresh fruit, clean clothing, and other amenities under often-difficult circumstances. Killick often serves as a sort of comic relief within the narrative; his presumptuous and rude lines delivered in a whiny nasal tone set Aubrey's teeth on edge.

Barrett Bonden

Bonden is Aubrey's coxswain. He is easily the most dependable character in Aubrey's crew, even serving as manservant to Maturin and Aubrey while ashore. Aubrey demonstrates his complete trust in Bonden by entrusting him with Maturin's care. Needless to say, the reliable Bonden always demonstrates complete tact, honesty, and devotion. Bonden is amused and fascinated by Maturin's total lack of naval knowledge.

Thomas Pullings

Mr. Thomas Pullings is the 1st lieutenant of Lord Nelson and subsequently the 2nd lieutenant of Polychrest during the middle chapters of the novel. Pullings is a recurring character in the various novels of the series. He is an enthusiastic and optimistic officer, a devoted supporter of Jack Aubrey, and an extremely capable navigator, seaman, and officer. Pullings is promoted to lieutenant on Aubrey's strong recommendation—an act that expends all of Aubrey's political influence and demonstrates how valuable Pullings is. In addition, Pullings' family contributes heavily to the stores of the ships in which he serves.



Objects/Places

The Bear Suit

When war breaks out in the opening segment of the novel, Aubrey and Maturin are vacationing in France. Maturin can pass for a Spaniard but Aubrey is obviously English. Hence, he dons a bear suit as a disguise and then travels across France with Maturin posing as his trainer. The suit is made from the skin of a real bear and is unbearably hot and constricting.

Gynandromorph

The gynandromorph is a peculiar insect—a mutant butterfly that is a male on one side of its body and a female on the other side of its body. Maturin obtains it from an associate and then makes it a present to Sir Joseph Blaine. As a symbol, the gynandromorph is a peculiar representation of Maturin.

Mapes Court

Mapes Court is the name given to the traditional home of the Williams family. Aubrey happens to rent Polcary Down, a neighboring estate, and thus meets Sophia Williams. Mapes Court is fairly well described in the novel and is the setting for much of the introductory chapters.

HMS Polychrest

H.M.S. Polychrest is a British sloop-of-war originally designed and built to convey a secret weapon. The weapon was a complete failure and the curious ship was marginally converted into a useful gun platform. Known colloquially as the 'Carpenter's Mistake', Polychrest is a bizarre and peculiar ship which attracts insults from most seamen. Aubrey commands the ship in a fierce action against a French ship sheltered in a harbor.

HMS Lively

H.M.S. Lively is a British frigate commanded by Captain Hammond; the ship is noted for being fast and a good sailing ship. The crew is widely respected as being very competent though stern. Many of the crewmembers are pressed Chinese and Javanese. Captain Hammond sits in parliament and during the closing chapters of the novel has been recalled to England on political matters. During his absence the command of the ship has been entrusted to Aubrey. The ship is a principle setting for the final chapters of the novel.



Futtock Shrouds and the Lubber's Hole

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

Splinters

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

The Weather Gauge

To have or possess 'the weather gauge' describes the favorable positioning of a sailing vessel relative to another with respect to the wind; in brief, it is any position upwind of the other vessel. Being upwind, or having the weather gauge, allows a vessel to maneuver at will toward any downwind point and thus gain the tactical advantage over other ships. Further, the ship having the weather gauge typically controls the timing and even the occurrence of military engagement. In general, correct tactics dictate that seeking the weather gauge is always an appropriate endeavor.

Carronades

A carronade was a short smoothbore cannon used by the British Navy until about 1860. They were designed as short-range cannons. Light-weight and devoid of many of the features of long guns, carronades were devastating at short ranges but notoriously inaccurate beyond pistol-shot ranges. Polychrest is fitted with carronades—an inappropriate choice given her poor sailing qualities which meant she would be unlikely



to close with any enemy. A carronade weighed approximately $\frac{1}{4}$ as much as a long gun throwing an equal weight of metal.

Spanish Treasure Fleet

Spain's possessions in the New World produced an unbelievable stream of gold and silver which was sent from the River Plate to Cadiz in heavily armed Spanish Galleons. To improve security, the ships traveled in a small fleet. At the end of the novel Aubrey helps to intercept and capture a Spanish treasure fleet of four ships—the resulting prize money presumably makes him a wealthy man.



Themes

Adventure on the High Seas

The novel's principle setting is the high seas during a time of war; Napoleon Bonaparte's military adventures threaten the British Empire and only a strong naval response keeps the French aggression at bay and ensures the survival of the empire. As a commander and later post captain of the Royal Navy, Jack Aubrey's sworn and obvious duty is to engage and destroy the French at every opportunity. He carries out this duty first with H.M.S. Polychrest and later with H.M.S. Lively, engaging the French successfully on several occasions. Aubrey's particular friend Stephen Maturin also stands in opposition to the French, finding their governmental system tyrannical and offensive. He participates as an intelligence officer—a spy—in the defense of England and with the hope that Catalonia will revolt from Spanish rule.

The novel relates sea voyages in the year c. 1803; although the voyages are fictional they contain many historical elements and the maritime combats described are often based on historical accounts. The ships mentioned usually represent fictionalized ships of historical significance, though the English crews are entirely fictional. All aspects of the novel are related to sea adventure; most of the action takes place at sea and even the action which takes place on land generally relates to the sea. For example, the H.M.S. Polychrest's prolonged stay in port is necessitated by the large amount of special refitting work made necessary by her peculiar design.

The strength and popular appeal of the novel is undoubtedly due to the nature of high seas adventure and the conversational way in which it is presented. Although full of accurate descriptions of lengthy nautical maneuvers and frequent technical descriptions of nautical equipment, the text is presented in an accessible and friendly manner which allows the reader to descend to deck-level, at it were, and enjoy the excitement of days long gone.

The Nature of Friendship

The two protagonists of the novel, Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin, share the spotlight nearly equally. The two men have enjoyed a prolonged friendship which has developed slowly over the course of a previous novel. Their mutual confidence has survived conflict, suspicion, and even competition and emerged the stronger for it. Both men are able to haltingly share their innermost fears with the other, and their natures are such that their respective spheres of expertise complement the others' without conflict.

The constantly developing nature of their friendship not only drives the tone and texture of the novel, but is also largely responsible for the novel's plot development. For example, Sophia and Aubrey arrive at their understanding because of Maturin's



constant prodding. Later, Maturin uses his influence to secure a rewarding mission for Aubrey. This constant exchange of graces and friendship runs as a dominant thread throughout the novel—indeed throughout all of the novels of the series—and forms one of the most enjoyable themes present. Such a close male-male friendship, entirely devoid of any homoeroticism, is indeed rare in modern fiction. Their friendship is perhaps enabled only by the nature of the environment used as the principle setting; that of a man-of-war on prolonged sea duty.

The Nature of Love

It is perhaps strange that one of the novel's primary themes treats the nature of love—after all, how can love enter into a wartime life at sea, months and miles away from home? Yet romantic love is certainly one of the novel's dominant themes. Although they experience love in different ways, both of the primary protagonists are romantically in love; Jack Aubrey develops a love for Sophie Williams, fortunately reciprocated; and Stephen Maturin experiences unrequited love for Diana Villiers.

Aubrey's life largely becomes framed and grounded by his developing love for Sophia. Sophia's love inspires Aubrey, demands his success, and drives him to successes. Sophia's influence on Aubrey is positive. Maturin's life, on the other hand, is disrupted by his love for Diana. He is an accomplished scientist and renowned surgeon in spite of, rather than because of, his love for Diana. In fact, without Diana Maturin may very well be more productive and reach greater accomplishments than he does. His love for Diana consumes him, frustrates him, weakens his resolve, and leads him into self-doubt. Diana's influence on Maturin is negative. Meanwhile, Diana reciprocates Maturin's feelings only haphazardly and ephemerally.

Style

Point of View

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

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

Setting

The novel features two primary types of settings. The first and most significant is shipboard in a British warship. Examples of these include Polychrest and Lively, a sloop-of-war and a frigate, respectively, in the service. Both ships are captained by Aubrey, officered by Pullings, Babbington, and others, and crewed by a rag-tag assortment of British seamen, pressed lubbers, and a motley assortment of other nationalities. One of the novel's achievements is the presentation of shipboard life as something intriguing and even desirable, while simultaneously presenting a realistic view of the often horrible hardships endured.

The second setting presented in the novel is diffuse and consists of numerous ports, cities, and islands. Included among these settings are a French port—Toulon, an English port—Portsmouth, and a few minor islands and sandbars off the French coast. In general, these settings are transient, poorly described, and thought of—at least by Aubrey—as temporary locations to refit and re-supply. While the action aboard ship is dominated by Aubrey, the action ashore is usually dominated by Maturin. On every occasion when time permits, Maturin goes ashore and usually has an experience of minor adventure, returning to the ship with a collection of natural history specimens or simply his recovered boots with lead soles.



Language and Meaning

The novel's language is generally simply and accessible. Standard punctuation is used to indicate dialogue and interior thoughts and descriptive text are easily distinguished. Most of the places, some of the objects, and even some of the events referenced in the narrative are identifiable as real geographical locations or historic events. It is notable that the novel was originally written and published in England and uses standard English punctuation and spelling styles which may be somewhat unfamiliar to American readers.

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

Structure

The 527-page novel is divided into fourteen numbered chapters of roughly equal length, though some chapters are noticeable longer than others. The narrative is presented in strictly chronological order with each chapter's events occurring after the events in the previous chapter and before the events in the subsequent chapter. Of course, references to previous events occur with some frequency and characters from time to time think about future events. Such deviations from the principle timeline are minor and are clearly identifiable as such. Thus, the novel's principle timeline is accessible and easily followed.

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

The structure is further complicated by adherence to historical events. In broad terms, events in the novel are fictional or fictionalized events which could have occurred, or did occur, in the period of time used as the novel's setting; namely, the war between England and France during the year c. 1803. Thus, the novel's language, technology, politics, and geography are all based upon historically accurate representations.



Quotes

"'Thou looks't like Antichrist in that lewd hat,' she said in a somber voice, for the hounds had lost their fox and the only tolerable-looking man had vanished.

"'Oh! Oh!' Cried Cecelia, 'what a shocking thing to say! It's blasphemy, I'm sure. I declare I've never had such a shocking thing said to me since Jemmy Blagrove called me that rude word. I shall tell Mama.'

"'Don't be a fool, Cissy. It's a quotation—literature—the Bible.'

"'Oh. Well, I think it's very shocking. You are covered with mud, Di. Oh, you took my tricorne. Oh, what an ill-natured thing you are—I am sure you spoilt the feather. I shall tell Mama.' She snatched the hat, but finding it unhurt she softened and went on, 'Well: and so you had a dirty ride. You went along Gallipot Lane, I supposed. Did you see any of the hunt? They were over there on Polcary all the morning with their horrid howling and yowling.'

"'I saw them in the distance,' said Diana.

"'You frightened me so with that dreadful thing you said about Jesus,' said Cecelia, blowing on the ostrich-feather, 'that I almost forgot the news. The Admiral is back!'" (p. 27)

"'Yo ho, shipmate,' called Diana over the hedge, and she was surprised to see her cousin blush cherry-pink. The chance shot had gone straight home, for Sophia had been browsing in the admiral's library, looking at Navy Lists, naval memoirs, Falconer's Dictionary of the Marine, and the Naval Chronicle; and the admiral, coming up behind her in his list slippers had said, 'Oh, that Naval Chronicle, is it? Ha, ha! 'Though Miss Di has been before you—forestalled you long ago—made me explain the weather-gage and the difference between a xebec and a brig. There is a little cut of the action, but the fellow did not know what he was about, so he put in a great quantity of smoke to hide the rigging, which is most particular in a xebec. Come, let me find it for you.'

"'Oh no, no, no,' said Sophia in great distress. 'I only wanted to know a little about—' Her voice died away." (p. 41)

"'Stephen, Stephen, Stephen!' Jack's voice came along the corridor, growing louder and ending in a roar as he thrust his head into the room. 'Oh, there you are. I was afraid you had gone off to your stoats again. The carrier has brought you an ape.'

"'What sort of ape?' asked Stephen.

"'A damned ill-conditioned sort of an ape. It had a can of ale at every pot-house on the road, and it is reeling drunk. It has been offering itself to Babbington.'

"'Then it is Dr. Lloyd's lewd mangabey. He believes it to be suffering from the furor uterinus, and we are to open it together when I return.'

"Jack looked at his watch. 'What do you say to a hand of cards before we go?'

"'With all my heart.'" (p. 61)

"'You speak of loss of weight. But I find that you yourself are thin. Nay, cadaverous, if I



may speak as one physician to another. You have a very ill breath; your hair, already meager two years ago, is now extremely sparse; you belch frequently; your eyes are hollow and dim. This is not merely your ill-considered use of tobacco—a noxious substance that should be prohibited by government—and of laudanum. I should very much like to see your excrement.'

"You shall, my dear sir, you shall. But I must leave you now. You will not forget my tincture? I shall abandon it entirely once I am in Lérida, but until then it is necessary to me.'

"You shall have it. And,' said Dr. Ramis, with a veiled look, 'it is possible that I may send you a note of the first importance at the same time: I shall not know for some hours yet. If I do, it will be in system three. But pray let me feel your pulse before you go. Reedy, intermittent, my friend, just as I thought.'

"What did he mean by that?' said Stephen, referring not to the pulse but to the hypothetical note, and thinking again with some regret of the simplicity of his dealings with plain mercenary agents. Their moves were so clear; their loyalties were to their persons and their purse. The complexities of the entirely honest men, their sudden reticences, the interplay of conflicting loyalties, the personal sense of humour, made him feel old and tired." (pp. 107-108)

"Dear God,' he said at last, twisting his head from side to side, 'could I have sweated all my courage out?' Courage gone, and generosity with it? He had seen courage go—men run down hatchways in battle, officers cower behind the capstan. He and Stephen had talked about it: was courage a fixed, permanent quality? An expendable substance, each man having just so much, with a possible end in sight? Stephen had put forward views on courage—varying and relative—dependent upon diet, circumstances, the functioning of the bowels—the costive frequently timid—upon use, upon physical and spiritual freshness or exhaustion—the aged proverbially cautious—courage not an entity, but to be regarded as belonging to different, though related, systems, moral, physical, sexual—courage in brutes, in the castrated—complete integrity, unqualified courage or puerile fiction-jealousy, its effect upon courage—Stoics—the *satietas vitae* and the supreme courage of indifference—indifference, indifference..." (p. 116)

"She's blown the gaff—I'm brought by the lee,' thought Jack. 'They carried powder—What an amazing spirited thing to do.' 'Dear Miss Lambs,' he said most humbly, 'I beg you to forgive me. The last half-hour of the action—a damned warm action too—is a perfect blank to me. I fell on my head; and it is a perfect blank. But to carry powder was a most amazing spirited thing to do: I honour you, my dears. Please forgive me. The smoke—the trousers—what did I say, so that I may unsay it at once?'

"You said,' began Miss Susan, and paused. 'Well, I forget; but it was monstrous..." (p. 147)

"—the law,' cried the seamen, and Bonden, grappling with the bailiff, wrenched the staff from him. He flung it right down the lane, fairly into the water, and said, 'You've lost your commission now, mate. I can hit you now, mate, so you watch out, I say. You watch out, cully, or you'll come home by Weeping Cross.'



"The bailiff uttered a low rowl, pulled out his hanger and hurled himself at Jack. 'Artful, eh?' said Bonden, and brought his stretcher down on his head. He fell in the mud, to be trampled upon by Pullings and friends, pouring out of the inn. At this the gang broke and fled, calling out that they should fetch their friends, the watch, the military, and leaving two of their number stretched upon the ground.

"'Mr Pullings, press those men, if you please,' cried Jack from the boat. 'And that fellow in the mud. Two more? Capital. All aboard? Where's the Doctor? Pass the word for the Doctor. Ah, there you are. Shove off. Altogether now, give way. Give way cheerly. What a prime hand he will make, to be sure,' he added in an aside, 'once he's used to our ways—a proper bulldog of a man.'" (p. 229)

"'You have the Gaelic, sir?' cried Macdonald.

"'No, sir,' said Stephen, and that is what is so curious. I no longer speak it; I thought I no longer understood it. And yet there at once, with no volition on my part, there was complete understanding. I had no idea the Erse and the Irish were so close; I had imagined the dialects had moved far apart. Pray, is there a mutual understanding between your Hebrideans and the Highlanders on the one, and let us say the native Ulstermen on the other?'

"'Why, yes, sir; there is. They converse tolerably well, on general subjects, on boats, fishing, and bawdy. There are some different words, to be sure, and great differences of intonation, but with perseverance and repetition they can make themselves understood very well—a tolerably free communication. There are some Irishmen among the pressed hands, and I have heard them and my marines speaking together.'

"'If I had heard them, they would be on the defaulters list,' said Parker, who had come below, dripping like a Newfoundland dog.

"'Why is this?' asked Stephen.

"'Irish is forbidden in the Navy,' said Parker. 'It is prejudicial to discipline; a secret language is calculated to foment mutiny.'" (pp. 294-295)

"An explosion forward—not the right crash of the carronade. Shouts, a high dog-like howling of agony. The over-heated gun had burst, killing the gunner stone dead and wounding three more—one man jerking clear of the deck as he screamed, leaping so that twice he escaped from his mates' arms, carrying him below. They slid the gunner over the side, cleared the wreckage, worked furiously to shift the other carronade into its place, but it was a slow job—ring-bolts and all had gone; and all the while the Bellone's muskets played on them in the bows.

"Now they ran silently, with eager, inveterate malice; the coast drew nearer—the savage cliffs and the white water on the reefs were in view; and without a pause the animal screaming came up from the cockpit far below." (p. 339)

"'Has Diana Villiers put herself under your protection? Has she commissioned you to say this to me?'

"'No, sir.'

"'Then I do not see what right you have to speak to me in this way.'



"Sure, Jack, my dear, I have the right of a friend, have I not? I will not say duty, for that smells of cant.'

"A friend who wants a clear field, maybe. I may not be very clever, no God-damned Macchiavelli, but I believe I know a ruse de guerre when I see one. For a long time I did not know what to think about you and Diana Villiers—first one thing and then another—for you are a devilish sly fox, and break back upon your line. But now I see the reason for this standing off and on, this "not at home", and all this damned unkind treatment, and all this cracking-up of clever, amusing Stephen Maturin, who understands people and never preaches, whereas I am a heavy-handed fool that understands nothing. It is time we had a clear explanation about Diana Villiers, so that we may know where we stand.'

"I desire no explanations. They are never of any use, particularly in matters of this kind, where what one might term sexuality is concerned—reason flies out of the window; all candour with it. In any case, even where this passion is not concerned, language is so imperfect, that...'

"Any bastard can cowardly evade the issue by a flood of words.'

"You have said enough, sir,' said Stephen, standing up. 'Too much by far: you must withdraw.'

"I shall not withdraw,' cried Jack, very pale. 'And I will add, that when a man comes back from leave as brown as a Gibraltar Jew, and says he had delicate weather in Ireland, he lies. I will stand by that, and I am perfectly willing to give you any satisfaction you may choose to ask for.'

"It is odd enough,' said Stephen, in a low voice, 'that our acquaintance should have begun with a challenge, and that it should end with one.'" (pp. 362-363)

"Mizzen chains, Bonden,' he said, loosening his sword in its scabbard.

"A shattering burst of fire, a great roaring—the Marines were boarding her over the bows.

"Mizzen chains it is, sir,' said Bonden, heaving on the tiller. A last broadside overhead, and the boat came kissing along the side.

"Up. He leapt on the high roll, his hands catching the dead-eyes. Up. No boarding-netting, by God! Men thrusting, grasping all around him, one holding his hair. Up and over the rail, through the thin fringe of defenders—a few pikes, swabs, a musket banging in his ear—on the quarterdeck, his sharp sword out, pistol in his left hand. Straight for the group of officers, shouting 'Polychrest! Polychrest!' a swarm of men behind him, a swirling scuffle by the mizzenmast, an open maul, men grappling silently, open extreme brutal violence. Fired his pistol, flinging it straight at the next man's face. Babbington on his left running full into the flash and smoke of a musket—he was down. Jack checked his rush and stood over him; lunging hard he deflected the plunging bayonet into the deck. His heavy sword carried on, and now with all his weight and strength he whipped it up in a wicked backhanded stroke that took the soldier's head half off his body." (pp. 397-398)

"It's all lies,' cried Rogers, beside himself with indignation. 'All lies.'

"Well, what did happen?' said Jack. 'Tell me in your own words.'



"'I will, your honour,' said Rogers, glaring round, pale and trembling with fury. 'In my own Gospel words. Master-at-arms comes for'ard—which I was taking a caul, my watch below—tips me a shove on the arse, begging your pardon, and says, "Get your skates on, George; you're fucked." And I up and says, "I don't care for you, Joe Brown, nor for that fucking little cunt Evans." No offence, your honour; but that's the Gospel truth, to show your honour the lies he tells, with his "verify the statements". It's all lies.' There seemed to be a more familiar ring about this version; but it was followed by a rambling account of who pushed whom, in what part of the ship, with contradictory evidence from Button, Menhasset and Mutton, and remarks on character; and it seemed that the main issue might be lost in a discussion of who lent someone two dollars off of Banda, and was never repaid, in grog, tobacco, or any other form." (p. 445)

"When Jack returned, still trembling and with the sweat running down the hollow of his spine, it was time for quarters. The drum beat and the Livelies hurried to their stations in the usual way; but they knew very well that this was no ordinary ritual, not only from the gunner's uncommon activity and knowing looks, but also because Mrs Miller had been desired to step down into the hold, with a midshipman bearing an armful of cushions to show her the way: asked if she minded a bang, had replied, 'Oh no, I love it.'" (p. 467)

"'But what takes my breath away, what flabbergasts me to this high pitch,' said Jack, 'is, that they should have given you a temporary commission. The Navy, you know, is uncommon jealous of rank, very sparing of such compliments. I hardly remember ever to have heard of it, except once. They must think the world of you in Whitehall.'

"'I wonder at it too, this insistence upon a commission. It struck me at the time. I am sensible of the compliment, but puzzled. Why should I not have been your guest?'

"'I have it,' cried Jack. 'Stephen, may I ask without indiscretion whether this could be a—what shall I say?—a profitable expedition?'

"'It might be, too.'

"'Then they mean to cut you in on the prize-money. Depend upon it, they mean you to share as a captain. These are Admiralty orders, so no flag gets a share: if it comes to anything, your cut should be pretty handsome.'

"'What a pretty thought in Sir Joseph; remarkably delicate in him. I do not regret sending him my gynandromorph by the messenger now: the fellow seemed amazed, as well he might—a princely gift. Tell me, what would a captain's share of—I name a hypothetical sum—a million pounds?'

"'Taken by a squadron with four, no, five, captains in it? Let me see, fives into ten is two, and eights into two hundred, five and twenty—seventy-five thousand pounds. But there are no prizes like that afloat these days, my poor Stephen, more's the pity.'

"'Seventy-five thousand pounds? How absurd. What could Sir Joseph imagine I should do with such a sum? What could any reasonable man do with such a sum?'" (pp. 506-507)

Topics for Discussion

Would you rather be a seaman aboard H.M.S. Polychrest or H.M.S. Lively? Why?

Do you consider Jack Aubrey to be the epitome of what a Royal Navy captain should embody? Why or why not?

Contrast the way Sophie Williams treats Aubrey to the way Diana Villiers treats Maturin. Should Maturin have been genuinely surprised by Diana's association with Richard Canning?

Maturin makes fairly liberal use of opiates to sleep. Discuss the elements of Maturin's character which might indicate a desire for a secret reliance on drugs.

The narrative descriptions of Diana and Sophie contain many similar elements. In general, Diana is characterized as more beautiful and far more sensual than Sophie. Contrast the two women. Which character do you find more sympathetic? Does the novel treat women characters fairly?

Aubrey seems to be a master of the sea but quickly falls apart when ashore, making bad decisions and spending money foolishly. Toward the conclusion of the novel Aubrey apparently secures a fortune. How long do you think these funds are likely to last once he sets foot aground in good old England?

Why do you think Aubrey and Maturin are such close friends?

After reading the novel, does the life of a common seaman—perhaps that of Bonden—seem appealing to you? In your opinion, which class of sailors has the best situation—seamen, midshipmen, officers, or the captain?