

# From Hells Afloat to Happy Ships: Naval Fiction's Influence Upon the History of the Royal Navy during the Georgian Era

**Kelly Kathleen Chaves**

*De la représentation du dix-neuvième-siècle de "l'enfer à flot" à la description du 21ème siècle des "bateaux heureux," le ton de l'histoire sociale navale a changé nettement avec le temps. Ce changement, autant progressif que radical, de l'historiographie a été occasionné par l'influence de la fiction navale de Smollett, de Forester et d'O'Brian. En examinant chronologiquement les contributions fictives des auteurs indiqués et de la littérature scolaire de la marine royale de 1748-2007, cet article argue du fait que le ton et l'emphase de l'histoire sociale navale a été toujours influencée par la fiction navale populaire du jour.*

"Don't talk to me of naval tradition!" Winston Churchill reputedly snapped as he stormed out of a Cabinet meeting in 1914, "The only traditions of the Royal Navy are rum, sodomy and the lash."<sup>1</sup> While rum, sodomy and the lash existed in equal proportions in the Georgian Navy to which Churchill referred, the early social history of the Royal Navy originally presented no more than this bleak trilogy. In this version of history, sailors suffered under sadistic captains who enjoyed ordering floggings; the sailors debauched innocent youths sent to sea and numbed themselves with grog, the

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Roger Knight and N.A.M. Rodger for responding to my numerous questions and John Hattendorf for allowing me to interview him and for reading an early draft of this article. I would also like to thank Dr. Marc Milner, Dr. Janet Mullin and the anonymous reviewers for reading the work and providing valuable suggestions. William Manchester, *The Last Lion: Winston Spencer Churchill, Visions of Glory* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1983), p. 657. Although this quote has famously been attributed to Churchill, there is some debate over whether he said those words. Anthony Montague-Brown, Churchill's assistant, wrote that Churchill "had not uttered those words, although he wished he had." Either way, this quote, whether of Churchillian origin or not, characterizes the view of the Royal Navy until the 1960s. See: Misquotes, The Churchill Centre, 2003 [cited 17 March 2008]; available from [www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=112](http://www.winstonchurchill.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=112).

daily ration of rum. This dismal view of the Royal Navy originated with novelist Tobias Smollett in 1748 and was echoed by historians until 1940.<sup>2</sup>

The advent of social history in the 1960s changed the popular naval ship-cum-prison image into one where sailors lived hard, honest and simple lives and their officers, often tortured with the weight of command, battled the unfair land-based system of interest to gain promotion.<sup>3</sup> C.S. Forester, a novelist and screenwriter, had first presented this particular view of naval life twenty-three years earlier, in 1937, with the inauguration of his popular series of naval fiction that followed the life and career of Horatio Hornblower. Forester's works not only caused historians to reconsider life on the lower deck, but also led them to discredit the antipodal caricature—either saintly hero or sadist villain—of the naval officer. During the 1960s to 1980s, work on the origin of officers and their training became the main focus of naval history.

The 1990s witnessed another shift in the historical focus of naval social history. Historians began to portray life on both the lower deck and the quarterdeck as hard, but generally fair and even harmonious. In the 1990s, the “hell afloat” became the exception and not the rule. The naval fiction of novelist Patrick O’Brian may have influenced many historians who wrote during this period; the tone of his popular twenty-book series definitely propounds a similar view of naval history. In O’Brian’s *oeuvre*, sailors experience the dangers of the sea, but are neither overworked nor over-disciplined. O’Brian’s officers care for the welfare of their men, provide for their devoted followers, and yet are not gilded solely in glory; many of the officers have their own vices that display their only too human nature. Jack Aubrey, O’Brian’s fictitious post-captain, and Stephen Maturin, Aubrey’s particular friend and ship surgeon, certainly inspired many

<sup>2</sup> A gap in the literature exists between the 1940s and the 1960s. N.A.M Rodger suggests that naval history falls in and out of fashion. And “economic rather than military history of the sea was fashionable in the postwar [World War Two] years.” See: N. A. M Rodger, "Recent Books on the Royal Navy of the Eighteenth Century," *The Journal of Military History* 63, no. 3 (1999), p. 683. While the social history of the navy proved unfashionable in the 1950s, a number of scholars started to study sea power, which they defined as the ability of one nation to control or make use of the sea. A selection of works detailing British sea power are as follows: Sir Herbert William Richmond, *The Navy as an Instrument of Policy, 1558-1727* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1953); Stephen Wentworth, *The Strategy of Seapower, Its Development and Application* (London: Collins, 1962); C.J. Bartlett, *Great Britain and Seapower, 1815-1853* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1963); Elaine W. Fowler, *English Sea Power in the Early Tudor Period, 1485-1558* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1965); E.B. Potter, *Sea Power; A Naval History* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hill, 1969). Geoffrey Jules Marcus combined the concepts of sea power and social history in *Heart of Oak: A Survey of British Seapower in the Georgian Era*. Marcus argued that the men and the officers of the Royal Navy generated British sea power. See: Geoffrey Jules Marcus, *Heart of Oak: A Survey of British Sea Power in the Georgian Era* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

<sup>3</sup> Dr. Samuel Johnson, British poet, critic and lexicographer, perpetuated the idea of the navy akin to prison when he said, “Being in a ship is being in a jail, with the chance of being drowned.” See: Samuel Johnson, *A Dictionary of the English Language: An Anthology* (1759; reprint, London, UK: Penguin, 2006), p. 348.

academics to invoke their names in either acknowledgements, titles or quotations throughout their works.<sup>4</sup> Even though O’Brian died in 2000, his equitable view of the Georgian navy continues to persist in academic circles.

From the nineteenth-century portrayal of the “hells afloat” to the twenty-first century depiction of “happy ships,” the tone of naval social history has changed dramatically over time. This gradual, yet radical, change in the historiography has arisen due to the influence of Smollett’s, Forester’s and O’Brian’s naval fiction. By chronologically examining the fictional contributions of these authors and the academic literature of the Royal Navy from 1748 to 2007, this article argues that the tone and the emphasis of naval social history has always been influenced by the popular naval fiction of the day.

### **Hells Afloat: Smollett’s Influence on Naval History, 1748-1940**

Tobias George Smollett never intended to create the naval novel. Nor did he want to be associated with, or influence, naval history. Born into Scotland’s landed aristocracy in Dalquhurn, West Dunbartonshire, Scotland in 1721, Smollett benefited from a privileged upbringing. He attended the University of Glasgow and qualified as a surgeon. The life of a surgeon held little allure for Smollett, however, so in 1739 he moved to London to begin his career as a dramatist. An ill reception among the city’s literati and a fondness for regular meals caused a penniless Smollett to accept a position as a surgeon’s mate on board HMS *Chichester*.<sup>5</sup> The ship sailed to Jamaica in 1740 and returned to England in 1741. Smollett left the Royal Navy upon his arrival in England and appears to have returned to Jamaica where he lived for several years until he met and married a wealthy Jamaican heiress. The couple departed for London in 1743. Five years later, Smollett wrote his first and only naval novel, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Brian Vale and Janet MacDonald mention Patrick O’Brian’s novels in their acknowledgements. See: Brian Vale, *A Frigate of King George: Life and Duty on a British Man-of-War 1807-1829* (London: St. Martin’s Press, 2001); Janet MacDonald, *Feeding Nelson’s Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2004). N.A.M. Rodger contributed to O’Brian’s Festschrift. See: Rodger, “The Naval World of Jack Aubrey.” John Hattendorf wrote for one of the many companion guides to the Aubrey and Maturin books. See: John Hattendorf, “The Royal Navy During the War of the French Revolution and the Napoleonic War,” in *A Sea of Words: A Lexicon and Companion to the Complete Seafaring Tales of Patrick O’Brian*, ed. Dean King (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995). Patrick O’Brian wrote the forward to Brian Lavery’s insightful look at Nelson’s Navy. See: Lavery, *Nelson’s Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793-1815*. Steven Maffeo actually included quotes from the Aubrey-Maturin novels as historical evidence in his latest work. See: Maffeo, *Most Secret and Confidential: Intelligence in the Age of Nelson*.

<sup>5</sup> Charles Napier Robinson, *The British Tar in Fact and Fiction: The Poetry, Pathos, and Humour of the Sailor’s Life* (London: Harper and Brothers, 1909), p. 267.

<sup>6</sup> Tobias Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random* (1748; reprint, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979), p. xli. Smollett’s other novels included characters who were ex-



This illustration, from *The Navarre Society* edition of 1902 of Smollett's "The Adventures of Roderick Random" was drawn by English caricaturist and illustrator George Cruikshank (1792—1878). It represents the "Combat between Roderick Random and Captain Weazel" in Vol. 1 Chap. XII. Courtesy: the Archives and Collections Society.

naval officers, however, the author never again followed his characters to sea. Smollett's other major novels included: *The Adventures of Peregrine Pickle*, *The Adventures of Ferdinand*, *Count Fathom*, *The Adventures of Sir Lancelot Greaves*, *Travels Through France and Italy* and *The Expedition of Humphry Clinker*. See: Francesco Cordasco, *Tobias George Smollett, a Bibliographical Guide* (New York: AMS Press, 1978).

The protagonist, Roderick “Rory” Random, is the son of a Scottish nobleman and a lower class woman. Shunned by his paternal relatives, a teen-aged Random seeks out Tom Bowling, his maternal uncle and a lieutenant in the Royal Navy. Bowling provides for his nephew as best he can between voyages. To support himself, Random begins to work for a Scottish surgeon, Lancelot Crab. Crab, for his own purposes, suggests that his apprentice travel to London to become a surgeon’s mate in the Royal Navy. When Random reaches London, he obtains a warrant as a surgeon’s mate from the Navy Office, but does not find ready employment. Penury overtakes him until he is pressed into the Navy. He describes the horrors of his ship and, through the fault of an incompetent navigator, becomes shipwrecked in France. Here he meets Narcissa and falls in love. The rest of the novel follows Random’s attempts to have Narcissa’s aristocratic family consent to their marriage.<sup>7</sup>

*Roderick Random* portrayed the Royal Navy as a haven of cruelty and corruption. Smollett presented Captain Oakhum as an incompetent and self-aggrandizing tyrant who disallowed sickness in his ship, beat his men mercilessly and developed a paranoid fear of being mutinied upon. The midshipmen’s berth, led by the fictional midshipman, Crampley, harboured bullies who terrorized both their fellows and the men of the lower deck. The purser and the steward stole from the men by serving short rations, and the food was putrid and disgusting. The lieutenants were fastidious and aloof. Sailors were the only redeeming element in Smollett’s navy. He portrayed them as simple but loyal men who were compelled to serve their cruel masters.<sup>8</sup>

Early scholars of naval social history believed Smollett’s work to be autobiographical and so took his depiction of the navy at face value. Even Sir Laird Clowes, in his multi-volume history *The Royal Navy* (1897-1903), relied on Smollett’s work for his brief passages on life at sea.<sup>9</sup> John Masefield treated Smollett’s fictional account as historical fact in his 1905 work *Sea Life in Nelson’s Time*,<sup>10</sup> whose central theme was that sailors suffered at the hands of cruel, tyrannical captains. Like all authors of naval social history who followed him, Masefield tried to depict life onboard an eighteenth-century man-of-war. He followed the careers of the officers from their

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<sup>7</sup> Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 138-201.

<sup>9</sup> Laird W. Clowes, *The Royal Navy: A History from the Earliest Times to Present* (1897-1903; reprint, New York: AMS Press, 1960).

<sup>10</sup> John Masefield, *Sea Life in Nelson’s Time* (London: Meuthen & Co., 1905). One could argue that William Laird Clowes was the first social historian of the navy. He included several sections, entitled “Civil History of the Royal Navy” throughout his multi-volume work. In these sections, Clowes discussed pay scales, the number of ships in the navy during a given period, the number of officers, their hatred of the corrupt prize money system, and various other minutiae. Mainly, these sections handled the nascent social history of the upper deck, however, by the fifth volume, Clowes discovered the lower deck account of Jack Nastyface and reproduced large paragraphs of it in his Civil History section of his fifth volume. Because Clowes’ work focused more upon operational, administrative and political history than social history, the author chooses to acknowledge Masefield as having written the first work of naval social history.

time in the midshipman's berth, through their examination for lieutenant, until they became post captains. He discussed each of the warrant officers' duties in detail and then turned his attention to the daily routine of life for the members of the lower deck. With chapters on victualling, manning, discipline, the daily routine and combat, Masefield glorified the common seaman, but vilified the officers, except for the surgeon, who he—like Smollett—portrayed as a sympathetic character.<sup>11</sup> For Masefield, it was the able seaman who “passed, those mighty ones, in the blackness of the cockpit, in the roaring hell of the gun-deck, that we might hear no noise of battle. They were well pleased to live among thieves and infamous folk...[cringe] before tyrants and [lose] their manhood at the gangway.”<sup>12</sup> Whereas captains, he wrote, “were perhaps, the most cruel and tyrannical fiends ever permitted on earth.”<sup>13</sup>

Masefield was heavily influenced by naval fiction. He cited the “nautical novels” of Smollett, Marryat, Glascock, Neale and Chamier in his bibliography of “the books from which the present writer has extracted his information.”<sup>14</sup> Indeed, he continually referred to these authors throughout his work and cited them as historical authorities. When speaking of midshipmen, Masefield noted that “Captain Chamier, Captain Marryat, Jack Mitford, Captain Sinclair, Captain Glascock, Augustus Broadhead, and the author of “The Navy at Home,” have all painted vivid pictures of the life in the midshipmen's berth.”<sup>15</sup> Masefield later made direct references to “surgeons in Smollett's time” when describing the duties of the surgeon.<sup>16</sup> And, when examining the role of chaplains in the navy, he remarked that “Captain Glascock tells a tale of a chaplain aboard the *Meander*,

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<sup>11</sup> Masefield, *Sea Life in Nelson's Time*, p. 86.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 217-18.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 59.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 219-221. After the success of Roderick Random, the next wave in nautical fiction occurred after the end of the Napoleonic Wars, spurred on by the writings of Captain Frederick Marryat. Marryat's contemporary captain-novelists included Frederick Chamier, W. Johnson Neale and William Glascock. Although each man wrote several naval novels, their most famous contributions are cited. See: Frederick Marryat, *Frank Mildmay or the Naval Officer* (1829; reprint, Ithaca, New York: McBooks Press, 1998); Frederick Chamier, *Ben Brace, or the Last of Nelson's Agamemnon* (London: Richard Bentley, 1840); W. Johnson Neale, *Paul Periwinkle or, the Pressgang* (London: Thomas Tegg, 1841); William Nugent Glascock, *Tales of a Tar, with Characteristic Anecdotes* (London: Henry Colburn and Richard Bentley, 1830). John Mitford served under the command of both Hood and Nelson and later became a poet. See: John Mitford, *The Adventures of Johnny Newcome in the Navy: A Poem in Four Cantos with Notes* (London: Sherwood, Neely and Jones, 1819). Augustus G. Broadhead, a lieutenant in the Royal Navy, turned his hand to fiction at the close of the Napoleonic wars. See: Augustus G. Broadhead, *The Navy as It Is, or the Memoirs of a Midshipman* (Portsea: 1854). Captain Archibald Sinclair reminisced about his naval service in his later years. His book had been quite popular, but now few copies survive. For information on Sinclair and his reminiscences see: William Anderson, *The Scottish Nation* (Edinburgh: Fullarton, 1863).

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86.

who took his spell at the pumps to encourage the seamen. Marryat tells of another, who helped to put out a fire.”<sup>17</sup> Masefield’s reliance upon literature-as-fact, however, should not really come as a surprise. Possessing a literary background, Masefield wrote twenty-one novels, three plays and various works of poetry. In 1930, King George V appointed him Great Britain’s poet laureate, a title he held until his death in 1967.<sup>18</sup> Although Masefield abandoned non-fiction writing later in life to pursue his literary career, *Sea Life in Nelson’s Time*, with its use of nautical fiction as historical evidence, continued to influence the writing of the social history of the navy.

Naval fiction also influenced John Robert Hutchinson. Unlike Masefield, however, Hutchinson did not reference his fictional sources in his 1914 publication, *The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore*.<sup>19</sup> In his well-researched work, Hutchinson argued that the press gang—the system by which the British navy forcibly conscripted British mariners to man its warships—was not only illegal, but also immoral. Hutchinson described how the press gang originated, how and who it seized as recruits and its workings both on sea and ashore. He also provided four reasons why the press gang lost favour; namely because of its “demoralizing effects of long-continued violent and indiscriminate pressing upon the Fleet, its injurious and exasperating effects upon trade, its antagonizing effect upon the nation and its enormous cost as compared with recruiting by the good-will of the people.”<sup>20</sup> Like Masefield, Hutchinson portrayed the common sailor as a poor creature enslaved upon a floating prison meant ironically to secure British freedom.

Smollett’s description of the press gang in *Roderick Random* influenced Hutchinson’s interpretation. In *Roderick Random*, Smollett had his protagonist snatched on Tower Hill by a press gang and conveyed to a press tender.<sup>21</sup> Random, who had been beaten while trying to evade the gang, demanded that his wounds be dressed. The midshipman in charge squirted “a mouthful of dissolved tobacco upon me, through the gratings, told me ‘I was a mutinous dog, and that I might die and be damned.’”<sup>22</sup> This scene influenced Hutchinson deeply. “The callosity of Smollett’s midshipman, who spat in the pressed man’s face when he dared to complain of his sufferings, and roughly bade him die for aught he cared,” concluded Hutchinson, “was characteristic of the service.”<sup>23</sup> While much of the evidence for Hutchinson’s work came directly from the Public Record Office, naval fiction clearly shaped his view of the press gang.

As time progressed, historians began to question the authenticity of naval fiction and began discouraging its use as either historical fact or evidence. E.G. Twitchett, a

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17 Ibid., p. 96.

18 Constance Babington Smith, *John Masefield: A Life* (New York: Macmillan, 1978).

19 J.R. Hutchinson, *The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore* (New York: E.P. Dutton, 1914).

20 Ibid., p. 311.

21 Smollett, *The Adventures of Roderick Random*, p. 139. Many naval novelists and early historians were influenced by the anti-press gang literature that appeared throughout Great Britain until the end of the impress service in 1815. See: Rodger, “The Naval World of Jack Aubrey.”

22 Ibid., p. 140.

23 Hutchinson, *The Press Gang Afloat and Ashore*, p. 297.

literary critic and historian, questioned the credibility of Marrayat's fiction as a historical source in *Life of a Seaman: Thomas Cochrane, 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Dundonald*.<sup>24</sup> Twitchett's biography followed Cochrane's naval career from midshipman to admiral, pausing in between to emphasize how Great Britain under-appreciated this illustrious naval hero. Discussing Cochrane's career as a young officer, Twitchett noted:

Captain Marrayat, whilst a midshipman, was a member of the ship's crew which Cochrane, without particular orders, threw into Fort Trinidad at Rosas to hold up a French army—in itself a first-class artistic conception. Marrayat tells the story (in the fictitious character of Frank Mildmay) of how grievously near, and how unwillingly and untimely, his green fictional promise came to being sacrificed for his captain's preservation.<sup>25</sup>

But, observed Twitchett, Marrayat's details “must be taken with a grain of caution.”<sup>26</sup> Twitchett's criticism reminded scholars that naval fiction was just that, fiction. This work would have been just another one of the countless naval biographies replete with glory and hero-worship had Twitchett not planted a seed of doubt about citing historical fiction as historical fact.

Michael Lewis, an historian and contemporary of Twitchett, allowed Twitchett's doubts to blossom in his 1939 work, *England's Sea Officers: The Story of the Naval Profession*.<sup>27</sup> Lewis' study examined the creation and growth of the naval profession by exploring the origins of each naval rank. He divided naval professionals into two groups—seamen and fighters—and argued that as the navy became a more professional force, officers were forced to specialize to a point where they could become either seamen or fighters, but they could not be both as they had once done.<sup>28</sup>

Where previous historians and novelists denigrated the reputation of naval officers, Lewis defended them. He argued that the eighteenth-century naval captain lived in a brutal and cruel society, which taught him that the “only way to deal with his men was to flog them.”<sup>29</sup> But, Lewis acknowledged that captains in particular and sea officers in general had been ill served by “that acid writer, Tobias Smollett.”<sup>30</sup> Although Lewis referenced Smollett throughout his work, he did so only to discredit Smollett's bleak picture of naval life. “We should do well,” observed Lewis, “not to take his [Smollett] words too literally; not only because his naval pen-portraits are invariably overdrawn to the limits of caricature, but also because, for all its author's first-hand experience,

<sup>24</sup> E.G. Twitchett, *Life a Seaman: Thomas Cochrane, 10th Earl of Dundonald* (London: Wishart & Company, 1931).

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> Michael Lewis, *England's Sea Officers: The Story of the Naval Profession* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939).

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 29-37 and pp. 281-290.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 198.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 256.

*Roderick Random* is still a novel.”<sup>31</sup> According to Lewis, fans of naval fiction needed to remember that “a novelist is quite entitled—indeed his main object often is—to create striking and amusing characters.”<sup>32</sup> But that was all Captain Oakhum, Roderick Random, Tom Bowling, Crampley and Doctor Mackshane were—fictional characters and not actual people. Nor were the events of *Roderick Random* historical fact and, thus, historians needed to stop citing them as such. Lewis asked his readers to judge sea officers as products of their time and not by either modern standards or fictitious accounts of life at sea.<sup>33</sup>

By 1939, Smollett had lost his historical authority. Historians preferred to research aspects of naval life in the archives and not in the pages of *Roderick Random*. Yet, naval fiction did not lose its influence over the direction of naval history. A new, important series of books entered into publication in 1937 that would not be mistaken as historical fact, but would nevertheless shape the course of the social history of the navy for fifty years.

### **Pacing the Quarterdeck: Forester’s Influence on Naval History, 1940-1990**

Horatio Hornblower, the famous fictional character of Cecil Scott Troughton Smith — who published under the name C.S. Forester — owed his existence to a popular Hollywood film, a scorned opera starlet and a disputed paternity suit. Before becoming a writer of naval fiction in 1937, C.S. Forester worked as a Hollywood hack.<sup>34</sup> In 1935, Forester was writing a pirate film for Paramount Studios. Before he had finished the script, however, *Captain Blood*, starring Errol Flynn and Olivia de Haviland, debuted. Unfortunately for Forester, the writers had based that film upon the same historical incident that he had intended to use for his script. “Rather than seeking another position and hounded by the prospect of a paternity suit from a fading opera star,” Forester visited an antique bookshop, bought three volumes of the *Naval Chronicle* and booked passage on a freighter to return home to his wife and children in England.<sup>35</sup> Forester recalled how he “read and reread...those volumes of the *Naval Chronicle*...during the months that followed.”<sup>36</sup> He began to devise Hornblower’s character while aboard ship, determining both his attributes and his weaknesses. When the freighter docked at Portsmouth,

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid. Lewis knew the motivations of the novelist well. Apart from writing and editing thirteen scholarly works, he also wrote four novels, two books of poetry and two short stories. The navy inspired only two of his fictional offerings. See: Michael Lewis, *Afloat and Ashore* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1921); Michael Lewis, *The Island of Disaster* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1926).

<sup>33</sup> Lewis, *England's Sea Officers*, p. 256.

<sup>34</sup> Forester’s most notable film, *The African Queen*, premiered in 1933. See: John Forester, *Novelist and Storyteller: The Life of C.S. Forester* (Lemon Grove, CA: the author, 2000), p. 115.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., p. 303.

<sup>36</sup> C.S. Forester, *The Hornblower Companion: An Atlas and Personal Commentary on the Writing of the Hornblower Saga* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1964), p. 76.

Forester had “the novel practically written.”<sup>37</sup>

Forester’s critically acclaimed eleven book series follows the career of Horatio Hornblower, an officer in the Royal Navy, from midshipman to rear admiral during the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>38</sup> Hornblower has many adventures throughout the series.<sup>39</sup> Notably, however, he blockades Brest, experiences the hardships of half pay while stuck on shore, commands the ship for Nelson’s funeral on the Thames, sails to South American waters and encounters a mad, messianic revolutionary whom he helps to overthrow, fights countless ship-to-ship battles with the French and the Spanish, escapes from a French prison, suppresses a mutiny off Le Havre and lives long enough to witness the navy’s introduction of steam-powered ships.<sup>40</sup> Forester portrays the navy as a hard, lonely environment for the ship’s officers. After becoming a captain, Hornblower struggles with being a “man alone” and commanding other men. Hornblower is lonely and self-critical. While he labors under the heavy weight of responsibility, the men he commands are hardworking, earnest and jovial; however they are also lazy, apathetic and discontented. Forester attempts to portray an accurate picture of naval life by presenting this dichotomy to the reader, in sharp contrast to the one-dimensional view of Smollett and other early writers of naval fiction. The Hornblower series does not focus solely upon the daily shipboard routine, however. Many of the books detail the operational and logistical history of the navy during this time period. It is these broader aspects of the subject, along with a renewed interest in naval officers, that influenced historians of the 1960s–1980s in their interpretation of naval social history.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>38</sup> Although readers can now follow Hornblower’s journey from midshipman to rear admiral in sequence, Forester did not write the novels in chronological order. The novels, in the order they were written are as follows: *The Happy Return* (1937), *A Ship of the Line* (1938), *Flying Colours* (1938), *The Commodore* (1945), *Lord Hornblower* (1946), *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower* (1950), *Lieutenant Hornblower* (1952), *Hornblower and the Atropos* (1953), *Hornblower in the West Indies* (1958), *Hornblower and the Hotspur* (1962), *Hornblower and the Crisis* (unfinished, published in part 1967). Chronologically, the novels order themselves as follows: *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower*, *Lieutenant Hornblower*, *Hornblower and the Hotspur*, *Hornblower and the Crisis*, *Hornblower and the Atropos*, *The Happy Return*, *A Ship of the Line*, *Flying Colours*, *The Commodore*, *Lord Hornblower* and *Hornblower in the West Indies*. See: Forester, *Hornblower Companion*, p. ix.

<sup>39</sup> Widely popular, the Hornblower series spawned a major motion picture, *Captain Horatio Hornblower RN*, starring Gregory Peck in 1951, an A&E TV mini-series starring Ioan Gruffudd and a literary society devoted to the works of C.S. Forester. Reportedly, Gruffudd would like to re-make the 1951 Hornblower film and is currently looking for financial backers. See: Gruffudd Hopes to Make Hornblower Film, 2007 [cited 7 April 2008]; available from [www.contactmusic.com/news.nf/article/gruffudd%20plans%20hornblower%20movie\\_1022658](http://www.contactmusic.com/news.nf/article/gruffudd%20plans%20hornblower%20movie_1022658).

<sup>40</sup> C.S. Forester, *The Young Hornblower Omnibus* (London: Penguin Books, 1989); C.S. Forester, *Captain Hornblower R.N.: An Omnibus* (London: Penguin, 1987); C.S. Forester, *Admiral Hornblower: An Omnibus* (London: Penguin, 1996).

<sup>41</sup> Nicholas Rodger read Forester as a teenager. Likewise, Roger Knight read Forester at the age of sixteen. John Hattendorf read his father’s copies of the Horatio Hornblower saga also

Michael Lewis, already a critic of Smollett, relied upon sources similar to Forester's for his most influential work, *The Social History of the Navy, 1793-1815*, published in 1960.<sup>42</sup> Both men utilized printed sources like the *Naval Chronicle* and Steel's *Navy List*, along with easily accessible memoirs and biographies.<sup>43</sup> In the *Social History of the Navy*, Lewis argued that the Napoleonic Wars forced the Royal Navy to evolve into a recognizably modern fighting force. Utilizing the new methodology of social history, Lewis examined the men who composed the navy and found that the hierarchical distinctions afloat reflected the "cross-section of contemporary British life" ashore.<sup>44</sup> Lewis divided his book into four parts: Origins, Entry, The Profession and The Price of Admiralty. In each part, he reviewed the experiences of both the men of the lower deck and of the quarterdeck. In fact, Lewis popularized the term "lower deck" to describe the common sailors and "quarterdeck" to describe the officers. His work is one of the first to try, on the basis of primary sources, to provide an objective view of the men and the officers aboard a man-of-war.

While trying to maintain his objectivity, Lewis' bias still entered his writing. Like Forester, Lewis portrayed the navy as a hard but fair environment. Sailors, "simple souls, obstinately conservative, ill-educated and...unvocal," were nevertheless made of "good, sound stuff."<sup>45</sup> Through statistical analysis, Lewis concluded that "one quarter [of the men on the lower deck] came willingly, but—and herein lies the secret of their

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as a teenager. He attributes his desire to join the navy to Hornblower. See: Nicholas Rodger, letter to the author, 13 March 2008; Roger Knight, letter to the author, 20 March 2008; John Hattendorf, telephone conversation with author, 8 April 2008. One of Hornblower's biggest fans was not an academic, however. Winston Churchill adored the Hornblower novels. Oliver Lyttelton gave Churchill his first Hornblower novel in 1941. Churchill read it while travelling on the *Prince of Wales* for his historic meeting with President Roosevelt off the coast of Newfoundland. As the ship neared Placentia Bay, "Churchill sent a telegram to Oliver Lyttelton to thank him for his leisure reading. It read simply: HORNBLOWER ADMIRABLE. This message, Churchill later recalled, 'caused perturbation in the Middle East Headquarters where it was imagined that "Hornblower" was the codeword for some special operation of which they had not been told.'" See: Don Beadle, "Admirable Hornblower! Churchill on Forester," *Reflections November*, no. 6 (2003), p. 11.

42 Michael Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1960), p. 5. Eight years later, Christopher Lloyd wrote a comprehensive social history of the navy. Lloyd attempted to reveal the social history of the navy from the Middle Ages until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Lloyd argued that for many years the history of the navy had been that of the Admiralty, admirals, captains and battles and not of the common seaman, although he had invariably been the key component in the navy. Lloyd revisited several themes throughout the chronological span of his work, such as impressment, paying and victualling. His work was the first to offer a broad overview of naval social history. See: Christopher Lloyd, *The British Seaman, 1200-1860: A Social Survey* (London: Paladin, 1968).

43 Lewis, *A Social History of the Navy 1793-1815*, pp. 444-46.

44 *Ibid.*, p. 18.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 136.

inherent efficiency—only about one quarter were really new to the job.”<sup>46</sup> Had life afloat been as horrible as early writers implied, Lewis suggested that fewer men would have become sailors.<sup>47</sup> Lewis’ depiction of the captain echoed Forester’s Hornblower. “His [the captain’s] was normally a lonely life, for the eminence of his position on board had to be constantly emphasized by strict non-fraternization.”<sup>48</sup> Pacing the quarterdeck—the favorite pastime of Horatio Hornblower—“was but another manifestation of his [the captain’s] solitary grandeur.”<sup>49</sup> Before the Hornblower novels gained a popular following in the 1940s, Lewis published *England’s Sea Officers: The Story of the Naval Profession* in 1939. And though he spent much time defending the reputation of eighteenth and early nineteenth century naval captains, he did not discuss their loneliness or their bitter battle with “the evil system” of “interest” or patronage, which if present could advance a naval officer’s career and if absent could keep him a lieutenant forever, in that work.<sup>50</sup> These themes appeared in Lewis’ subsequent books only after Forester published his accounts of Hornblower’s similar trials.

Five years after publishing the *Social History of the Navy*, Lewis wrote what he thought to be his most important work, *The Navy in Transition*.<sup>51</sup> Lewis argued that the most important and least studied revolution in naval history occurred in the years immediately following the end of the Napoleonic Wars. During this period the Royal Navy changed its very nature, from “national warrior, acting in the interests of Britain, into international policeman, acting dispassionately in the interests of all sea-users.”<sup>52</sup> This transformation came about, Lewis argued, through the continued professionalization of the already semi-professional navy. Owing to the glut of naval officers and seamen left unemployed at war’s end, the navy began promoting officers on merit alone and not upon interest. The navy also instituted retirement schemes for both the officers and the men. Many unemployed men, however, journeyed to South America to serve in the navies of the continent’s newly emerging nations and fight with them in their battle for self-determination. Lewis attributed all of the changes in the navy to the introduction of steam power within the fleet and the subsequent technical specialization of the crew that resulted.<sup>53</sup>

Forester first broached the navy’s transition from the age of sail to the age of steam in his 1958 novel, *Hornblower in the West Indies*. In that work, the Admiralty appoints Hornblower commander-in-chief of the West Indies station in 1821. Hornblower embraces the navy’s steam-driven transformation, although others laugh at

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46 Ibid., p. 139.

47 Ibid.

48 Ibid., p. 230

49 Ibid., p. 233.

50 Ibid., p. 210.

51 Michael Lewis, *The Navy in Transition, 1814-1864; a Social History* (Hodder and Stoughton: London, 1965).

52 Ibid., p. 12.

53 Ibid., p. 14.

“the possibility of ocean-going ships propelled by steam.”<sup>54</sup> His orders require him to suppress pirates in the Caribbean who hamper the implementation of free trade and to regulate the privateers, owned and manned by unemployed British naval officers and men, operating under the aegis of the Chilean government.<sup>55</sup> Forester’s work introduced and popularised the navy’s transformation from sail-driven to steam-powered technology. Indeed, no scholarly works had been written on the subject until *Hornblower in the West Indies* was published, although many academic works began to be written on this topic after its publication, with Lewis’ work being the first.

While Lewis’ work examined the careers of officers and seamen from 1797 to 1870, John Laffin’s 1969 mainstream work, *Jack Tar: The Story of the British Sailor* ignored the officers altogether.<sup>56</sup> Laffin was one of the first writers to capitalize on the popularity of naval fiction and produce naval social history for the popular market. His work reflected Forester’s portrayal of the common seamen. Laffin attempted to depict the ordinary sailor in a sympathetic light; yet, like Forester, he littered his book with phrases that belittled the able seaman. For example, Laffin wrote that “being drunk was simply part of his primitive, uncomplicated nature for while the sea hardens it does not necessarily add culture.”<sup>57</sup> Even though he believed the men to have simple and mean intellects, he put a good part of the blame on the service, claiming it to be a hard life with bad food, poor pay and hard duties.<sup>58</sup> Forester also dealt with this stereotypical duality of the able seaman in the Hornblower series. While the seamen knew and performed their duty impeccably, they also drank, gambled and—in some instances—naively believed that “God lived in the maintop.”<sup>59</sup> Hornblower sympathizes with the sailors throughout the series, but treats them with firmness because he believes they would understand nothing else.<sup>60</sup>

As the popularity of the Hornblower novels grew in the 1970s and early 1980s, so too did descriptive works on the social history of the navy. For the most part, novelists and journalists wrote these books, which were devoid of scholarly arguments.<sup>61</sup> In 1981,

<sup>54</sup> Forester, *Admiral Hornblower: An Omnibus*, p. 547.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> John Laffin, *Jack Tar: The Story of the British Sailor* (London: Cassell, 1969).

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., p. 30. Laffin approached naval social history with a particular anti-British bias. An Australian scholar of Australian military history, Laffin wrote ninety-nine books on Australia’s contributions to the world wars and one book on the British naval social history during the Age of Sail. Laffin compared the treatment of sailors in the early nineteenth-century navy with that of soldiers in the modern military. This unfair and anachronistic comparison left Laffin appalled at the treatment of British mariners.

<sup>59</sup> Forester, *The Young Hornblower Omnibus*, p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Respected historians also rode the wave of Hornblower’s popularity and produced books meant for the popular market. C. Northcote Parkinson, a historian and naval novelist, wrote a very convincing spoof biography of Horatio Hornblower that fooled many people—among them reputable scholars—to believe that Hornblower had been a real person. To this day, the National Maritime Museum in Greenwich, England, still places a disclaimer on their website

Dudley Pope, a fan of Hornblower and the author of another popular naval fiction series, wrote such a work. In *Life in Nelson's Navy*, Pope described the daily life aboard a man-of-war, with chapters on victualling, discipline, punishment, medicine, the press gang, the building of ships, the background and the duties of the crew and officers.<sup>62</sup> Pope believed that Nelsonic sailors needed to be understood in their historical context. The tone of Pope's work echoed that of Forester's novels and with good reason. C.S. Forester had personally encouraged Pope in his literary career.<sup>63</sup> Gratitude toward his mentor manifested itself in Pope's view of naval history. Officers populated Pope's navy, while men—although they knew and performed their duty—faded into the background of the ship.<sup>64</sup> Of all the officers, Pope showed a particular affinity for the struggles of the captain who, like Hornblower, “found himself overwhelmed by the loneliness represented by the great cabin.”<sup>65</sup> The captain:

ate every meal alone; when he walked the quarterdeck the officers and men left the windward side clear for him. He was the captain; no one joked with him, no one chatted, always there was an invisible wall between him and his officers, a wall which represented discipline but one that shut out the captain.<sup>66</sup>

But, wrote Pope, “the loneliness of command was something that a good leader accepted.”<sup>67</sup>

C.S. Forester died in 1966 due to complications from arteriosclerosis. His fans mourned his passing and fondly remembered and re-read his novels. In 1969, David C. Taylor, in a review for the *Library Journal*, said of a new work of naval fiction that “mourning Hornblower fans may prefer to read a good if disappointing new book rather than to reread one of the master's epics.”<sup>68</sup> Although Forester's works continued to influence the writing of naval history until 1990, this “good if disappointing new book” gathered a following of astronomical proportions that had a greater influence upon naval history than Forester could ever have imagined.

### **A Happy Ship: O'Brian's Influence on Naval History, 1990-2007**

Richard Patrick Russ had never been a yachtsman. He had never served in the

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that “Admiral of the Fleet Viscount Hornblower of Smallbridge (1776-1857) did not exist.” See: C. Northcote Parkinson, *The Life and Times of Horatio Hornblower* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1970). See also: Was Hornblower a Real Person? , National Maritime Museum, 2008 [cited 10 April 2008]; available from <http://www.nmm.ac.uk/server/show/conWebDoc.17909>.

<sup>62</sup> Dudley Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy* (London: Allen&Unwin, 1981).

<sup>63</sup> John Hattendorf, “Naval Novel,” in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Maritime History*, ed. John Hattendorf (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 10.

<sup>64</sup> Pope, *Life in Nelson's Navy*, pp. 165-176, 191-201, 211-230.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 63.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>68</sup> David C. Taylor, “Master and Commander,” *Library Journal*, 15 December 1969.

navy or the merchant service. He had never even traveled around the world by freighter. In fact, he had never crossed more than the Irish Sea and that had been in a ferryboat.<sup>69</sup> But he found himself drawn to the ocean. In 1945, the Englishman Richard Russ abandoned his non-nautical past and reinvented himself as the Irishman Patrick O'Brian, a sailor and a writer of naval fiction and non-fiction.<sup>70</sup> Two years later he published his first nautical work, *A Book of Voyages*, compiled from seventeenth and eighteenth-century travel accounts, written on both land and sea.<sup>71</sup> He and his wife Mary, conducted the research for the work at the British Museum and the British Library.<sup>72</sup> Although the book sold poorly, it piqued O'Brian's interest in all things nautical. And after an eight-year hiatus, he wrote his first work of naval fiction, *The Golden Ocean*, quickly followed by *The Unknown Shore*. While these novels, which fictionalize George Anson's circumnavigation, were received well by the critics, they had only a small readership.<sup>73</sup> Following Forester's death in 1966, Robert White Hill, Lippincott's editor in chief, asked O'Brian to write another historical novel about the Royal Navy during the Napoleonic Wars. Hill wanted to "launch the next Forester...and thought that O'Brian might have the talent."<sup>74</sup> O'Brian accepted. O'Brian had read Forester's books and while he recommended Hornblower novels to his friends, he privately disparaged Forester's work for its predictable plots, inadequate historical research and lack of character development.<sup>75</sup> He vowed to write a better work of naval fiction. With this goal in mind, he set off to research the time period and events of his novel in the Public Record Office and the National Maritime Museum.<sup>76</sup> After a year of researching and writing, Lippincott published O'Brian's manuscript, *Master and Commander* (1969) and introduced the world to the two characters who would influence the writing of naval social history the most: Jack Aubrey and Stephen Maturin.<sup>77</sup>

The Aubrey-Maturin novels—twenty in total—detail life in the Royal Navy from 1800-1818.<sup>78</sup> Jack Aubrey, O'Brian's fictitious post captain, and Stephen Maturin,

<sup>69</sup> Nikolai Tolstoy, *Patrick O'Brian: The Making of a Novelist* (London: Random House, 2005), p. 169.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 333.

<sup>71</sup> Dean King, *Patrick O'Brian: A Life Revealed* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2000), p. 105.

<sup>72</sup> Tolstoy, *Patrick O'Brian*, p. 333.

<sup>73</sup> Stuart Bennett, "Four Decades of Reviews," in *Patrick O'Brian: Critical Essays and a Bibliography*, ed. A.E. Cunningham (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), p. 155.

<sup>74</sup> King, *Patrick O'Brian*, p. 192.

<sup>75</sup> Tolstoy, *Patrick O'Brian*, p. 396.

<sup>76</sup> King, *Patrick O'Brian*, p. 194.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>78</sup> Patrick O'Brian wrote the Aubrey-Maturin novels in chronological order. They are as follows: *Master and Commander* (1969), *Post Captain* (1972), *HMS Surprise* (1973), *The Mauritius Command* (1977), *Desolation Island* (1978), *The Fortune of War* (1979), *The Surgeon's Mate* (1980), *The Ionian Mission* (1981), *Treason's Harbour* (1983), *The Far Side of the World* (1984), *The Reverse of the Medal* (1986), *The Letter of Marque* (1988), *The Thirteen-Gun Salute* (1989), *The Nutmeg of Consolation* (1991), *Clarissa Oakes* [published

Aubrey's surgeon, travel the world while completing many dangerous missions.<sup>79</sup> Aubrey, known to his men as "Lucky Jack," is particularly successful at capturing enemy vessels and makes his fortune in the prize court. Later in the series much of this fortune is lost through untoward legal dealings. Maturin is not only a physician, but also a spy with ties to British naval intelligence. Like Hornblower, the pair fight many battles, serve on blockade duty and work to overthrow tyrannical governments in South America. Unlike the Hornblower novels, however, O'Brian's characters develop much of their complexity and depth ashore. The characters seem to be able to step off the page into reality. When at sea, O'Brian uses the character of Aubrey to portray the navy as a hard, but fair institution steeped in tradition and custom. The men aboard the HMS *Surprise*, Jack Aubrey's ship, work hard, but are not without human frailty and vice; the officers are taut, but not sadistic; the captain supports the careers of his junior officers, but can be melancholic and snappish. O'Brian's attention to the development of his characters, combined with his penchant for historical research and accuracy, began to influence the writing of naval social history in the late twentieth century.<sup>80</sup> Scholars adopted his equitable view of the navy, his attention to the land-based society's influence on shipboard culture, and his concentration on life aboard a single man-of-war and pursued these approaches in their historical writings.

Nicholas Rodger, a naval historian and former curator at the Public Records Office, shared O'Brian's evenhanded view of the navy in his 1986 work, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy*.<sup>81</sup> Rodger argued that "the Navy resembled

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as *The Truelove* in North America] (1992), *The Wine-Dark Sea* (1993), *The Commodore* (1994), *The Yellow Admiral* (1996), *The Hundred Days* (1998), and *Blue at the Mizzen* (1999).

<sup>79</sup> Stephen Maturin protests the title of ship's surgeon. Maturin explained to Aubrey that "'Surgeons are excellent fellows,' said Stephen Maturin with a touch of acerbity. 'And where should we be without them, God forbid...But I have not the honour of counting myself among them, sir. I am a physician.'" See: Patrick O'Brian, *Master and Commander* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1969) p. 37.

<sup>80</sup> O'Brian's books had a small, but loyal following in Great Britain after their publication, but did not find a devoted readership in North America until W.W. Norton & Company re-issued them in the 1990s. Bennett believed that "reasons for this long American dry spell can be found in some of the reviews of the early Aubrey novels. Clearly many readers, including reviewers, came to the books expecting the predictability of C.S. Forester's Hornblower novels, and were bewildered and disappointed by the complexity of O'Brian's created world." See: Stuart Bennett, "Four Decades of Reviews," in *Patrick O'Brian: Critical Appreciations and a Bibliography*, ed. A.E. Cunningham (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1994), p. 159.

<sup>81</sup> N. A. M Rodger, *The Wooden World: An Anatomy of the Georgian Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986). Roger Knight believes that Rodger's book is "unquestionably the most influential book" in the field of naval social history. See: Rodger Knight, letter to author, 20 March 2008. Patrick O'Brian was also a fan of the book. He believed it to be "an uncommonly valuable book...the most authoritative and enjoyable text on the subject that can be imagined." Patrick O'Brian provided this quote for the cover of Rodger's book.

the society from which it was recruited in many more ways than it differed from it.”<sup>82</sup> Indeed, each ship within the fleet was a microcosm for shore-based English society. Rodger also challenged the long-held view of the navy as a tyranny. If the navy had been “a floating concentration camp” as the historical literature suggested, the Navy would not have been as operationally successful as it had been.<sup>83</sup> Officers needed to value their men and their unique abilities in order to have enjoyed the tactical success that they did. And to value their men, captains need to *know* their men. To do this, the captain could not be like Hornblower—a “man alone”—but needed to be like Aubrey, working amongst his crew to discover their limitations and their strengths.<sup>84</sup> Rodger emphasized that English systems of power and patronage operated to a greater degree afloat than they did ashore.

Patrick O’Brian did not influence Rodger directly, even though his book echoed O’Brian’s interpretation of naval life.<sup>85</sup> Rodger attributed his interest in naval history to both his father, who had been a lieutenant commander in the Royal Navy, and to “growing up being often afloat.”<sup>86</sup> Rodger, however, read the Aubrey-Maturin series, admired O’Brian’s “prose and characters [who] have rarely been equaled” and met the author late in his life.<sup>87</sup> He contributed a chapter to O’Brian’s *Festschrift*.<sup>88</sup> The themes in *Wooden World* uncannily echo those in the Aubrey-Maturin series. Both O’Brian and Rodger emphasize the land-based societal microcosm aboard ship. Both authors portray captains as fair and happy-go-lucky men; both view discipline as an important part of naval life, but not as sadistic torture. Both recognize and emphasize the importance of the able seaman to the navy’s very functioning.

While Rodger disavowed a direct correlation between O’Brian’s work and his own, Brian Lavery did not.<sup>89</sup> Lavery, the curator of ships and technology at the National Maritime Museum, capitalized upon the popularity of O’Brian’s Aubrey-Maturin series in the writing of his 1989 work *Nelson’s Navy: The Ships, Men and Organization, 1793-1815*.<sup>90</sup> Like O’Brian, Lavery tried to present a rounded and balanced picture of

82 Rodger, *Wooden World*, p. 345.

83 Ibid.

84 Ibid.

85 Nicholas Rodger, letter to the author, 18 March 2008.

86 Ibid.

87 Ibid.

88 Rodger, "The Naval World of Jack Aubrey."

89 Nicholas Rodger said that when he began writing naval history, O’Brian’s novels had not been published and he had not read them. He emphasized that he was already published before he read the Aubrey-Maturin series. His publications before *Wooden World* include both independently authored books and editorial collections. They are as follows: N.A.M. Rodger, *The Admiralty* (Lavenham, England: T. Dalton, 1979); N.A.M. Rodger, *Articles of War: The Statutes Which Governed Our Fighting Navies, 1661, 1749, and 1886* (Homewell, Havant, Hampshire: K. Mason, 1982); N.A.M. Rodger, *The Naval Miscellany, vol. 5* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984); N.A.M. Rodger, *Naval Records for Genealogists* (London: Public Records Office, 1984); N.A.M. Rodger, *The Pollen Papers: The Privately Circulated Printed Works of Arthur Hungerford Pollen, 1901-1916* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1984).

90 Lavery, *Nelson’s Navy: The Ships, Men and Organisation, 1793-1815*.

the Royal Navy. His work, organized as a very detailed guide to every aspect of naval life, examined the social, operational and logistical sides of the navy. Lavery included chapters on the men, the officers, and their life at sea, as well as the dockyards, ship design, ship building, navigation, foreign navies, naval fleets and recruiting.<sup>91</sup> Conway Maritime Press published Lavery's conspectus because of the good "sales of naval fiction by C.S. Forester, Patrick O'Brian, Dudley Pope, Alexander Kent, Richard Woodman and others."<sup>92</sup> Indeed, Patrick O'Brian provided a foreword to the book. He acknowledged that "there is no royal road to a knowledge of the navy of Nelson's time, no smooth and easy path to be followed without effort," but, he praised Lavery's work for, "being the most nearly regal that I have come across in many years of reading on the subject."<sup>93</sup> According to O'Brian, with Lavery's work in hand, "should the reader have an inclination to join the ranks of historical novelists...all he needs to do is to find a plot and to lay in a store of paper and ink."<sup>94</sup>

Lavery's work became one of many that invoked O'Brian's name and fictional characters in order to find publishers and boost sales.<sup>95</sup> Brian Vale, a naval historian, also acknowledged the contributions of the Aubrey-Maturin series in his 2001 work, *A Frigate of King George: Life and Duty on a British Man-of-War*.<sup>96</sup> Vale noted that "naval fiction

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91 Ibid.

92 Ibid., p. 9.

93 Ibid., p. 7.

94 Ibid., p. 8.

95 Like Forester's Hornblower, O'Brian's characters have spawned a wide range of popular media including a cookbook that provides well researched recipes for all of the food mentioned in the Aubrey-Maturin series, two CDs filled with recordings of the music mentioned in the novels, a major motion picture and several readers' companion works. See: Anne Chotzinoff Grossman and Lisa Grossman Thomas, *Lobscouse & Spotted Dog, Which It's a Gastronomic Companion to the Aubrey/Maturin Novels* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1997). See also: *Musical Evenings with the Captain: Music from the Aubrey-Maturin Novels of Patrick O'Brian*, Philharmonia Virtuosi, Richard Kapp, Mela Tenenbaum, Alexander Tenenbaum and Dorothy Lawson, ESS.AY Recordings compact disc 1047 and *Musical Evenings with the Captain, vol. II: More Music from the Aubrey-Maturin Novels of Patrick O'Brian*, Philharmonia Virtuosi, Richard Kapp, Mela Tenenbaum, Dorothy Lawson, Richard Brice, Jerry Grossman and John Ferrillo, ESS.AY Recordings compact disc 1056. A few of the companion books for the series include: Anthony Gary Brown, *Persons, Animals, Ships and Cannon in the Aubrey-Maturin Sea Novels of Patrick O'Brian* (New York: McFarland & Company, 1999); A.E. Cunningham, ed., *Patrick O'Brian: Critical Essays and a Bibliography* (New York: Norton & Company, 1994); Dean King and John B. Hattendorf, *Harbors and High Seas: An Atlas and Geographical Guide to the Complete Aubrey-Maturin Novels of Patrick O'Brian* (New York: Holt Books, 2000); Dean King, ed., *A Sea of Words: A Lexicon and Companion to the Complete Seafaring Tales of Patrick O'Brian* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995); Brian Lavery, *Jack Aubrey Commands: An Historical Companion to the Naval World of Patrick O'Brian* (Baltimore, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2003); Richard O'Neill, *Patrick O'Brian's Navy* (New York: Running Press, 2003).

96 Vale, *A Frigate of King George*.

continues to be a popular and absorbing form of literature. The naval novels of C.S. Forester, Patrick O'Brian, Alexander Kent, Richard Woodman and others are widely read and appreciated."<sup>97</sup> But, continued Vale, "each writer has a different vision of life on a wooden warship."<sup>98</sup> Which fictional interpretation of the truth was correct, he queried. He acknowledged that his work attempted to answer this question by drawing upon the official letters, logs, muster books, journals and pay books of one ship over a period of twenty-two years. The *Doris*, the subject of Vale's case-study, served in South American waters at the close of the Napoleonic Wars and into the 1820s. The ship and her crew experienced the changes in personnel and technology that affected the navy at the outset of the steam revolution. Like the Aubrey-Maturin series, Vale viewed the navy and the treatments of its crew in equitable terms. By following the life and fortunes of the *Doris* and her captain, Thomas Graham, Vale compared the impact that land-based society had upon a singular officer's career and the impact that officer had upon the men aboard his ship. This approach, very much in keeping with O'Brian's fictional format, allowed the reader to comprehend the ordinary life of the navy and realize the importance of the entire crew upon the success of a ship over time. Vale left readers to decide "which of their favorite naval novelists is closest to the truth."<sup>99</sup> Given the tone of his work, Vale, an avid Patrick O'Brian fan, believed that Graham could have stepped off the deck of the *Doris* and onto that of Aubrey's *Surprise* without feeling out of place.<sup>100</sup>

Since the 1990s, scholars began publishing studies that examined only one aspect of the navy's social history. Often these micro-histories followed the interests of O'Brian's characters. In the series, Jack and Stephen are devoted to their stomachs. O'Brian describes the lavish dinners that the pair eat and the rations of the able seamen in great detail. Janet MacDonald, a food writer who became interested in naval history by reading the descriptions of the food in the Aubrey-Maturin series, wrote on the food served to sailors while at sea in the Georgian period. She argued that the food in the Royal Navy was both plentiful and of a high quality.<sup>101</sup> If the food had been as bad as previously thought, argued MacDonald, sailors would never have joined the navy and would have died within months from malnutrition.

Along with food, music also features prominently throughout O'Brian's *oeuvre*. In *Master and Commander*, Jack and Stephen meet at a public concert held at the

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., p. x.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Nicholas Blake imitated Vale's study of a single ship in *Steering to Glory: A Day in the Life of a Ship of the Line*. Unlike Vale who followed the *Doris* and her crew for twenty-two years, Blake examined a single day in the life of a ship-of-the line. His work explored the daily life of individuals and detailed their daily tasks. Blake did not write his book about a real ship, however. He created a hypothetical ship that he termed the *Splendid* and generalized about shipboard conditions from a variety of sources. See: Nicholas Blake, *Steering to Glory: A Day in the Life of a Ship of the Line* (London: Chatham Publishing, 2005).

<sup>101</sup> MacDonald, *Feeding Nelson's Navy: The True Story of Food at Sea in the Georgian Era*.

Governor's House in Port Mahon.<sup>102</sup> As the series progresses, women, money, politics and religion test their friendship, but music provides the thread that eternally bind Stephen, a cellist, and Jack, a violinist, together. David Proctor, a fan of O'Brian's work, examined this thread in his 1992 work, *Music of the Sea*.<sup>103</sup> Proctor argued that the navy adopted the musical preferences of shore-based society and that this integration of land based culture and seafaring culture resulted in a distinctive shipboard culture.<sup>104</sup> Proctor not only considered the musical abilities of the officers, who often took violins or German flutes with them to sea, but also the sea songs and shanties of the men. A good shanteyman, argued Proctor, was as important to the crew as any of the petty officers. Music relieved the stress of battle, of separation from loved ones and of physical fatigue. The navy recognized the importance of music to the lives of their sailors and encouraged its playing while aboard ship. Proctor, like O'Brian, believed that had the navy been as draconian as suggested by earlier scholars, this accommodation of the musical arts would not have been allowed.<sup>105</sup> Instead, Proctor, echoing O'Brian's sentiments, suggested that the navy had been a far more equitable institution than previously thought.

Patrick O'Brian died in 2000, but his interpretation of the social history of the navy continues to flourish within scholarly circles. Academics recognize that the Royal Navy acted not as a floating prison, but as a microcosm of land-based society, while being invested with a unique shipboard culture. O'Brian also influenced the way that scholars wrote the social history of the navy. While some historians continue to write large, comprehensive narratives that explore all aspects of life at sea—these works are generally written for the popular market and carry either Nelson or Jack Aubrey's name (and sometimes both) in the title—books that explore singular facets of the navy's social history remain *en vogue*. The popularity of O'Brian's Aubrey-Maturin novels present scholars with a unique dilemma. O'Brian's work inspires people to explore naval history, but the believability of O'Brian's characters have created a number of problems.<sup>106</sup> In recent years, at least two books written by reputable young scholars cite O'Brian's fiction as historical fact.<sup>107</sup> While a more equitable view of the navy is a positive outcome from O'Brian's work, scholars should be wary of regarding the romanticized world of Jack

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<sup>102</sup> Patrick O'Brian, *Master and Commander* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), p. 7.

<sup>103</sup> David Proctor, *Music of the Sea* (London: HMSO, 1992).

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 2.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 51.

<sup>106</sup> Interview with John Hattendorf.

<sup>107</sup> Stephen Maffeo continually uses O'Brian's text as fact throughout his book. See: Maffeo, *Most Secret and Confidential: Intelligence in the Age of Nelson*. In a keynote address given on 10 October 2007 at the 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Maritime Heritage Conference in San Diego, California, Ian Toll addressed the audience by reading from O'Brian's *The Fortune of War*. Toll noted that Maturin's feelings about the Royal Navy's defeat at the hands of America's nascent navy "were how people really felt." Toll also included several references to O'Brian's work, without identifying it as fiction, in his book. See: Ian W. Toll, *Six Frigates: The Epic History of the Founding of the US Navy* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006).

Aubrey and Stephen Maturin as fact and thus returning, full circle, to Smollett's historical influence.

## **Conclusion**

Naval fiction has influenced the writing of the social history of the navy since the early twentieth century to the present. Most works of naval social history explore the lives and duties of the officers, the warrant officers and the able seamen; they also discuss manning, victualling, discipline, battle and medicine. And while the component parts of a work of naval social history have changed very little since Masfield published *Sea Life in Nelson's Time*, the tone of that history has changed. Influential novelists precipitated the change in the historiography, but should not receive sole credit for the reinterpretation of naval social life. Historians, such as Michael Lewis and Nicholas Rodger, influenced Forester and O'Brian as much as these men influenced them. A symbiotic relationship exists between naval fiction and naval history. Patrick O'Brian's novels continue to exert their influence upon the social history of the navy. But, soon, O'Brian's literary successor will appear and the historiography of the navy will change yet again.

## Call for Papers

### **The 2009 Annual Conference of the North American Society for Oceanic History, Steamship Historical Society of America and National Maritime Historical Society**

**Hosted by the California Maritime Academy, CSU  
Vallejo, California**

“Ports, Forts and Sports: Maritime Economy, Defense and Recreation through Time and across Space,” the 28<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the North American Society for Oceanic History (NASOH) co-sponsored by the National Maritime Historical Society and Steamship Historical Society of America, will be hosted by the California Maritime Academy in Vallejo, California, May 14-17, 2009. The Conference Program Committee invites proposals for papers and sessions exploring all fields of study related to saltwater or navigable freshwater environments. Suggested areas of research include, but are not restricted to, archeology and anthropology, arts and sciences, history, and/or museum exhibitions. Proposals that identify the unique characteristics and influence of maritime economy, defense and recreation in the Pacific and other ocean regions are especially encouraged.

The Program Committee welcomes the submission of individual papers and full sessions, preferring panels with three papers and a chair. Proposals should include a brief abstract of 500 words for each paper or a one-page abstract for panels and a brief bio of 200 words for each participant, including chairs. Graduate students are strongly encouraged to submit proposals. Accommodations for PowerPoint presentations will be provided; however, any other requirements, including audio-visual equipment, special outlets, or accommodations for disabilities should be included in the proposal. Scholars interested in chairing sessions are welcome to send a brief bio to the Program Committee Co-chairs. Please note that all participants must register for the conference. Specific questions may be directed to Program Committee Co-Chair, Bill Thiesen at [thiesen@earthlink.net](mailto:thiesen@earthlink.net). The deadline for submissions is December 1st, 2008.

Send or email submissions to the two Program Committee Co-Chairs listed below:

Victor T. Mastone  
Board of Underwater Archaeological Resources  
251 Causeway Street, Suite 800  
PO Box 4613  
Boston, MA 02114-2199  
[victor.mastone@state.ma.us](mailto:victor.mastone@state.ma.us)

James M. Allan  
Saint Mary's College of California  
Department of Anthropology,  
1928 Saint Mary's Road  
Moraga, CA 94556  
[jallan@stmarys-ca.edu](mailto:jallan@stmarys-ca.edu)