

Commentary

I have always been fascinated by stories of adventure and exploration at sea. In particular it was Edgar Allen Poe's *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* which inspired this story. Poe takes a piratical image synonymous with the seventeenth century and places it in the early-to-mid nineteenth century whaling industry, renewing a stereotype by transposing it through time. Pym is, like Dogrose, swept away by adventure and, unexpectedly, into piracy. I also thought of Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*, which has been a personal favourite since childhood. Again, the character is a young boy who finds himself unexpectedly among pirates, but where as both Jim Hawkins and Arthur Gordon Pym (at least to begin with) use the option to fight against the pirates with others who share their morals or peril, Dogrose is seemingly left alone as the only one on board the ship, with the exception of Queen, without the feelings of indignation towards King and Country which provokes the piracy of the crew.

The idea of a lonely hero appealed to me, as did the time frame of the late Peninsular War, mostly inspired in its maritime setting by Patrick O'Brian's *Aubrey / Maturin (Master and Commander)* series. From my research of the time, I found information on the British Anti-Slavery Movement which I found fascinating and decided to incorporate if possible. It seemed to contain ongoing controversy, and a decent scope for interpretation, and whereas the likes of William Wilberforce and his campaigning societies worked on primarily moral grounds, there was strong evidence to suggest that the British government (a highly anti-abolitionist institution for many years of the campaign) only took interest, and eventually action, when financial and tactical gain became involved. To explore the possibilities of this idea, this era and the theme of a pirate cruise, I went to the National Maritime Museum in London where I met with Stephan Schiller, a resident expert. He helped me find an appropriate size of ship and crew for the journey from England to West

Africa which was necessary for the inclusion of an attempted slave-run. He has since confirmed details for me such as the use of Annobon island and its ports and the credibility of the journey itself.

Even though I planned to create Dogrose as a very introspective character, I felt that it was important to include foundations of historical fact on which to base this highly emotional narrative. The main difficulty with the rooting of fact was my love of the 'Golden-Age' pirate image; the style of character did not quite fit in a Napoleonic setting. I looked instead to characters such as Midshipman Simpson from C. S. Forester's *Mr. Midshipman Hornblower*, an example of the enduring archetypal bully. He seemed to me to represent a decent template of the classic ruthless seaman condensed into a uniformed and regimented setting. I was encouraged by the endurance of the image into the later-Georgian historical period and into the same navy as I intended to portray.

At the National Maritime Museum, Stephan Schiller was of the opinion that the British Anti-Slavery Movement of the early nineteenth century was primarily a tactical military strategy, rather than a moral battle. The theory being that the American free-labour (slave) work-force was making them into too strong a nation, and that cutting off this work-force was the best way to weaken the country which had recently gained its independence through war. The facts upon which this theory was built are supported by texts such as Frank Howley's *Slavers, Traders and Privateers*, as well as through BBC History Online. The idea allowed my characters to create a form of justification for their actions. Even the black characters on board the *Caballo* appear to accept the plan as a way to both make money and undermine the strategies of the country which they believe to have abandoned them (although it is also reported that the crew react guiltily to their own actions). Many seamen, particularly black seamen, were discharged or deserted in response to the lowering standards of the navy once Britain had established oceanic supremacy at

Trafalgar, there were even mass-ship revolts. As many of the seamen's skills were not transferable, the sailors who fought for 'The world's first equal opportunities employer, offering freedom, equal pay, and the chance for life-changing promotion,'¹ the British Navy, often ended up begging on the streets after their service had come to an end. Deserters would have been a comparatively easy group of people to 'press-gang' into service for a privateer, giving them the promise of food, pay, and a use for their skills. Most of all, it would have given them purpose.

Along with mutiny and treason, desertion was a capital offence. The idea of a crew of deserters working on a privateer especially appealed to me, as it added to the layers of isolation; the ship is isolated from her national navy, upon the ship, the crew is isolated (and even targeted) by fellow crews, and within the crew, John Dogrose is isolated by his origins. As deserters would have been put on trial if they were discovered by a ship of the fleet, I was also provided with a catalyst to turn the ship completely against its home nation. To begin with, the crew work towards a common goal with the British Navy, but the provocation of the *Bucephalus* forces a fight-or-flight reaction from them.

Having established a route for my adventure, a task and a reason (or an end and a middle to the narrative), I decided to move on to Dogrose's origins and to producing an opening for my short-story. I had been discussing the use of horses on board ships with John Trammelling, owner of *Horses Through History*, and decided to create an equine background for Dogrose, thus allowing me to create a link with his old life on-board which would remain silent to the reader and add another layer of internalising thought for Dogrose, his airing-of-beliefs to the animals acting as a dual-self dialogue. I was keen for his human links to fall away from him, leaving him only with Joshua Gaytes, who is (although quite loving) manipulative towards Dogrose. The equine setting for his

¹ Channel 4, *The Untold Battle of Trafalgar*, first broadcast June 2010

background which I chose was saddlery. I decided upon this profession on a primarily personal basis, my own ancestors having worked as saddlers in the early nineteenth century.

I took the ideas for different parts of the narrative and began to story-board them into sections. The main linking character for each section quickly became the Doctor, he is simultaneously captivating and untrustworthy, making him a valuable driving force for the story itself, having the ability to change narrative tones easily and send the storyline in less predictable directions than a more two-dimensional character would. It therefore became fitting for me that the story should open with his death, allowing me to relate the entirety of *The Caballo Queen* as the snapshots of John Dogrose's life in which Joshua Gaytes held influence. I decided to split this short narrative into chapters to reflect the 'snapshot' quality of its progression. The opening, however, remains outside of the banner of a chapter number, appearing as a short prologue.

The first thing that Dogrose tells us about himself is that he was born a bastard, and the son of a Frenchman during the French revolution. He and his mother are immediately cast out of their town, and he instantly develops a sense of internal controversy. His mother is largely absent from the narrative and never gains a name for the reader. I decided to keep her distant from the written accounts of Dogrose, favouring instead a series of metaphorical substitute mothers – both Elizabeth and the horses on the ship take this position, as does the Caballo itself, the most obvious and effective mother-figure is Queen, who makes a late appearance in the chaptered story, yet gives it its title and its initial drive, as well as aiding Dogrose in his moral judgement which allows him to finally become himself at the end of the story, as opposed to being, as he sees it, enslaved either to his family, or to the ship. Doctor Gaytes takes on this mothering role through his care for Dogrose, but is also placed very much in the role of a surrogate father in the fantasies of

the protagonist. This doubling of character-roles combined with the Doctor's binary self creates a slightly twisted adaptation of an Oedipal role for him as the story progresses.

As Dogrose narrates the story, it becomes apparent that the most noticeable aspect of the world for him is the way it changes. All of the sections of life which he relays to us regard dramatic change, be it the natural changes of growing, the change in his uncle's business, a change in location or situation, he rarely discusses the established, or the on-going, but concentrates on the borders of each aspect of life. He also takes notice of other people discussing change throughout the story. Farmer Lucker points out that his family's business style has changed, then Mrs. Lucker thrusts an egg upon him, a long-established symbol of change. When Dogrose throws the egg at his uncle and it is revealed to be hard-boiled, it shows change to have been stunted, the potential for birth has been removed and the egg can never change back into what it once was. This section works as a visual representation of his leaving his home in Gusehet, through anger and external developments, the place has become hard-boiled to him. Later, when he has been established as part of the Caballo's crew, the only seaman's anecdote which he relates is the story of a cat which changes into a man and attacks its captors when they try to domesticate it for use on board their ship. This story is told to him just before Queen joins them on board. When the pirates, under the direction of Captain Sutherland turn to the slave trade, Doctor Gaytes attempts to assert the authority of the ship over Dogrose, but it is the life and freedom of Queen which gives him moral strength and transforms him into a man. The style of the Doctor's manipulation of Dogrose is also emphasised by his discussion of the horses. The animals which would be naturally afraid of the sea-voyage have been doped and drugged into docility. In an early draft of the story, I included a passage in which the Doctor attempted to pressure Dogrose into taking cocaine himself, keeping in mind the sub-story of addiction which runs through Patrick O'Brian's *The Letter*

of *Marque*, but later decided that control through pure authority was more useful as a narrative tool, and that Dogrose was associated enough with the animals of the story without this added level of force which, in reading, felt quite wrong for the personality of Doctor Gaytes, even with his internal multiplicity of character. As close as the narrative now comes to that theme is the Doctor's offering of a sleeping aid to Dogrose after telling him of the circumstances which lead him on board the *Caballo* in the first place.

The character of Joshua Gaytes commands instant respect and admiration from Dogrose and his uncle, James. Any dissent towards the Doctor on Dogrose's part is instantly punished; when he laughs at the man as a child, his uncle hits him hard enough for him to worry about bursting into tears. He is loyal to the doctor throughout, questioning him very little, until he sets events in motion which lead to the man's death. The only time Dogrose is expressly angry to the Doctor in person it is when Queen seems threatened and once again, he is quickly corrected and put in his place. Within the proleptic opening, it is difficult to decipher Dogrose's feelings towards Doctor Gaytes. He is obviously an important character to the narrator, who could be seen as guilty, or regretful at having missed the specific moment of his death. We are also told by Queen at this early point that he is, at least in some way, responsible for the situation of the crew facing the firing squad, which is a vast, unending source of Guilt for the boy. Dogrose corrects his referral to the man from 'Doctor Gaytes' to 'Joshua', establishing an intimacy as 'Joshua' is killed. During the shooting itself, Dogrose's attention is caught on his Captain, Gow Sutherland, who's death also provokes a feeling of remorse. The audience may well assume at this early point that Captain Sutherland has committed some evil to put himself into that situation, but as the story continues, both he and Doctor Gaytes are established as strong, but kind characters until circumstances drive them to extremes.

Gow Sutherland is my representation of the classical golden-age style of pirate in my

own time-setting. He is a battle-hardened seaman and, within this style of focus, earns the most description of any character. He is absent for much of the narrative, but any appearance he makes is dramatic and promises a heightening in the pace of the plot. His strength and charisma lie in antithesis to the personality of Uncle James who is seen as somewhat of a buffoon. He is first heard to speak at the first meeting with Joshua Gaytes, during which he bumbles awkwardly. He appears socially inept, but becomes confident and articulate when talking about saddlery – I spoke to experts at the Irish Agricultural Museum for authoritative notes on tack observations for the time to give James a strong voice on the subject, as well as finding nineteenth century reports of the Midland Hardware District. It is, however the bumbling which John Dogrose notes. Throughout the story, Dogrose reveals himself as a slightly unreliable (or inconsistent, at least) narrator. In the very first chapter he is unsure of how old he was when he met Doctor Gaytes for the second time, yet describes his attire and words in great detail from a meeting years before. He retells his own speech in a voice more childish than that with which he narrates, using simplistic structures and lexis, yet, as the story progresses, so does the overall narrative voice, his descriptions and his knowledge of his own emotions become more mature as the story advances. When he talks with Queen, he states outright that he is not giving an entirely faithful account of his actions and conversations, telling us that the words which he has written emit Queen's requests for clarification and his explanations. This revelation on his part changes the entire narrative, the audience is reminded that the absence of an omnipotent narrator allows for the story to become heavily biased, or even, in this context, styled as false propaganda to save himself from trial. At this point in the narrative he can become suddenly untrustworthy for a reader, especially as a young man who may not even properly understand his own story. The style of unreliable, introspective narration was largely inspired by a combination of Kazuo Ishiguro narrators, both Christopher Banks

from *When We Were Orphans* and Stevens from *The Remains of the Day*. These characters create highly personal narratives, tainted throughout by mental instability, the protection of reputation and the personal opinions of the respective narrators. As is revealed towards the end of the story, Dogrose's own reputation could be seriously questioned. He is originally taken before the firing squad, grouped in with the rest of the crew until Queen saves him and the only justification we have of her is what Dogrose himself tells us. He goes as far in his narration to annotate his re-telling with up-to-date thoughts, such as describing his talk with the horse Elizabeth as 'stupid thoughts', or by noting the inaccuracy of his observations at the time with the retrospective benefit of having lived through the rest of the story. This style makes everything which he recounts to us particularly individual to him and tainted perhaps, not only by his personality, but by his fear of how he will be judged. It becomes explicit that Dogrose is aware as a narrator that the story exists in a public environment, as opposed to being as an internal monologue which is often the case with first-person narratives.

Horses are important to this short story, even the name of the ship, *Caballo*, means *horse* in Spanish, therefore, whenever Dogrose refers to his fellow shipmates as 'Caballos', he is calling them horses, they are also referred to as his new family - the horse becomes his metaphorical home. In his younger narration, he recounts talking to his horse Elizabeth intimately about life and the (then strange and appealing) character of Joshua Gaytes. Horses are then referred to several times as a link to his roots, it then becomes appropriate that it is whilst riding a horse that Doctor Gaytes gives him the information about his past which changes his entire outlook on life, including his severance from his situation with his family. The other main ship in this story is called *Bucephalus*, after Alexander the Great's warhorse. The British Navy at the time used characters from mythology for many of its ships names. The real (but frequently mythologised) horse

Bucephalus was appropriate to me not only for its elements of historical appropriateness, but as it was a horse who was afraid of his own shadow. The Caballo, as a privateer and deserter ship could very easily be described as a shadow of the Bucephalus, a war-ship of the British Navy. In the stories of Alexander the Great, he had to turn the horse away from it's shadow to tame it, but in *The Caballo Queen*, Captain white meets his ship's shadow head on and loses for it. If he had turned his Bucephalus away, then the Caballo may well have worked, as she was entrusted to with a letter of marque, in the favour of the British Empire.

We see very little of Captain White after his first appearance; the introspective narrative leaves only a small amount of room for his story, as Dogrose focusses on himself, largely ignoring the trials of others on board the ship. The ordeal with the Bucephalus, and especially the suspected killing of the reverend is the first spark of fear for him though, especially when it is linked to his own repeated words 'Dip the soldiers, dunk the priest.' This strange phrase ties him back into his past and to the encounter with Farmer Lucker's wife. Her madness becomes almost like a premonition, adding a haunting element to Dogrose's time on the ship. These small reminders of his life before the Caballo also serve to demonstrate to Dogrose the distances he has travelled, both in terms of miles and in terms of growing physically and emotionally. Another demonstration of Dogrose's growth comes from his reactions to anecdotes. In his early life, he recounts the stories about Captain Gow Sutherland when the man is mentioned by Doctor Gaytes. He remembers with awe the stories which seem, in comparison to the rest of the narrative, to be obvious fabrications. Later in Dogrose's life, Jeffries recounts the ghost tale of the man-cat who was said to have killed an entire crew. This story is told shortly after Dogrose learns the truth about his use as payment for his uncle's debt, marking a significant plateau in his growth and standing in antithesis to the difficult truth. He casts this story aside as a

'blatant falsehood' when other members of the crew enjoy it and applaud it for pure entertainment value. Once again, Dogrose isolates himself from the rest of the crew, he specifies his own separation by noting the actions of others, he observes crew members applauding, praising and cajoling the young Jeffries, but does not tell us anything of what he does himself. Through this isolation he is in conflict with his other descriptions of the crew as a family, or the ship as its own nation, showing himself as either unaware of his social positioning, or inconsistent in his retelling; both of these aspects contribute towards the narrative being open to interpretation by adding to the unreliability of the first-person narrator. Even from his early life, it is independence which he craves. His childhood excitement peaks when he is able to take the horse and go for a job on his own. His dreams at this point are of making and mending tack independently, free from his uncle. This longing for freedom from James is another haunting aspect for Dogrose. He finds that he is still effectively working for his uncle, being on the ship as repayment for the man's debt, he mostly avoids relating his situation to the reader as such, apart from within the speech of Doctor Gaytes, instead he refers to himself as 'sold'. As close as he comes to seeing himself as still under the control of his uncle is towards the end, describing himself his uncle's slave at the pinnacle of his anger.

In my original research, I turned to Captain Johnson's *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the Most Notorious Pirates*. Seen by many as the archetypal text on the Golden Age of Piracy, this book was also used by Robert Louis Stevenson as he wrote *Treasure Island*. One of the most striking features of this book is the accounts of the deaths of each pirate, I was particularly struck by the death of Captain John Gow, whose surname I took for my own Captain Gow Sutherland. John Gow was a Scottish Pirate Captain who was hanged in London in 1725. On first attempt, the rope around his neck snapped after he had been hanging for four minutes, Captain Gow reportedly

climbed the ladder back up to the hangman without even being out of breath, to be re-hanged. My own Captain, Gow Sutherland similarly faced death when he was shot in the cheek by a rifleman, as heard in a story recounted by Doctor Gaytes. The rest of his own personal story is his climbing of the ladder; putting himself in harms way in the knowledge that a minuscule percentage of historical pirate captains had ever survived. His ladder is also the voyage which, once again, puts him in the position of Ship's Captain.

European piracy had been all but wiped out at the time of my narrative, of course there were still occurrences of mutinies on board ships and illegal maritime practices, but the strength of the British navy, combined with the previously mentioned 'equal opportunities' promotion standard, meant that piracy was either unwise, or unnecessary. The main strongholds of piracy at this time were in Africa and South-East Asia. These were targeted and attacked by British Naval forces, even during the Peninsular War, for example, in 1813, William Allen (who became Captain, and subsequently Retired Rear Admiral), was part of a successful attack on a pirate stronghold on Borneo. The taking of pirates was still considered a noble feat this far from the Golden age. There are also many examples of Privateer takers, such as Sir Robert Barlow and Sir Henry Blackwood, from this period in time, who were famed for their courage in these attacks. In fiction, when Jack Aubrey loses his position in the British Navy in O'Brian's Aubrey / Maturin series, he is saddened by having to take a post as a privateer captain, seeing it as a far less worthy position than the one he previously held. The character of Jack Aubrey is also famous for hunting French and American Privateers as part of his occupation.

Throughout our historical records, and within this style of fiction, there is a consistent hierarchy of honour, from Nelson and the head of the navy, down through ships of the fleet, to British Privateers, then the more lowly foreign sea-powers and their privateers, all above pirates. As a retaliation to this almost propagandistic tradition, I attempt to instil an

integrity within my down-graded captain and crew, even within their abhorrent plans. It was important to me to show these men to be driven to extremes, rather than naturally evil. I thought back to the documentary, *The Untold Battle of Trafalgar*, which shows the hardships and pressure put upon a quantity of seamen post-Trafalgar, many of whom were driven to extremes. It is impossible to justify the plans of Captain Sutherland and his crew, but I wanted readers to be able to visualise him in the same way as the more noble representations of the British Navy before his fall into piracy, and for at least a shadow of his integrity to remain. Overall, I did not want the audience to wish death on the crew of the Caballo once their story had been established, so that Dogrose's guilt might be more palpable. To this end, the acceleration of the piece allows very little time for an audience to digest the scale of the Caballo's actions until the story is closing.

The Caballo Queen uses a framework of extraordinary external events to foreground the internal changing and growth of one boy in a coming-of-age style narrative. One of the main difficulties with this was displaying change in so short a story, especially when I wanted the leaps in time to be softened by subtle alterations in character, rather than a series of complete metamorphoses. Therefore, this narrative winds itself slowly up, establishing the background of the boy as completely as possible, before accelerating away, highlighting the slighter internal changes which might be lost in a more consistently flowing narrative.

Bibliography

Books

- Adkins, Roy, *Trafalgar, The Biography of a Battle*, (London, Abacus: 2004)
Although this book concentrates on The Battle of Trafalgar itself, it details naval development from 1793 to 1815, including ship names and strengths, and where British forces were deployed over this timeline.
- Cordingly, David, *Life Among the Pirates: The Romance and the Reality*, (London, Abacus History: 1996)
David Cordingly is one of Britain's foremost authorities on maritime history. This book not only provides deep historical insight and information (including the differences between types of ship etc which have been invaluable in my envisioning of this piece), but also highlights the differences between the darkest realities of life at sea and the most light-hearted of fictions aiding me, as a writer, in finding a plateau between the two.
- Downer, Martyn, *Nelson's Purse*, (London, Bantam: 2004)
This book details much of the life of Horatio Nelson through his letters to and from Alexander Davidson, giving insight, not only into life at the time for the famous to-be-Admiral, but also into language and colloquialisms.
- Forester, C. S., *The Young Hornblower Omnibus: Mr. Midshipman Hornblower, Lieutenant Hornblower, and, Hornblower and the Hotspur* (London, Penguin: 1989)
Although it was primarily the sense of 'sea-adventure' which I wanted from these books, I also found information on slaves being freed on British ships and a valuable perspective on the nature of the Royal Navy at the time.
- Grylls, Bear, *Facing Up*, (London, Pan: 2011)
Although irrelevant to the time period, I used this book to find a sense of personal adventure in a real-life situation. I also wanted an extra perspective from the autobiographical style.
- Howley, Frank, *Slavers, Traders and Privateers: Liverpool, The African trade and Revolution 1773 – 1808*, (Merseyside, Countywise: 2008)
I used this book in researching the manner in which slaves were held and transported as well as the routes they would have taken and British measures to prevent the continuation of trade.
- Johnson, Cpt. Charles, *A General History of the Robberies and Murders of the most Notorious Pirates*, (London, Conway: 2002)
This book is heralded as an essential for any piratical research or interest. It shows the other end of the maritime spectrum to the likes of Nelson and primarily displayed to me the way in which a ship can become its own microcosm and allow people to feel outside of the world and in a country with their own system of law.
- Konstam, Angus / McBride, Angus, *Privateers and Pirates 1730 to 1830*, (Oxford, Elite: 2001)
This book is where I found details of Privateer recruitment, which I did not need to detail in my story, but which I did need to know in order to confirm the historical validity of my ship

and crew.

- Lee, Christopher, *This Sceptred Isle*, (London, Penguin / BBC Books: 1998)
I have used this book many times, it has always been a brilliant source for time-lining events

- O'Brian, Patrick, *Aubrey / Maturin Series*, particularly *The Letter of Marque*, (London, William Collins: 1988)
As referred to several times through my commentary, this series has provided me with a solid base image on which to find my own story.

- O'Connor, *Star of the Sea*, (London, Vintage: 2004)
This novel displays astounding historical attention to detail. Although it takes place a number of decades after my own narrative, it is still relevant in its theme of people finding themselves at sea (this time as a result of the Irish Potato Blight). Similarly, it is the transition to travelling on board ship and the changes in people which are provoked by this book. Conversely to me, however, The Star of the Sea looks at a range of people, each with their own background and future separate to the ship, giving him a polyphonic narration, instead of concentrating on the individual as I have done.

- Poe, Edgar Allan, *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket*, (London, Penguin: 2006)
One of my personal favourite novels, both this and Treasure Island were the main inspirational texts behind the idea of The Caballo Queen

- Stevenson, Robert Louis, *Treasure Island*, (London, William Clowes and Sons: 193-)
This story has been with me since childhood. John Dogrose, though a very different character overall, takes much of his strength from Jim Hawkins.

- Harte, Bret, *The Queen of the Pirate Isle*, (Project Gutenberg edition, EBook #2798, <http://www.gutenberg.org/catalog/world/readfile?fk_files=1450160&pageno=1>)
Again, a childhood favourite which gave Queen her name. This story is about the strength of young imagination and Polly (the Queen) is able to control those around her with the strength of hers.

- Ishiguru, Kazuo, *Remains of the Day* (London, Faber and Faber: 2005) & *When We Were Orphans* (London, Faber and Faber: 2005)
I used these texts as bold examples of the unreliable and internalising narrator.

Online Resources

- BBC History online
<http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/british/empire_seapower/antislavery_01.shtml>
(Visited August 2011)
This page bullet points much of the essential information on slave-trading and abolition.

- <<http://www.contemplator.com/sea/fishes.html>> (visited June 2010)

This is where I found my 'sea shanty' which the men sing as the Caballo first sets sail. I liked the idea of a Scottish tune, as this reportedly is, to match my Captain. The idea for a shanty came from The Letter of Marque in which Jack Aubrey is shocked at the use of songs in work on a privateer, their not being permitted on naval vessels.

- Oxford Dictionary of National Biography <<http://www.oxforddnb.com>> (visited June 2011)

I used this resource to find factual contemporaries of my fictional characters, focusing primarily on high-ranking naval officers, who my Captain Sutherland may have once wished to contend with before his fall from service. Sir Henry Blackwood, William Allen and Sir Robert Barlow were among those researched.

People

- Andy Dean (Royal Armouries, Leeds)
- Stephan Schiller (National Maritime Museum, London)
- John Trammelling (Horses Through History, Brecon)
- Trevor Parkhill (National Museums of Northern Ireland, Cultra)