

The romantic side of Hornblower – some insights from *The Happy Return*

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Based on the novel *The Happy Return*, written by Cecil Scott Forester, Penguin Books, reissued edition 2006, with an introduction by Bernard Cornwell.

Introduction

The Happy Return (American title: *Beat to Quarters*) was the fifth of eleven books in the Hornblower saga, but the first to be written, published in the year 1937. As Bernard Cornwell points out in his introduction, C. S. Forester devised the plot of his first Hornblower book during a passage on a Swedish freighter-passenger ship sailing out of California for the Panama Canal and finally to England, after he had quit a job at Hollywood as a screen writer. Forester admitted later in an interview that this was a *Happy* trip (Sternlicht, p.33). The names of former colleagues at Hollywood (the producer Arthur Hornblow, screen writer Niven Busch) as well as of Barbara Sutro, another passenger on the sailing ship, were used in the new novel. The novel was written during the summer of 1936 (John Forester, p.316).

In short, the story *The Happy Return* begins at the end of the year 1807, as captain Horatio Hornblower at the age of 36 or 37 years takes over the command of *HMS Lydia*, a thirty-six-gun frigate. The mission: sailing to the Gulf of Fonseca (coast of Nicaragua), making contact with a landowner called Don Alvorado, in order to support his rebellion against the Spanish American colonies. It turns out that Don Alvorado, who entitles himself *El Supremo*, is a mad and messianic revolutionary, surrounded by some brute subordinates. While supporting the rebellion of *El Supremo*, Hornblower was informed that a Spanish two-decked ship, the *Natividad*, is patrolling the Gulf of Fonseca. Hornblower succeeds in capturing the *Natividad* by surprise. He hands over the *Natividad* to *El Supremo*, who plans to capture the city of El Salvador, approaching from the sea. While *El Supremo* and his men are surrounding El Salvador, Hornblower and the *Lydia* are patrolling the Gulf of Panama in order to hamper the transport of Spanish forces. The situation changed as Hornblower received a new naval order, to refrain from hostilities towards the Spanish possessions. The background is that an alliance has been concluded between His Majesty's Government and that of Spain. Hornblower was informed about a Spanish gold galleon on the way to Acapulco, at risk now of being intercepted by the *Natividad*. Hornblower decided to attack the *Natividad* a second time. The situation became complex when Hornblower received a letter from an English lady who had been captured by a Spanish privateer and brought to Porto Bello. In this letter, Lady Barbara Wellesley requested to convey her and her maid to England because of an outbreak of yellow fever in Porto Bello. Hornblower could not refuse Lady Barbara's demand, and the second part of the story goes on – the destruction of the *Natividad*, with Lady Barbara on board on the *HMS Lydia*, and finally the *Happy Return* to England.

It is the second part of the story which sheds a new light on Hornblower, the romantic side: the wife at home, Maria, and the temptation on board, Lady Barbara. Cecil Scott Forester created a complex relationship with its discreet opportunity, balanced by responsibility and duty, and timidity. Why did he not choose a more simple relationship for his hero? Parkinson (p.169f) ended his chapter *Frigate Captain* with the remark that *this chapter of Hornblower's life cannot close without some reference to the woman he had married and the other woman he certainly loved*. He concluded that it was *Hornblower's caution which prevented the friendship from becoming a romance*. Does the word *caution* really address this situation? Sternlicht pointed out (p. 68f) that Forester's biography about Admiral Lord Horatio Nelson, which was published in the year 1929, provided him with some key elements for his later Hornblower project. He said that Forester was fascinated by the relationship between the naval hero Nelson, his wife Frances, his mistress Lady Emma Hamilton, and her aged husband Sir William Hamilton, and at first glance, there may be parallels between Nelson and Hornblower, Lady Barbara and Lady Hamilton. What are the parallels, what are the differences? Was Lady Hamilton the blueprint for Lady Barbara?

I would like to discuss the following aspects:

Part A: The characters of Maria Hornblower and Lady Barbara, as Forester provided them to the reader in his first book of the Hornblower saga

Part B: A comparison of the fictive with living characters (Maria with Frances Nelson, Lady Barbara with Lady Emma Hamilton)

Part C: Facts about the social life of a British naval seaman during the Napoleonic war and the expenditure to get divorced at that time

Part D: Biographical facts in the life of Forester which might be the basis for the hesitant behaviour of Hornblower in the Happy Return

Part E: A careful synthesis (nothing more than an attempt)

Let's go back to the story, and have a closer look to the characters of Maria and Lady Barbara, created by Forester (**Part A**):

The character "Maria"

The first time Maria is mentioned by Forester is on page 76, as Hornblower dreams of riches in case he was capturing a Spanish galleon. Forester wrote "*Maria would like that, although he could not imagine Maria playing the part of a great lady with any grace. Hornblower tore his mind away from the contemplation of Maria snatched from her Southsea lodgings and settled in a country home*". Although Maria was not mentioned before and no further background information about Maria was given, the reader immediately recognizes Maria as Hornblower's spouse. Forester draw a picture with only a few words – Maria is a middle-class shorewife, and appears to be the opposite of a *gracious lady*. On page 104, we get a further detail about Maria that she *would be pleased as well as suspicious when she heard that he had been in correspondence with the daughter of an earl, the sister of a marquis*. Only one single word – *suspicious* – casts a shadow on the relationship between Hornblower and Maria: she supposes or even knows that Hornblower craves for another life. On page 113, Hornblower weighs the consequences of not leaving Lady Barbara on board. He fears that *he might never command a ship again, and that he and Maria would rot on the beach on half pay for the rest of their lives*. On pages 138 / 139, Hornblower realizes that *Lady Barbara is very different from Maria*. Hornblower admires the ease with which Lady Barbara handles his men, whereas his own Maria would have been *too gauche*. On pages 259 / 260, Hornblower emphasizes his poverty, and the difficulties to ensure the survival of Maria at home. Almost at the end of the book (pages 272 / 273) we suddenly get confronted with intimate details of Maria and her wedlock. Forester completes the figure of Maria with a few words (*short, tubby, stout, some flushing, apple cheeks, curl papers in her hair during night, hoarse voice*) and adds some memories which Hornblower had kept in mind (Maria arguing with house keepers, Maria's poor opinion of simple sailors). Finally, Forester gives the clue to what Hornblower binds to Maria, the despair of Maria over the death of their children little Horatio and little Maria, dying of smallpox in her arms. On page 275, Hornblower is still playing with fire, whether he offends Lady Barbara or whether he seduces her. He came to the conclusion that a divorce from Maria would cost him 5000 pounds, risking financial ruin. In the last paragraph (p.288) Forester is closing the romance with a vague outlook, *Hornblower felt he would be happy with Maria*.

In summary, the name Maria is mentioned on 16 occasions. The picture of Maria was drawn by Forester with a few brushstrokes: *short, tubby, stout, gauche, apple cheeks*. Forester let us know only few intimate details in the life of Maria and Hornblower. One terrible event, the death of their two children, affirms the sense of responsibility of Hornblower for his spouse.

The character “Lady Barbara”

On page 109, Lady Barbara came on board, *woman-dislike ascending a rope ladder, unassisted*. At first glance, Hornblower disliked her as one of the *horsefaced mannish women*; on the other hand, he looked at her very closely, and noted every detail, including the colour of her grey-blue eyes. Three pages later (p.112), we get aware of her white teeth contrasting her golden sunburn. At least now it's clear that a romance is approaching. Hornblower had to face some new challenges: Lady Barbara had a *practical commonsense*, which Hornblower was not used to in dealing with women. He was afraid that Lady Barbara could sneer at his shabbiness and poverty, and that she might be amused if misadventures happen (pages 118 / 119). Even his habit – Ha-h'm – for hiding his feelings was disclosed by this *sharp-witted lady* (pages 129 / 130). Hornblower and Lady Barbara shared the passion of playing whist (p.141). Another accomplishment was when Lady Barbara brought out a guitar on to the quarterdeck, and accompanied herself singing a sweet soprano – ...*the midshipmen loved her* (p.141). And finally, as all the wounded sailors had to be medically treated, Lady Barbara was the person most fitted to all in the ship to do this job without sparing herself (pages 224 and 228). Hornblower and Lady Barbara drew nearer to each other during these days, and then, quite unconsciously – as Forester wrote – Hornblower took both her hands in his, and Lady Barbara holds his heart in her hands (p. 243). The spell was broken, they start looking for each other taking endlessly (pages 261-5). Hornblower weighs his options, and is afraid that the divorce from Maria and remarriage with Lady Barbara would mean risking “*utter ruin – professional, social, and financial*” (p.275). Almost at the end of the journey, a coincidence led Lady Barbara into his arms, but Hornblower had made already his decision. Lady Barbara immediately grasped the new situation, and rose abruptly.

In summary, Lady Barbara is an upper-class woman, unmarried, with some – for Hornblower – unexpected characteristics and behaviour. She is sharp-witted, self-confident, with a practical commonsense in various situations. Self-imposed duties were brought to an end, without sparing herself. She shares the same passion as Hornblower, whist. She could talk to men as an equal, neither cold nor masculine, and made no use of her sex. All these made Lady Barbara very different to Maria. These differences are further emphasized by a direct comparison of the physical appearance: *short and stout* versus *tall and slender*, *apple cheeks* versus a *classical profile*.

Part B

In 1929, C.S. Forester published his biography about Nelson. I looked through this book for myself: it reads like a novel rather than a factual biography. It does not surprise me that this biography has been reviewed at the time of publication with the note “*The book is a contribution to literature rather than to history*” (Sternlicht, p.68). For our purposes, however, this earlier work of C.S. Forester is a “hit”, since it allows to share the analytical but subjective view of Forester on Nelson's life and psyche. Sternlicht (p. 69) pointed out that the *biography of Admiral Nelson was the vein of character and incident* which Forester used in his historical fiction. Indeed, he listed 27 incidents in the Hornblower Saga which parallel the life and psyche of Nelson, including Nelson's marriage without love, and his affair with Lady Hamilton. Before we move to Forester's Nelson, first some facts about Nelson's wife Frances and his mistress Lady Emma Hamilton (according to Wikipedia).

In short, Frances (“Fanny”) Nelson was born 1758, was orphaned at young age, and married 1779 the physician Dr. Nisbet. Dr. Nisbet died three years later (1781), leaving behind Francis with a 17 months old son, Josiah. The widowed Frances moved to the house of her wealthy uncle (Montpelier Estate at Nevis, an island in the Carribean Sea), where one of the frequent guests was a young naval officer, Horatio Nelson. Witnesses attested Frances as of positive appearance, including the remarks “*pretty, sensible, attractive, some beauty, and freshness of countenance*”. Finally, Frances Nisbet and Nelson married at Nevis in 1787. They moved to Nelson's home at Burnham Thorpe, Norfolk, where Nelson's father was still living. Frances took care for her father in law. In 1793, Nelson was appointed as commander of HMS Agamemnon, he took with him his stepson Josiah Nisbet. It has been said that he and Frances could not conceive a child of their own. After defeating the French in the battle of the Nile, Nelson met Lady Emma Hamilton, the wife of Sir William Hamilton, a British ambassador, at Naples. Nelson began an extramarital affair with Emma.

Lady Emma Hamilton was born as Amy Lyon in the year 1765. As a child she did not receive formal education, and worked as a maid to various actresses, before she earns her living as a model and nude table dancer. She became the mistress of Sir Harry Fetherstonhaugh, and conceived an unwanted child 1781. She had to leave Sir Harry, and found a new stay at the house of a former friend, the Honourable Charles Francis Greville, who took care and probably taught her to behave better and more elegantly. She changed her name to Emma Hart, and met a friend of Greville, the painter George Romney. The painter developed an obsession with Emma, and produced many portraits, including many sketches with and without clothes. Through the paintings, Emma Hart became well known to the society as an extremely beautiful young model. Greville planned to marry a young wealthy heiress, and had to get rid of his mistress Emma Hart. He persuaded his uncle, Sir William Hamilton, to take over Emma Hart. Sir William was newly widowed, and a "*collector of antiques and beautiful things*". He was the British envoy at Naples, and his home at Naples was well known for hospitality. Perhaps Emma agreed to move to Naples, to become a temporary hostess for Sir William's household. Later on, she realized that there was no way back to London and – to Greville to whom she has been very affected. She gave in to the advances of Sir William, and married him in 1791; at that time, he was 60 years old, and she 26. The wedding gave her the title Lady Hamilton. At Naples, she immersed herself into the high society, was admired for her singing, and invented a new game, called the *Attitudes*, posing classical figures. This performance was a sensation for visitors across Europe. Nelson met her for the first time during a short stay at Naples in September 1793, and five years later in 1798 after the battle of the Nile. Emma nursed him and his stepson in her husband's house, and the love story begins. In 1800, Nelson, Emma and Sir William went back to England. Emma was pregnant, and gave birth (1801) to a girl – Horatia. Emma, Nelson and Sir William lived together openly. Sir William died of old age in 1803 in the arms of Emma. Emma became a second time pregnant, but the child (a girl) died a few weeks after birth in 1804. Nelson started first steps to formalize a separation from his wife Frances, but it did not come to a divorce, until Nelson's death in 1805 ended this marriage.

These are the facts (if you believe in Wikipedia) about Frances Nelson and Lady Emma Hamilton. Now we should read about the affair - through the eyes of C.S. Forester.

Forester dedicated a whole chapter in his Nelson biography to the marriage with the widowed Frances Nisbet at Nevis. Forester characterized Frances as a *shadowy figure*, with one *salient feature, the belief in the efficacy of flannel worn next to skin*. Forester missed the "*fire*" in letters of Nelson he addressed to his wife, as he usually did in his official reports to the Admiralty. He compared the marriage with *naval tactics*, but without *brilliance and inspiration*. Forester noted that *there are some women whom one cannot idealize*, keeping in mind the difficult living conditions of both for almost eight years from 1787 until 1793 (living *in the distasteful inactivity of half-pay in circumstances of unpleasant monotony*). By the way, Smallwood (p.19) elucidated that Nelson's half-pay in 1788 was £100 per year, which made Nelson and Frances (and Josiah) rather poor, and they were dependent on additional money from the family. Nelson and Fanny had no child of their own. After Nelson took over the command of HMS Agamemnon in 1793, and during his *path of glory*, Forester mentioned only a few details about the marriage. As Nelson lost the sight of his right eye (1794), he sent no word of it to his wife. Later on, during a landing party to attack Santa Cruz (Tenerife), Nelson's right elbow was broken by a grapeshot, and he lost his arm (1797). He was sent home, and had a long convalescence at Bath. Forester noted that *Lady Nelson learnt how to dress his wound*, and both experienced *some domestic happiness, or at least... he thought domestic happiness could be*. After the battle of the Nile, Forester wrote one chapter to the topic "*Naples*". Nelson was ill, and Forester assumed a combination of malaria, a blow on the forehead and the relief from the extreme nervous tension of the past weeks. Nelson arrived the port of Naples in 1798, *announcing that he was only to stay a few days*, as Forester noted. Forester devotes several paragraphs to Lady Hamilton. "*She was a very tall and massive woman..., so that she quite dwarfed the lean little Nelson when she stood beside him*". Here some further key elements in the description of Lady Hamilton, according to Forester: *Cheshire girl of poor parents, she had passed through various men's hand, bearing an illegitimate child, educated by Charles Greville, quick and willing to learn, she was very beautiful, had an artistic taste, was well in good graces of Maria Carolina (Queen of Naples), had a good deal of influence in the Neapolitan policy, she had a thirst for glory and celebrity, and little taste for power. Nelson was the greatest hero Lady Hamilton ever met, and the closer she was to him, the larger would be the share of the limelight. Nelson needed after his period of intense anxiety womanly attention, and flattery, and ample beauty. Nelson found in Emma Hamilton the fulfillment of all these desires, whereas his wife could give him only praise*

and no more. Forester added that “*she (Frances) had been attentive to him – but the years he had spent with her had been the bitter ones of retirement and neglect, plus the few anguished months of recovery from his wound.*”

The French army entered Naples, and Forester discusses an error of judgement in failing to appreciate the possibilities by Nelson. Forester speculate that the error “*can be ascribed primarily to his rashness in involving himself in military affairs, and secondarily to the bias Lady Hamilton’s view had given to his opinions*”. The Royal family including the household of Sir William Hamilton had to move to Palermo (1799). At Palermo, “*Lady Hamilton was the only one to display nerve and spirit, nursing the whole Royal family single-handed*”, as Forester noted. And, Nelson lived at the Hamilton’s house, gambling, drinking, having dinner with the Hamiltons, and *his reputation was fast tainted by wild gossip which was spread by the English visitors*. His flagship, the Foudroyant swung “*idly at anchor, ..and on her deck, the lovely Lady Hamilton played her harp and captured the admiration of susceptible midshipmen*”, so Forester. In April 1800, however, the order for Hamilton’s recall arrived. The devoted trio, Sir William, Emma and Nelson went off for a 5 weeks cruise on board of the Foudroyant. Forester noted from this time onward a significant change in the correspondence between Nelson and Emma, and he suggests that Nelson was *unfaithful to his wife and Emma to her husband*. Forester closed this chapter (p.127f) with an analysis of the psychological background of both which might have led to this relationship. Forester made the point that Nelson developed the idea, *this romance was not vulgar and the ordinary laws of the society does not apply to him, ..and he expected everyone, including his wife, will applaud and forward*. Nelson thought – so Forester – Emma was *the most beautiful, the most talented, and the most skillful women the world had ever seen*. But not all agreed, and others draw a different picture: *..the most coarse, ill-mannered, disagreeable women, with a passion of gambling, and a tendency to heavy drinking*. It is interesting to note that Forester had some doubts whether Emma Hamilton had the same feelings as Nelson- he noted (p. 128): *It seems likely that Emma was in love with the victor of the Nile rather than with Nelson, and with the Baron rather than with the Admiral*. Back in London, Nelson forwarded his plan to make Frances and Emma friends, and to life under one roof, but Frances Nelson refused. The situation became more complex, as Lady Hamilton was delivered of a child in January 1801 at the home of Sir William. Forester found some proof in the correspondence between Nelson and Emma that Nelson believed himself the father. However, as long as Sir William was alive and agreed, whether he knew or not, a scandal could be avoided. Visitors described at that time this trio (p.152), regarding Lady Hamilton Forester recorded: “*...deferred to a very tall woman, immensely stout, with a ravaged complexion, coarse in manner and beginning to be coarse in appearance, with a tendency to drink more champagne than was quite seemly, and whose one wish after leaving the dinner table was to settle down to cards.*”

Let’s try to compare Frances with Maria, and both Ladies head by head, based on the pictures Forester had drawn in his fiction The Happy Return, and in his previous biography of Nelson.

	Maria	Fanny	Lady Barbara	Lady Hamilton
Family background	middle-class	wealthy	wealthy/aristocratic	lower class
Marriage	with Hornblower	1. with Dr. Nisbet 2. with Nelson	unmarried	with Sir William Hamilton
Giving birth to	1. little Horatio 2. little Maria	1. Josiah Nisbet	none	1. illegitimate child 2. Horatia Nelson Thompson 3. still-born child
Appearance	short, stout tubby apple cheeks	shadowy figure	tall slender classical profile	very tall, massive beautiful
Passion	not mentioned	salient feature, flannel worn next to skin	playing whist	glory & celebrity playing cards having drinks
Personality /skills	gauche trend to prejudices loving mother	learnt to dress wounds	sharp-witted, confident practical commonsense learnt to dress wounds playing guitar, singing	quick to learn artistic taste invention of <i>Attitude</i> playing harp, singing

The life and characters of Maria and Fanny have some few aspects in common: the physical appearance was not attractive and elegant, and both were not equipped with special gifts. Living with their husbands at home meant

half-pay and poverty, sufficient income went hand in hand only with separation for a long period of time. Both wives had been attentive to her husbands – but the times they had spent with their husbands had been the bitter ones. In the case of Fanny/Nelson the years of retirement and neglect, in addition a few anguished months of recovery from his wounds. Nelson found in his wife Fanny not very much backing, *she could give him only praise and no more*, as Forester stated. In the case of Maria/Hornblower there was the loss of their children. This terrible misfortune, which both had to get through together, strengthens however in Hornblower the sense of duty and concern, as Forester outlined in the Happy Return. This latter aspect appears to me a major difference in the figures of Maria (fiction) and Fanny (reality).

Lady Barbara and Lady Emma have almost nothing in common, except both played an instrument on board, and were singing, and were adored by the midshipmen – a guitar in case of the tall and slender Lady Barbara, and a harp in case of the very tall and massive Lady Emma. The two ladies have in common that there are the idealized imagines of our two heroes. In the case of Nelson, this imaging included *womanly attention, flattery, and ample beauty*, as Forester noted, in the case of Hornblower it was Lady Barbara's intellect and instinct to recognize Hornblower on his own, and Hornblower could confide her all his ambitions (p.263 in The Happy Return) and open his mind. The question remains whether both ladies fall in love with their companions. In the case of Lady Emma, Forester had some doubts about true love. He summarized that Lady Emma was in love with the hero, victor of the Nile and baron rather than the man, and liked to stay close to his limelight. In his novel, Lady Barbara admired Hornblowers' maritime skills, but loved the man, at least was fascinated by his physical appearance and his hands (p.278 The Happy Return), this comes, in my opinion, closer to love. In fact, Forester had this in mind as he mentioned this detail (*..he obviously must have the indefinable good looks that a woman would notice and ...along with those good looks would go good hands, beautiful hands, perhaps*; cited from The Hornblower Companion).

Taken together, the figures of Maria, Fanny, Lady Barbara and Lady Emma show many more differences than similarities. Neither Fanny nor Lady Emma were clear role models for his novel characters. Lady Barbara was obviously an idealized character, with very little in common with Lady Emma Hamilton. With Maria and Lady Barbara Forester created new characters, in many aspects quite the opposite of the real persons, who are otherwise discussed to be the blueprints of Forester's figures (Sternlicht, p.68ff).

Part C

According to Lloyd (1968), a census of 1801 provided the following numbers: England & Wales, Scotland and Ireland counted 15.716.956 inhabitants; the size of Navy and Marines at that time was 126.279. It is interesting to note that the chief cause of death for seamen was disease and accidents (81.5%), whereas the figure for those killed in action was strikingly low (6.3%) at that time (Lloyd, p.263). Whereas many aspects in the daily life of a British sailor from the beginnings until today have been analyzed, significantly less is known about the social life, wives, and families at certain periods. Basic data as the marital status of the sailors e.g. during the Napoleonic War are not present. Based on analyses of officers and men of sample of ships who died during the Seven Years War (1756–1763), about one-fifth to one-quarter left widows (Smallwood, p.3). It appears reasonable to assume similar numbers for the following period, the Napoleonic War (1803-1815), i.e. that 20-25% of the seamen in the RN were married. Kemp (1970) provided in his analysis somewhat lower figures. A new Act of Parliament (1795) under which seamen could allot part of their pay to wives, fathers or mothers. According to Kemp (p.180) allotments were paid to relatives every 28 days, among others at the Office of the Treasurer of the Navy in London, or by the Clerks of the Cheque at Portsmouth, Plymouth or Chatham. In its first year, 3.346 men (3.1%) took advantage of the Act out of the Royal Navy strength of 106.708; by 1812 the number had grown to 27.019 (19.6%) out of a total strength of 138.204. Thus, approximately 20% of seamen supported family members at home, and this number may not be even equal to wives at home. According to Smallwood (p.7), the RN officers wife were mostly from the middling class, very few came from aristocratic families, paralleling the social background of their naval officer husband. Naval officers in the eighteens-century often waited until they had achieved the rank of a post captain before marriage, thus, tended to be older as compared to the general population (the average age at the time of first marriage was 26.4 for men, and 23.4 for women)(Smallwood p.9). Another obvious reason for the delay in marriage was the length of time the naval officers spent at sea. Probably many officers tried to avoid a longer stay

onshore, since the hope for promotion and prosperity could be only realized on board. Without a ship, naval officers could collect only half-pay. This staying on board had some side effect, particularly during war time – it spared the burden of almost constant pregnancies, as it was the role for many other women (Smallwood, p.11f). Otherwise, some naval officers took advantage of the distance and separation. An example was the affair between Lord Nelson and Lady Emma Hamilton during his extended stay at Naples from 1799 to 1801. This affair is documented by letters, and – as Smallwood noted (p.58) - both did little to dispel the rumours.

In my research regarding marriage and divorce of RN sailors during the Napoleonic War, I was surprised by the topic women on board. Article XI of the Additional Regulations set out that *no Women be ever be permitted to be on Board but such as are really Wives of the men they come to* (Kemp, p.167). Some captain allowed on board only those women who could produce their marriage lines, despite the problem that forgeries are difficult to detect. Others tried to regulate the entry of women through the conduct of their crews, allowing only those who had behaved themselves on board (Kemp, p.168). Not all the women left the ship when they were cleared before sailing. According to Kemp (p.170) very few escaped detection; others, the wives of a few of the more trustworthy men on board, remained with the permission of the captain. Kemp: *These latter were tolerated on board, and they had a definite use in and after action, helping the boys bring up powder, and nursing wounded seamen afterwards, They were not officially victualled in the ship, being expected to share their husbands' allowance. It is thus that there were always women on board during battle, and frequently children as well.* Kemp closed this paragraph with the comment (p.171) that *there were several women on board the ships of Nelson's fleet at the Battle of the Nile, and one baby at least was born during the actual battle.*

What about divorce?

Before the *Act to amend the Law relating to Divorce and Matrimonial Causes in England* (Matrimonial Causes Act) in the year 1857, divorce allowing remarriage was restricted to wealthy persons. According to Wikipedia, it demanded either a complex annulment process or a private bill, either at great cost. Annulment is declaring a marriage from the beginning as if it had never taken place. Annulment makes a void or a voidable marriage null. A void marriage for example includes incestual marriage or bigamy. A voidable marriage is a valid marriage, but can be canceled by one of the parties, e.g. in case of forced marriages. In the *casa Hornblower*, an annulment process would not have been appropriate. The private bill is according to Wikipedia a proposal for a law that would apply to a particular individual. This proposal for a law leads to long debates, including intimate details in public in the House of Commons. Margaret K. Woodhouse (1959) analyzed divorce and marriage before and after the Matrimonial Causes Act in the year 1857. She wrote:

Before 1857, in order to remarry, a man must first file in a common law court a suit of criminal conversation against a party alleged to have been adulterous with the plaintiff's wife. A criminal conversation suit was a civil suit for damages. If he won this case, he must then institute in an ecclesiastical court – in other words, in a court of Church of England – a petition of separation. This separation was termed a decree of separation a mensa et thoro, or a divorce from bed and board. These suits have been won by the plaintiff before two courts, the application for complete divorce was ready to be presented to the House of Lords who heard the evidence as presented in the two previous trials. When the Lords, or after 1789 a select committee from the House of Lords, heard the case, it was sent to the House of Commons. Commons treated such private bills in a cursory fashion, passing them on the recommendation of the Lords. Thus a full divorce a vinculo matrimonii (from the bond of matrimony) was obtained (Note: a vincula matrimonii is necessary for re-marriage). The average a vinculo divorce entailed several months if not years, heavy expenses and an excessive exposure of privacy. The Deputy Register of the Consistory Court of London, the Bishop of London's Court, estimated that if a case were presented to the ecclesiastical court at the appropriate term and was not appealed, it could be obtained in six weeks or two months at a cost varying from £ 120 to 140. But should the defendant contest the case, three or four months would be required to investigate and fees would run as high as £ 500. To get a private bill through Parliament, cost about £ 180, exclusive a lawyer's fees. Thereafter alimony was a continuing expense till death dissolved it. As a consequence, one had to be well-to-do, or at the other extreme, penniless to acquire a divorce. Thus, the great majority of Englishmen were by financial considerations barred from divorce.

In his *Practical Treatise* (1841), Shelford summarized that before 1715, a parliamentary divorce in England was for some time exclusively confined to the very highest class, and granted to them only as a great favour, and under

special conditions. He noted that after the accession of the House of Hanover, a greater laxity was introduced. He investigated that during the period 1800 and 1836, only 80-90 bills passed through Parliament. He calculated that the expenses of a common divorce bill amounted to 600-700 £.

Taken together, Forester is correct as he mentioned that Hornblower would risk financial ruin in case of a divorce, not to mention the public affair. A divorce from Maria who had given birth to two living children was almost impossible at that time.

Part D

Sternlicht (1999) gives us some biographical details about C.S. Forester which may have had an influence on the story of *The Happy Return*. I would like to focus on two topics: women and money. Regarding the latter topic, Sternlicht made the statement (p.25f) that as a medical student, *money had always been short with Forester. Moreover, he misused the money his brother Geoffrey was sending him. He could not borrow any money more, ...and began to beg in the streets of London, singing ballads in a tuneless baritone for coppers and an occasional sixpence.* After ending his medical hopes and starting to write at a furious pace, his first novels were rejected several times. Sternlicht (p.27) adds that *although helped by relatives, his bills mounted up, and when his shoes wore out he was unable to buy a new one.* According to Sternlicht, Forester got to know poverty at the beginning of his life of literature, and experienced great anxiety over lack of money.

Regarding women, Sternlicht (p.24) describes *an attractive young man with piercing brown eyes, nearly twenty-years old, ..becoming entangled with women although he had sexual experience as a teen-ager.* In his self-biography *Long Before Forty*, Forester said *"The fools run after me and I ran after the whores, foolish though I realized such a proceeding to be"* (as cited by Sternlicht, p.24). Obviously he made the experience at young age to divide women only in two classes: fools and whores. In 1926, Forester married Kathleen Belcher, *a beautiful twenty-four-year-old sports instructor whom he had known for many years*, as Sternlicht recorded (p.30). In 1944 Forester and Kathleen were divorced, and 3 years later, he married Dorothy Ellen Foster. Sternlicht (p.36) adds that *Dorothy was a demure, gentle woman about his own age, and both remained together happily for the rest of his life.* Sternlicht did not comment on the first marriage with Kathleen Belcher, and the background for the divorce.

I just wonder whether I might get more information from Forester himself or from his closest family members. Thus, I purchased the autobiography *Long Before Forty* and the biography written by John Forester, the eldest son of C.S. Forester. The latter book was available in US, and only three copies were offered for sale, 300 US\$ upwards for one copy. Finally, I got the 2 volumes of *Novelist & Storyteller. The life of C.S. Forester* (No. 170/250, signed by John Forester).

The autobiography was published on C.S. Forester's death, and covers his first 31 years. It is a vivid description about his rocky path to becoming a famous writer. But he never experienced existential poverty, as Sternlicht liked to pull out. The story about begging and singing in the streets of London reads a bit different in his autobiography, as he needed urgently money for a date with an expensive lady, a *premiere danseuse* (p.101). Nevertheless, Forester commented on his first steps on the path to becoming a writer that he was always short of money, with an unceasing worry about money, and many unpaid bills. He told that the *most degrading sensation on earth is the feeling of icy, filthy water leaking in and out of one's shoes* (p. 124). The living conditions changed as his work *Payment Deferred* had been accepted for publication. To my surprise, he did not mention his marriage with Kathleen Belcher in his autobiography. Instead he mentioned an odd affair during the time he wrote *Josephine* (published 1925), thus a bit of time before he got married (p.158). Taken together, 1. Cecil S. Forester experienced anxiety over lack of money, but not existential poverty. 2. He provided in his autobiography no further clues on his first marriage, but is addressing an odd affair with a woman.

The book with Forester's autobiography also contains the reprints of text of *The Hornblower Companion*, some personal notes on the beginning and construction of the Hornblower saga. It should be noted that these personal notes were written after Forester completed the entire saga, and his success had reached its high. Thus, we cannot expect to gain deep insights into all the struggling and psychological details creating the characters we are

interested in. Regarding the creation of Lady Barbara, Forester wrote: "*Wellington's intensely interesting personal character would be more interesting still in the female line, and I already knew enough about the influence of politics on naval careers to guess what part the Wellesley clan might play in a novel of the period; clearly (as was once said in another connection) if a Wellesley sister did not exist it would be necessary to invent one.*" (p. 192). To the creation of Maria (p. 195): "*He was a married man, of course -otherwise there would be no difficulty with Lady Barbara; and what had already been settled went a long way towards fixing the character of the wife, about whom something had to be known, although she would make no personal appearance. She as hardly likely to be sensitive, or intelligent or experienced, because if she had been she might be expected to have done something to loosen some of the knots Hornblower was tied up in. Likewise, she was a woman of the people, for if she were of blue blood Hornblower's approach to Lady Barbara would be simplified. It was lucky that there would be no need to explain how a man like Hornblower had come to marry a woman like this Maria; the reader could be expected to know that mismarriages happened.*" Forester gave Hornblower the attributes *shy and reserved*, because – as he said – *to make this relationship to Lady Barbara more difficult*, and secondly, *there was little I did not know about shyness and reserve from personal experience* (p.196). Later on, Forester developed the characters more and more, and filled in the gaps. What we can learn so far? 1. The character Lady Barbara grew more out of respect of Wellesley's person rather than of the story about Nelson's mistress, 2. The character of Maria had to fit to a faithful wife, not willing, and more important, not able to interfere with the main character Lady Barbara, 3. Forester put some aspects of his personality and experience into his characters.

Finally, I read John Forester's book, two volumes, 28 chapters, 826 pages including index. Wow! At least one key in the relationship between father and son is summarized in introduction with only one single sentence (p4): *C.S. Forester was a story-teller, and his most successful novel was the story of his own life*. It is almost impossible to summarize all the details, discoveries and conclusions drawn by John Forester as he analyses his father's life and correspondence. Regarding money, John confirmed the worry of his father about money in his earlier years: *He was naturally worried about money. His needs were small, but his resources were smaller, and sometime in the future his family would require him to pay his debts to them* (p.80). And John disclosed the odd affair as an emotionally difficult romance to Lillian Artesani which started before Forester married Kathleen Belcher in 1926. However, he did not disclose only one affair of his father, he found evidence for a series of affairs and tete-a-tetes, and dedicated an entire chapter to the relationships between C.S. Forester and women (*He certainly had a secret life, a secret sexual life*; p749). Furthermore, John noted that *the sexual affairs in which he (C.S. Forester) chose to participate were those in which stealth and deception were necessary if scandal were to be avoided* (p. 760). John judged his father's practice of deception in sexual matters as *morbid fears*. Finally, John commented on his father's marriages, first to Kathleen Belcher, later to Dorothy Foster. Both were completed in a secret ceremony, and John suggests that one reason was because *it let his father carrying on other affairs* (p.761).

Coming back to Hornblower. In his biography, John Forester had no doubt that his father genuinely liked Hornblower (p.317). He says: *...it would have been a mark of real literary skill to have invented the character of Hornblower, one so admirable yet made human by his own doubts, self-consciousness, and the self-recognition of the source of his own desires. In point of fact, as you have also been given the chance to see, it was the other way round. Those aspects of Hornblower's character which prevented him from being a superman were Cecil's own; those virtues which lifted him above the ordinary were those Cecil attempted to arrogate to himself. In short, Hornblower was what Cecil wished himself to be, had he the character and ability to be so. ...The fact remains that for The Happy Return Cecil created a character who was very like what Cecil wished to be had he the courage and ability to be him* (p.318). Regarding females John saw a close parallel between the women of Forester's interest and his characters invented in his stories. He says: *....An assertive, as was Dorothy Bathurst, is the distinguishing characteristic of all women who aroused Cecil's interest after his early years. That is...with Dorothy Beale and Phyllis Callaghan, who lived in his home neighborhood. In addition, that statement excepts the Dorothy Foster who became his second wife. Kathleen of course was the assertive type, as had Lillian been before her, and others of whom I learned later...* (p.424). Furthermore... *The same blend of vanity, egoism and inferiority showed in his relations with women and in his depictions of sexual relationships. In almost every sexual relationship depicted in his works, the women controls the man, who generally accepts the subservient position....Hornblower is first maneuvered into an unsatisfactory marriage by his future mother-in law. When Lady Barbara comes his way, caution and fear dissuade him. When both he and she are rescued by fate from their marriages, we don't know which of them proposes, but Barbara takes the lead when Hornblower is ashore....*(p753f). These statements

strongly support the view mentioned above that C.S. Forester did not only invented abstract characters but provided the main characters in his novel with his soul, ...and his own desire.

Part E

Let's attempt a synthesis.

C.S. Forester liked his hero Hornblower, and put some aspects of his own personality and experience into the characters of his novel. In his first book of the Hornblower saga, C.S. Forester created beside Hornblower a main female figure, Lady Barbara, which on the one hand side grew out of respect of Wellesley's person and merits, but on the other hand appears to be an idealized woman with many characteristics for whom the author would have taken the risk of an affair by its own. I do not believe that the blueprint of Lady Barbara was Lady Emma Hamilton, as some scholars suggest. If there are any parallels, they are limited to minor aspects, e.g. singing on board. The personal characteristics include a sharp-witted intellect, self-confidence, and practical commonsense, talking equal with men, with the physical appearance tall and slender. Most importantly, this character does really love his partner, and to whom someone could confide all his ambitions and open his mind. But caution and fear of Hornblower (as well as of C.S. Forester), even morbid fear as John Forester would probably add, discouraged this affair. In fact, at that time of the Napoleonic War, such an affair between Hornblower and Lady Barbara including the divorce of Hornblower from his wife Maria would have led to utter ruin - professional, social and financial. And - financial problems, Hornblower had to struggle with, as C.S. Forester did for almost half of his life, were one good reason for caution and fear. In addition, I got the impression that something else might have prevented a divorce from Maria, a more hidden part in the personality of Hornblower (and perhaps of C.S. Forester?) - a mixture of responsibility, compassion, affection and shared suffering.

Is there any salvation? C.S. Forester, the story-teller, invented a simple and straight-forward way, far away from his own reality. He created the figure Maria as just the opposite of Lady Barbara, in education, intellect, social background and status, and appearance. And we know from later books, Maria had to die, as was the fate of many shorewives at that time with the burden of frequent pregnancies. The way for a romance opened.

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