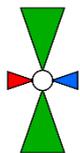


1441 DB

bncdoc.id	EC8
bncdoc.author	Fisher, Margery
bncdoc.year	1986
bncdoc.title	The bright face of danger.
bncdoc.info	The bright face of danger. Sample containing about 40607 words from a book (domain: arts)
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<1441/c>	. In the matter of social balance one could say that most sea-stories, from the time of Marryat onwards, romanticised fact at least by omission. Those who demand strict realism in fiction of this kind might take the same extreme view as Patrick O'Brian's sardonic Dr Maturin who, in discussing the Spithead Mutiny with his more conventional friend Captain Aubrey, pronounces himself in favour of the rebellion: 'You take men from their homes or their chosen occupations, you confine them in insalubrious conditions upon a wholly inadequate diet, you subject them to the tyranny of bosun's mates, you expose them to unimagined perils; what is more, you defraud them of their meagre food, pay and allowances - everything but this sacred rum of yours. Had I been at Spithead, I should certainly have joined the mutineers. Indeed, I am astounded at their moderation, Maturin counters the captain's protestation that happy ships did exist by asserting that harmony on a ship depends 'upon the whim, the digestion and the virtue of one or two men, and that is iniquitous'. Authority - 'that egg of misery and oppression' as the doctor has it - is the norm in the long line of historical adventures drawing for material on the extensively recorded history of the navy in the Napoleonic Wars; but the outstanding writers in the genre look round widely from this stance. It is not necessarily romantic - that is, restrictive, unreal, exaggerated - <u>to draw on the upper deck for the individual characters whose attitudes and decisions are to be the driving force of a story.</u> If Marryat made this choice, it was because he wrote from within the experience of many years serving in the navy from 1806, not continuously but when employment was available: more than one of his novels was written <u>in the cabin of a ship under his command.</u> In a prefatory note to his first novel he told his readers, 'Except the hero and heroine, and those points of the work which supply the slight plot of it, as a novel the work itself is materially true, especially in the narrative of sea-adventure, most of which did (to the best of our recollection) occur to the author.' <u>Many of his lower-deck characters were comic figures</u> - Chucks the boatswain in Peter Simple, for example, whose passionate desire to be a gentleman is satisfied when in return for his help with the newly constituted Danish Navy he is awarded the title of Count Schucksen, or Muddle the carpenter in the same book, who believes the world works in a repeating cycle of 27,672 years. But the roles assigned to the various characters, and
 <p>Key: Footprint ConEn1 Footprint ConEn2 Footprint ConEn3</p>	
	<u>the preponderance of officers over seamen</u>
	, was <u>a matter of literary choice and not of social prejudice.</u> Marryat's common-sense attitude to life was certainly not insensitive. When the seaman Peters, a thief and later a mutineer, protests against the commuting of the death sentence to the disgrace of being flogged round the fleet, Marryat as author finds it a matter for critical comment that the members of the court-martial are clearly surprised that a mere seaman should act from a sense of honour: ... they meant well - they felt kindly towards him, and acknowledged his provocations; but they fell into the too common error of supposing that the finer feelings, which induce a man to prefer death to dishonour, are only to be recognised among the higher classes; and that,

because circumstances may have placed a man before the mast, he will undergo punishment, however severe, however degrading ... in preference to death. This is only one of many instances of the breadth of Marryat's view, the sturdy wholeness of his reconstructions of life on men-of-war and escort vessels at a crucial period of British naval history. Although each of his books has a compact plot and a central, young hero, he was always ready to shift the point of vision from this hero. We can not as readers see this as a fault, since it made for such richness of scene and mood, though Marryat seems to have felt it so. Reflecting on the author's problems, he confessed that 'On turning over the different chapters' of *The King's Own*, he felt that the designated hero, Willy Seymour, was not sufficiently 'the hero of my tale': As soon as he is shipped on board of a man-of-war he becomes as insignificant as a midshipman must unavoidably be from his humble situation. I see the error - yet I can not correct it without overthrowing all 'rules and regulations', which I can not persuade myself to do, even in a work of fiction. Trammelled as I am by 'the service', I can only plead guilty to what it is impossible to amend without commencing *de novo* - for everything and everybody must find their level on board of a king's ship. Yet it is in the management of his various heroes that Marryat's reliable treatment of fact is most apparent. These young men - sanguine, bold, resourceful and opportunist as they are - do seem to be cut from the same cloth. Yet as individuals they are believable, not only for themselves but by virtue of their involvement with other people and the opinions of their behaviour that come to us from their shipmates and their superiors. This does