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A Strategy to Maintain the Sailors' World in the Last Scene of Joseph Conrad's *Chance*

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Introduction

These days, critics tend to interpret Joseph Conrad's *Chance* dealing with its representation of characters' gender, particularly that of the heroine Flora de Barral. For example, *Chance* is treated by four critics out of eight in *Conrad and Gender*, edited by Andrew Michael Roberts. They reevaluate the novel and challenge prominent Conradians, among whom Thomas Moser thinks that *Chance* exemplifies Conrad's "inability to understand women" (137) and his "misogyny" (160).

Among the four critics in *Conrad and Gender*, Susan Jones is worth attending to: her *Conrad and Women* asserts the historical situation of the publication of the novel. She points out that *Chance* is serialized in the *New York Herald*, whose "marketing strategies" attract wide readers including women (144-45). In her opinion, Conrad retains his image as "author of the sea," and he uses the ship called the *Ferndale* as the scene of the second half of the novel. He also designs *Chance* to "[i]nterest [w]omen [p]articularly" in accordance with the policy of the *Herald* (151). Jones also comments on the fact that he signed "a Writer's Memorial Petition" about "the claims of a women's suffrage bill" (102).

In consideration of the current tendency to gender criticism about *Chance*, my interest centers on the novel's representation of sailors' values. Concerning them, this paper treats its narrative structure. My contention is that the structure is the key to

consider the novel's strategy to maintain the sailors' world in its last scene.

This thesis accordingly claims two points. First, *Chance* has such a self-conscious narrative structure that its complication makes the subjectivity of the narrator Marlow, whose narrative seemingly embodies misogyny, many-sided. This many-sidedness and meandering narrative make readers wonder what Marlow's idea about Flora's story is like. The novel therefore encourages readers to interpret Marlow's narrative spontaneously.

This paper asserts, however, that this encouragement is a basis for the second point: whereas *Chance* focuses at length on the mental growth of its heroine Flora, the novel represents the sailors' world in the last scene. Flora has lived separately from his father, the Great de Barral, who has been a successful financier but whose illegal financial acts have made him bankrupt and imprisoned. Then she meets Roderick Anthony, the captain of the *Ferndale*, at the home of her caregivers called Mr. and Mrs. Fyne. Though Flora doesn't love Anthony at first, she marries him. This is because she wants to get on his ship and to leave Great Britain with her father, who has just been released from prison but whose scandals British people still remember. She is, however, falling in love with Anthony, and she prevents her father, who has been jealous of him, from poisoning Anthony. Then Flora and Captain Anthony recognize their love and consummate their marriage. In this way, Flora faces harsh realities, which include the death of her "poor Roderick"¹ after they have happily lived for "six years" (323; pt. 2, ch. 6), and she becomes mature in the last scene.

My interest, however, is, that we can interpret that the last scene attaches importance to the bond of sailors who appear to be minor characters. This is because the last scene is unnaturally rushed, and this rushed tone is recognized by readers; the

narrative structure, which Marlow's narrative makes many-sided, has promoted them to interpret the novel voluntarily. In the unnatural structure, the novel accentuates the contrast between Flora's maturity and the sailors' world hampered by her. Owing to this contrast, *Chance* secretly compels readers to attend to the sailors' world. This paper therefore argues that though the novel's structure is "unnecessarily over-complex" (Hawthorn 59) in appearance, it coherently maintains sailor's fidelity, which Conrad's earlier works emphasize.

I. Marlow's Narrative: Its Self-Consciousness and His Subjectivity

In order to assert the many-sidedness of Marlow's narration, this paper considers two types of criticisms that overlook dynamic aspects of Marlow's talks. One type is, as is said above, that Marlow is misogynic and he generalizes women's characters. Critics hence think that Marlow's narrative embodies his one-dimensional prejudice against women. For example, he says that the "women's rougher, simpler, more upright judgment, embraces the whole truth," but they don't speak "in its entirety." In his opinion, "[w]e [men] could not stand women speaking the truth" (110; pt. 1, ch. 5).

The other type of criticism is that Marlow's talks are not founded on his own experience and that his talks are artificial. This is because his remarks on the heroine and the hero, Flora and Captain Anthony, are on the basis of his friends' words: Mr. Fyne, Mrs. Zoe Fyne, who is Anthony's sister, and a sailor called Charlie Powell. Marlow first explains to his interlocutor, who frames Marlow's tale, about his first meeting with Flora; then he talks about her elopement with Anthony. Despite Marlow's detailed remarks on them, he has met Flora only three times: chapter 2 and 7 in part 1, and chapter 6 in part 2, which is the final chapter of the novel. With regard to Anthony, when Marlow starts his talk

about him, he refers to the captain as "a good soul." Soon after it, nevertheless, Marlow declares: "I [Marlow] did not know him [Anthony]. I really didn't" (31; pt. 1, ch. 2). It is noteworthy that his declarations about the captain are repeated here no less than twice and that these statements appear at the start of his narration. Thus Marlow's narration is clearly unnatural from the first.

This artificiality of Marlow's narrative causes critics' attacks on *Chance*. For example, Jakob Lothe compares the four Marlow stories: "Youth," "Heart of Darkness," *Lord Jim*, and *Chance*. He argues that "the variant of personal narrative which the device of Marlow represents has a more effective and persuasive function" than if it is not based on "a specific experience which has strongly and seriously engaged him [Marlow]" (42). Lothe thus regards *Chance* as more prosaic than the other Marlow tales, all of which originate from Marlow's own experience and to which he commits himself.

Yet I would like to argue that it is this artificiality that makes Marlow's narration many-sided because of its two characteristics: one is Marlow's self-conscious treatment of his talks, and the other is his swaying subjectivity. As for his self-consciousness, Marlow admits his lack of firsthand relationship with Flora and Captain Anthony. He repeats this kind of declaration again and again. Marlow declares his ignorance of Captain Anthony at least four times: "I [Marlow] did not know him" (31; pt. 1, ch. 2), "I never saw the man" (34; pt. 1, ch. 2), "I had never set eyes on the man. I didn't know him so completely that by contrast I seemed to have known Miss de Barral" (110; pt. 1, ch. 5), "The trouble was that I could not imagine anything about Flora de Barral and the brother of Mrs. Fyne [Captain Anthony]" (158; pt. 1, ch. 7). This paper claims that this repetition consolidates his careful treatment of the heroine and the hero.

Marlow's consciousness is also embodied in his other words;

he even utilizes his ignorance of the captain and carefully arranges his story about Flora and Anthony. For example, when Marlow manages to meet Flora, who has left the Fynes' home with Captain Anthony, he hears from her the process of their elopement. While Marlow explains the process to his interlocutor, he says: "You understand I am piecing here bits of disconnected statements [about Flora's meeting with Captain Anthony]" (167; pt. 1, ch. 7). Marlow even says to his interlocutor: "The trouble was that I could not imagine anything about Flora de Barral and the brother of Mrs. Fyne [Anthony]. Or, if you like, I could imagine *anything* [sic] which comes practically to the same thing" (158; pt. 1, ch. 7). The word "*anything*" portrays Marlow's bold idea that his imaginative guesses come to the core of Flora's affairs, and my assertion is that these passages exemplify Marlow's deliberate attitude towards Flora's talks. Concerning the artificiality and deliberateness of Marlow's talk, we should not also miss his self-consciousness as "an investigator—a man of deductions" (242; pt. 2, ch. 4). This self-consciousness clarifies his careful attitude towards his own narration: he arranges the past things about Flora and Anthony, and he interprets them by himself. Regarding Marlow's narration, Robert Hampson points out that this narrative structure resembles that of "detective fiction" (385). In other words, Marlow, who is conscious of his ability to guess the story, "investigates" Flora's past. Thus Marlow can detach himself from Flora's story and composedly handle it.

Marlow is, however, not only a composed investigator: he also cannot help indicating his vivid subjectivity. Marlow's talk is, accordingly, neither inhumane nor apathetic because, despite its artificial structure, he sympathizes with people in his narrative. Marlow's empathy is most clearly shown when he comes to know Anthony's sudden death. At the end of the novel, Marlow

is told by Powell, who has been on the *Ferndale*, that the ship has collided with another one. Then the *Ferndale* has sunk and Anthony has died. When Marlow hears this, he feels as if he has "known Captain Anthony personally" and he cries: "You [Powell] don't say so!" (324; pt. 2, ch. 6). We should notice that this cry shows Marlow's humane aspect that is contrasted with his artificial narrative, and consequently his subjectivity is stressed.

It is more remarkable that Marlow shows his swaying subjectivity when he faces his own gender. For instance, Marlow tries to find Flora near the Fynes' home after her elopement, and then he criticizes the girl as "the minx." Soon after this remark, nevertheless, Marlow says: "there is enough of the woman in my nature to free my judgment of women from glamorous reticency." He even admits that "a woman" is "a human being, very much like myself [Marlow]" (43; pt. 1, ch. 2). Marlow's self-recognition as "woman" contributes to his defense not only of Flora but also of women.

A more remarkable instance is his talk with Mrs. Zoe Fyne about Flora's elopement. Marlow thinks that Mrs. Fyne consults with him because she has "scented" in him "that small portion of 'femininity,' that drop of superior essence of which I [Marlow] am myself aware" (111; pt. 1, ch. 5). This remark, despite his subsequent declaration that he is "not a feminist," makes clear Marlow's careful treatment of his gender. It is also important to notice that from his viewpoint Marlow's femininity is "scented" by Mrs. Fyne, who is an energetic feminist. Concerning the structure of *Chance*, Edward Crankshaw thinks that the novel "is not about Marlow at all" (125). Yet, though Crankshaw regards the structure of the novel as "great" (132), he misses Marlow's swaying identity.

Nonetheless, it is not deniable that, even after his careful

remarks on his gender, Marlow sometimes takes prejudicial attitudes toward women. At those times, however, Marlow's words are criticized by his interlocutor. For example, when Marlow starts talking about the newly-married life of Flora and Anthony on the *Ferndale*, he tells his interlocutor that a woman's part is "passive" and that she lacks "energy," "wisdom," and "courage." His interlocutor responds to Marlow and says: "I wouldn't use an ill-sounding word about women" (210; pt. 2, ch. 2). The two men's talk clarifies Marlow's prejudicial remarks in such an explicit way that the novel requires readers to interpret his words carefully. The novel thus deals with Marlow's biased aspects in a clear way. More important, Marlow and his interlocutor don't talk. They rather have a dialogic relationship, which, in Jeremy Hawthorn's words, embodies "a clash of opinions and, arguably, of temperaments" between the two men (140). This paper argues that Hawthorn properly refers to Marlow's interlocutor as "the 'I' narrator," whose connotation makes it clear that Marlow's remarks are not one-way speeches to his listener. This relationship embodies Marlow's swaying ideas about his gender, and it clarifies his humane aspects.

This thesis thus asserts the dynamism between the two points of Marlow's narration: his self-consciousness and his swaying subjectivity. Marlow's talk is criticized by Douglas Hewitt, who regards it as filled with ironic "clichés" and "vague generalizations" about "the subject of women" (100-01). The dynamism, however, forces readers not to believe in his words but to interpret them by themselves, and hence Marlow's "clichés" are a device to promote reader's voluntary engagement to *Chance*.

II. The Sailors' Masculine World and Flora's Maturity

This dynamism of Marlow's narration makes readers wonder what Marlow's intention is like or whether his "investigation" is

right or not.² This paper contends, however, that this wonder is concerned with a strategy of the novel to maintain sailors' values, particularly in its final scene. The last scene, where Marlow meets Flora again for the first time since her marriage, focuses on the heroine's growth. Nevertheless, since the narrative structure encourages readers to interpret the story by themselves, the novel leads them to examine its ending. This examination is a basis for which *Chance* underscores sailors' lives in the shade of Flora's maturity.

First of all, as for the relationship between the sailors' world and the dynamics of Marlow's narrative, we should not miss the importance of Marlow's subjectivity again: his attachment to the life on the sea. He has "retired from the sea in a sort of half-hearted fashion some years ago" (29; pt. 1, ch. 1). In other words, Marlow himself is a retired sailor. Yet, according to the "I" narrator, the "sea is the sailor's true element." Marlow on shore is thus to him "an object of incredulous commiseration like a bird, which, secretly, should have lost its faith in the high virtue of flying" (29). These words of the "I" narrator's display Marlow's cynical character, which is represented especially by the phrase "lost its faith." The novel, which is mainly narrated by Marlow, therefore focuses on sailors' values.

The novel, in addition, makes Marlow, a retired mariner, narrate at length about sailors' lives on the *Ferndale*. When Marlow starts talking about Powell's days as a second mate on the ship, he makes remarks on the first mate, Franklin, who has been on familiar terms with Captain Anthony on the *Ferndale* for a long time. Franklin soon becomes friendly with Powell, and he tells the new second mate the sailors' solidarity on the *Ferndale*. Franklin refers to his colleagues as "[s]teady men," and he confirms: "No good man need ever have thought of leaving the *Ferndale* unless he were a fool" (209; pt. 2, ch. 2). This remark

of Franklin's is weighty because he values the *Ferndale*, the main scene of the second half of the novel. His words hence highlight not only the environment on the ship but also the sailors on board.

This course of the story and the narrative structure express mariners' solidarity and their "solid world surrounded by the salt, uncorruptible waters" (203; pt. 2, ch. 1). In contrast with this "world," the novel describes the maturity of Flora, who has lived lonely since her father's imprisonment. It is crucial that the sailors' values are not familiar to Flora and that she is also detested by them. This detestation is because of sailors' tendency to think that, in Powell's words, "captains' wives could work a lot of mischief on board ship if they happened to take a dislike to anyone" (27; pt. 1, ch. 1). Sailors' repulsion to captains' wives is also described by Franklin, who has "won for the course of many long voyages, a footing of familiarity" with Captain Anthony (200; pt. 2, ch. 1). Franklin regrets that anyone can "see that the man [Anthony] was changed" (225; pt. 2, ch. 3). Flora is, as a result, excluded by the sailors on board except Powell. Powell is, however, a newcomer on the *Ferndale*, and consequently he is "something of outsider" (214; pt. 2, ch. 2) just like Flora; she doesn't get on well either with Anthony or her father. In short, Powell's strangeness makes him friendly with her, and this strangeness stresses Flora's own lonely and unstable position on the ship. Hence she has not one to rely on at first.

These harsh realities, however, are the foundation for Flora's maturity: the sailors' world works as an obstacle that she has to overcome. Thus *Chance* vividly depicts Flora's growth. In consequence, she becomes mature enough to declare in the last scene that she has "discovered my [Flora's] love" for Roderick Anthony "through agonies of rage and humiliation" (328; pt. 2, ch. 6). This declaration shows her acceptance both of her harsh past

and of her love for her husband.

As for Flora's way to maturity, the sailors' world seems to be only an obstacle to her. My claim is, however, that we should observe that the novel depicts sailors' values at length. In the first place, *Chance* deals with the sailors' world at its beginning: the "I" narrator and Marlow listen to their new friend Powell, who talks with Marlow about their "examination" (8; pt. 1, ch. 1) to get officers' certificates. Then Powell continues talking about his young days, and accordingly he recalls how he has gotten on board the *Ferndale* as a second mate. We should notice that from the start of the novel the sailors' values are represented in the narrative structure, whose complication is sustained by Marlow's self-conscious narrative.

This paper claims that whereas *Chance* is the heroine Flora's bildungsroman, it in reality attaches importance to the sailors' masculine world. This argument is consolidated in the last scene of the novel. First of all, that scene has an unnatural structure that urges readers to interpret the ending by themselves. It is remarkable that, after Marlow finishes talking about the consummation of Flora and Anthony and her father's suicide, he narrates so many events. At that time, however, the novel contains no more than nine pages in the Oxford paperback edition 2002: pp.322-30. Thus the ending, as Martin Ray points out, "seems to be particularly rushed" (xiv). More important, Marlow even "quickly skip[s] over" (Ray xiv) the "six years" (323; pt. 2, ch. 6) of the happy days of Flora and Anthony. Though they are the heroine and hero of the novel, Flora expresses their happiness only in her declaration that she has "discovered" her love for him (328). Because of her words, as Cedric Watts says, though the ending of *Chance* depicts Anthony's death, it is "exceptionally positive" by "Conradian standards" (118). Yet this thesis insists that this "rushed" tone of the ending makes readers careful about its

contents and narrative structure.

Here it is important to notice that, in spite of this hurried course of the ending, the novel portrays two points. First, the novel attends to the sailors' world. This is because Marlow tells the "I" narrator about Franklin and Powell. The two sailors' attachment to the sea is, however, hampered by Flora. Second, the novel promotes its readers to detach themselves from Flora's growth, and this detachment contrastively foregrounds sailors' bond that has worked as an obstacle to her growth. My assertion is that these two points, as a result, paradoxically underline seamen's values.

As for the first point about the sailors' world, Franklin's case casts doubts on Flora's too much influence on the ship. When Marlow talks with Powell about the six happy years of Flora and Anthony, Powell says that he has spent those years with the couple "[a]lmost as long as Franklin" (323; pt. 2, ch. 6). The word "[a]lmost" appears because Franklin has "left the *Ferndale* a year or so" (323) after de Barral's attempted murder. This means that Franklin has left the ship, which he himself has thought that no "good man need ever have thought of leaving" (209). As a matter of fact, Powell has not voluntarily chosen to do it, because Flora has indirectly caused her husband to "recommend[...]" Franklin "for a command" of another ship. According to Powell, Anthony has "read her [Flora's] thoughts" and noticed that she has "not like[d] him [Franklin] very much," though Powell thinks that she has not "let out whisper against" Franklin (323).

Concerning Flora's dislike of Franklin, he is to blame to a certain degree because of his jealousy of Flora. Franklin has been Anthony's "shipmate for full six years" and "the only chief mate he [Anthony] ever had" (225-26; pt. 2, ch. 3). He has accordingly been confident, before de Barral's attempted murder, that Captain Anthony "has no one now but his [Anthony's] old friend Franklin"

(299; pt.2, ch. 6).³ Hence Franklin is not friendly with Flora, who has "changed" the captain, and he cannot accept their marriage.

Franklin's frustration, however, doesn't only embody his jealousy; it also shows that the sailors' world is disturbed by Flora. Since Franklin has worked with Anthony "for full six years," they have naturally built trustable relationship based on sailors' solidarity. Nonetheless, only owing to his wife's dislike of the first mate, the captain has chosen to part from him. Thus it is not Anthony's valuation on each sailor's ability but Flora's taste for people that controls the personnel affairs of the *Ferndale*.

Powell's case more clearly casts doubts on Flora's influence on mariners' solidarity: the novel indicates that he will retire from the sea. At the end of *Chance*, Marlow talks with Flora about Powell, who often visits her cottage. Then Marlow tells her that Powell "is fond of the sea." Flora says, however, that Powell "seems to have given it [the sea] up". Flora's utterance shocks Marlow, and he thinks that "[p]erhaps it is because he [Powell] loves something else better" (329; pt. 2, ch. 6). In Marlow's opinion, Powell, who has been friendly with Flora on the *Ferndale*, will retire from the sea in order to live with her. This opinion bewilders Marlow so much that he is afraid that Flora is "a selfish person" (329). Here it is essential to notice one thing: as Andrew Michael Roberts says, Powell's future "echoes" the "I" narrator's "puzzlement as to why Marlow seems to have given up the sea himself" (*Conrad and Masculinity* 158). In short, there is no evidence that after Powell leaves the sea, he won't be cynical like Marlow, who is "an object of incredulous commiseration" (29).

There is, however, a factor about the ending which makes readers consider sailors' values more ironically than the first point, the cases of Franklin and Powell. That factor is the second point: the novel's detachment from Flora's growth. This is

because, despite her declaration of her love to Anthony, the novel implies the possibility that her growth is superficial.

This doubt about Flora is caused by her unchanged figure that makes readers wonder whether she has become mature or not. When she and Marlow meet again, he says that she is "now her true self" (327; pt. 2, ch. 6), which means her change from "the poor girl for whom it seemed there was no place in the world" (131; pt. 1, ch. 6). At the same time, nevertheless, Marlow describes her eyes as "the eyes of the Flora of the old days, absolutely unchanged" (327). This description is worth attending to because this resonates with her past in which her glances have afflicted her. When Flora has lived separately from her father, she has moved from one place to another. One day she has moved to Mrs. Fyne's female friend's home, and she has accepted the girl at first. This old lady has, however, come to dislike Flora because she has been disturbed by the girl's "enigmatical glances" (136; pt. 1, ch. 6). It is also her "desperate eyes," in Mr. Fyne's words, that have attracted Anthony (182; pt. 1, ch. 7). In short, her glances have sown the seeds of her elopement with Anthony, which consequently makes her mature but also causes her to face the crew's repulsion to her. Moreover, there is another physical feature of hers worth considering: her voice. Marlow refers to it as "the very voice of the Flora of the old days." In that voice she talks with Marlow about Powell, and she asks Marlow whether Powell "should care for me" (329; pt. 2, ch. 6). This combination of Flora's unchanged voice and her question about Powell's will more accentuate the problem of his future than if her voice changes.

In addition to the depictions of Flora's body, as Allan Simmons points out (264), Marlow's reference to Flora's cottage are also allusive. At its "garden gate," Marlow and Flora meet again in the afternoon that has been "well advanced" (326-27; pt. 2, ch. 6).

This situation echoes that of the Fynes' cottage, at whose "wicket gate" Flora first saw Captain Anthony in "the evening" (155; pt. 1, ch. 7). This paper insists that these physical environments about Flora make readers doubt her maturity.

More important, I claim that these doubts on Flora's unchanged features are consolidated by her probable future life with Powell. Powell has been luckily rescued at the collision of the *Ferndale*. His rescue is, however, double-edged: the rescuer has mistaken Powell for Captain Anthony and says: "Aren't you [Powell] the captain?" (325; pt. 2, ch. 6) This mistake alludes to the probability that Powell is another Roderick Anthony, who has had difficulty in communicating with Flora. This allusion casts doubts not only on whether Flora's life will be happy but also on whether Powell, who is "fond of the sea," should retire from it for the sake of her.

Owing to Flora's unchanged features, the novel detaches itself from Flora's growth. This thesis asserts that these doubts on Flora make the novel's readers wonder whether the sailors' world is merely an obstacle to Flora's growth. As a result, the sailors' values are contrastively accentuated.

Conclusion

This paper has asserted the two points in order to claim that the narrative structure of *Chance* maintains sailors' masculinity: first, the dynamism between Marlow's self-consciousness and his subjectivity. The second is the contrast between the sailors' world and Flora's maturity. In particular, this thesis attends to the "rushed" end of the novel, whose artificiality is sustained by its self-conscious structure. We are consequently forced to reconsider the two contrastive things: Flora's growth, which *Chance* represents at length, and sailors' lives that seem to work only as an obstacle to her maturity. The structure of *Chance* therefore

foregrounds the latter: the sailors' world. This paper hence asserts the coherence of the structure of the novel.

As is said in the introduction, critics attend to women readers' reception of *Chance* these days. The novel really sold no less than 13,200 copies within the two years of publication, in Great Britain alone (Watts 114). Despite its sales, *Chance* "[n]otoriously" has "narrative difficulty," and it doesn't seem to gain "so many admirers" (Davies 75).

This paper argues that the "difficulty," which is sustained by Marlow's narration, allows *Chance* to portray sailors. The novel is, as Susan Jones points out, required to attract women readers by the *New York Herald*. In this situation of its publication, the novel can depict sailors only by using the complicated narrative structure as a last resort. The novel thus preserves mariners' values in the shade of the heroine's way to maturity till its ending. My claim is that the novel portrays sailors' solidarity and their world more firmly than Susan Jones thinks, because she doesn't pay enough attention to the narrative stratagems in the ending. *Chance* has a complicated and apparently chaotic narrative structure. The apparent disorder of the structure is, in reality, a strategy to maintain the sailors' masculine world in the last scene of the novel.

Notes

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- 1 Joseph Conrad, *Chance: A Tale in Two Parts*, ed. Martin Ray, rev. ed. (1914; Oxford: Oxford UP, 2002) 328; pt. 2, ch. 6. All the references to the novel are to this edition, and page numbers are shown in the parentheses.
- 2 We should also notice that readers' wonders are strengthened by another aspect of the structure of *Chance*: the novel has a lot of time shifts as

though it delineates Marlow's own puzzlement as to Flora's maturity. For example, the first part of *Chance*, which contains about one hundred eighty pages in the Oxford paperback edition 2002, has no less than "nine time shifts," though four out of which concentrate in chapter 5 (Moser 171-72). This characteristic of the narrative structure more strongly promotes readers' spontaneous interpretation than if it has a straightforward chronology.

- 3 As for Franklin's trust in Captain Anthony, Andrew Michael Roberts thinks that the first mate has "[h]omosocial desire between men" ("Secret Agents" 99).

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