



**Epitome : International Journal
of Multidisciplinary Research**

ISSN : 2395-6968

**THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NAUTICAL REFERENCES IN
THE BIBLE AND ENGLISH LITERATURE**



Dr. K. THOMAS BABY

Assistant Professor

Department of Languages and Translation

Dhofar University, Salalah, OMAN

Email: kthomasbaby@hotmail.com

ABSTRACT

The sea has played a significant role in shaping human history and culture. Human response to the sea has been enigmatic throughout the ages because people experience the sea in contradictory ways. Most often, it is perceived as a powerful destructive force that is completely beyond human control. At the same time, it is a sustainer of life embodying within itself a powerful but mysterious marine ecosystem. The sea has played a significant role in the development of Literature, art and culture around the world. It has shaped human consciousness through its influence on religion and mythology. The

sea is a central image in the Bible which underlines the fact that divine intervention is necessary to control the ruthless power of the sea. Since the influence of Bible is undeniable in the development of English literature, it is necessary to examine briefly the references to sea in the Bible in order to understand clearly the role and significance of nautical references in English literature.

KEYWORDS

Sea, Nautical References, religion, mythology, Bible & English Literature

RESEARCH PAPER

Introduction

The word 'nautical' is a comprehensive adjective comprising of navigation, sailors, sea and all types maritime or seafaring activities. The sea has played a significant role in shaping human history and culture. Human response to sea has been enigmatic throughout the ages because people experience the sea in contradictory ways. Most often, it is perceived as a powerful destructive force that is completely beyond human control. At the same time, it is a sustainer of life embodying within itself a powerful but mysterious marine ecosystem. Since the sea has become an integral part of human culture, the all-pervading influence of sea can be found in all types human art forms such as painting, literature, poetry, theatre and even in music.

The sea has played a significant role in the development of Literature in various cultures around the world. It has shaped human consciousness through its predominant influence in religion and mythology. This is evident from the earliest religious and mythological texts in which one can find interesting descriptions of the Leviathan in the Bible and that of the kraken in Norse mythology. Moreover, the sea is a central image in both the old and the new testament of the Bible. It underlines the fact that divine power and intervention is necessary to control the ruthless power of the sea as testified in the crossing of the Red Sea and calming down of the violent sea and walking on the waters of the sea by Christ himself.

In classical literary texts, the sea is a frequently recurring image. For example, the sea is central image around which the whole plot of Homer's famous classic the Odyssey is built up. Similarly, the whole dramatic action in Shakespeare's Tempest is constructed systematically in the background of a tempestuous sea. Invariably, in the literature of the past, the sea has been symbolically represented as a hostile force that brings destruction to human beings. Throughout the ages, religion and mythology influenced people into a belief that the sea is an extremely dangerous place populated by fantastic or supernatural creatures. In modern times, the sea symbolizes the personal and collective unconscious as projected in the works of famous psychiatrist Carl Jung. As a result, the mysterious image of the sea has become an integral part of the unconscious psyche of the human race.

The influence of Bible is undeniable in English literature. Therefore, it is necessary to examine briefly the underlying aim and purpose of the references to sea in the Bible before analyzing the role and significance of the nautical references in English literature.

Nautical References in the Bible

There are more than five hundred (504) direct and important references to the sea in the Bible. A critical analysis of these references will reveal that sea is an integral part of the Bible. These references deal directly with diverse aspects of the sea which confirm the fact that it is a powerful force that can be controlled only through divine intervention. "The sea is His, for it was He who made it, and His hands formed the dry land" (Psalm 107:29). Man has no power over the forces of the sea such as the storm and the rain. The sea consists of powerful destructive forces that are completely beyond human control, only God has power over these forces. Psalm 107 says: "He caused the storm to be still, so that the waves of the sea were hushed". The crossing of the red sea by the Israelites mentioned in the Bible demonstrates that only divine intervention can save the life of people from the fury of the sea. "Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea; and the LORD swept the sea back by a strong east wind all night and turned the sea into dry land, so the waters were divided" (Exodus 14:21).

In contrast, the sea is also a sustainer of life embodying within itself a powerful but mysterious marine ecosystem. "Then God said, Let the waters teem with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens." (Genesis 1:20). The mysterious and unfathomable nature of the sea peopled with fantastic or supernatural creatures is elaborated effectively in the book of Revelations. "And I saw something like a sea of glass mixed with fire, and those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, holding harps of God" (Revelation 15:2). This mysterious nature of the sea is further intensified in the book of Job. "Have you entered into the springs of the sea or walked in the recesses of the deep?" (Job 38:16). There are even metaphorical references to sea such "the wicked are like the tossing sea, for it cannot be quiet" as mentioned in Isaiah.

The Bible is replete with umpteen references to sea in various hues and shapes. "In that day the LORD will punish Leviathan the fleeing serpent, With His fierce and great and mighty sword, Even Leviathan the twisted serpent; and He will kill the dragon who lives

in the sea” (Isaiah 27:1). When we examine the New Testament, we find Christ rebuking and calming down the violent sea and even walking on the waters of the sea. The New Testament also depicts the sea as a place populated by supernatural creatures in the apocalyptic vision of John. “And the dragon stood on the sand of the seashore. Then I saw a beast coming up out of the sea, having ten horns and seven heads, and on his horns were ten diadems, and on his heads were blasphemous names” (Revelation 13:1). Therefore, the sea is a central image in the Bible which underlines the fact that divine power and intervention is necessary to control the ruthless forces of the sea.

Development of Nautical Literature in English

Nautical Literature or Sea narratives have a long history of development. Adventure and travel narratives that highlighted sea and maritime activities gradually became the source of inspiration for Nautical Literature. For Example, Homer's epic poem the Odyssey, the Old English poem The Seafarer and The Icelandic Saga of Eric the Red (1220-1280) can be considered to be the earliest works of nautical literature. In the 18th century the interest in sea fiction revived in Europe because of the economic opportunities brought by increased maritime activities and trade coupled with the influence of the Romantic Movement that instilled a spirit of adventure. It is during this century Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote his narrative poem Rime of the Ancient Mariner (1798). Subsequently Byron wrote the poem Childe Harold's Pilgrimage in (1812-16) upholding the thrill and romance of venturing into the unexplored regions of the sea.

There is a pleasure in the pathless woods,
There is rapture on the lonely shore,
There is society where none intrudes,
By the deep Sea and music in its roar. (Byron)

Nautical fiction

Frederick Marryat (1829-1848) is considered to be father of nautical fiction in Britain. He was in the Navy during the Napoleonic wars and his experiences in the sea during the war period constituted the subject matter of most of his novels. His style of writing had much in common with the writing style of James Fenimore Cooper. Marryat's sea novels are graphic description of contemporary naval culture and depicted the harsh realities of the tough life of the mariners. Therefore his core thematic concern was to glorify the

masculinity and valour of naval officers. Gradually, by the end of 19th century, a distinct genre known as nautical fiction began to take shape in the whole of Europe and United States.

A number of prominent works of fiction were produced during this time. Some of the best works during this period are Melville's Moby-Dick, Victor Hugo's Toilers of the Sea and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness. Among this trio, Melville's works deserve special mention as he brought out a series of sea novel such as Typee (1846), Omoo (1847), Mardi (1849), Redburn (1849) and White-Jacket (1850) during this period. However, Moby-Dick is his most celebrated work which is popularly known as the Great American Novel. DH Lawrence epitomized it as "the greatest book of the sea ever written". This view is certified by the fact that it was Melville who first transformed mere narratives of physical struggles into inward spiritually journeys. For example, the hunting of the whale by Captain Ahab transforms the narrator Ishmael so completely that he goes into the trance of a spiritual journey. This regenerative spiritual aspect of man's struggle is a theme which is further developed effectively by later authors of nautical fiction. The Heart of Darkness by Joseph Conrad and later Old man and the sea by Earnest Hemingway explored and perfected the regenerative spiritual aspect of nautical fiction through these two great novels.

The most singular influence of nautical fiction in modern times can be traced back to Joseph Conrad. He was inspired by earlier nautical fiction writers such as Victor Hugo and Leopold McClinton. Hugo's book Toilers of the sea can be considered to be a forerunner in nautical fiction. Conrad's inspiration for nautical fiction is directly related career life because he was a captain in the merchant marine. He worked with both the French and British liners. In the course of time he translated merchant marine experience into valuable nautical fiction. In fact, his best novel Heart of Darkness is a direct outcome of his rich and varied experiences as the captain of the ship owned by a Belgian trading company.

The common themes of nautical fiction can be said to be masculinity and heroism because the nautical novels mainly deal with life on naval and merchant ships consisting of a purely male world. Therefore, the structural fabric of nautical fiction is composed of a purely male dominated world which reflects and upholds the traditional outlook of

conservative social order. However, in the course of development there began to appear significant variations in the nature and characterization of male heroism and models of masculinity.

Nautical References in Contemporary Novels

The history of literature and novel embodies the cultural milieu of the place of its origin. In other words it can be considered as an extension of their culture and life style of nations and territories. Hence, there arose genres such as the English novel, the French novel and the American novel. However, nautical fiction or sea novels can be considered as a unifying force in the divisive world of literature because the sea is without boundaries. Therefore nautical fiction which emanates from the boundless sea can unite different nations divided by their own specific cultural configurations. In Margaret Cohen's remarkable study of sea fiction, she explores this unifying force. According to her Robinson Crusoe dramatized the wonders of unknown lands, the storms, shipwrecks, and the pirates. She further adds that James Fenimore Cooper refashioned the adventure novel in postcolonial America to the new frontiers of maritime labor and technology of the nineteenth century. Finally she says how Jules Verne reworked adventures at sea into science fiction and how Melville, Hugo, and Conrad navigated the foggy waters of language and thought.

The Old man and the Sea

Nautical fiction achieved a new dimension in contemporary novels through Earnest Hemingway's 'The Old Man and the Sea'. The novel tells the story of a battle between an aging, experienced fisherman, Santiago who couldn't catch a single fish for nearly three months. His peculiar condition of being a "salao" (unlucky person) make him ostracized from society and he leads a lonely life. In addition, Manolin, his young apprentice was not allowed to go with him as a helper because of Santiago's unlucky streak. The parents wanted the boy to learn fishing from other successful fisherman but the boy loves the old man because he knew that Santiago different from other fisherman. Similarly, Santiago has a special affection for the boy. According to Hemingway, it is only when a man liberates himself from the false confines of modern society that he becomes capable of confronting the larger reality. Santiago becomes an embodiment of optimism through his perseverance in spite of prolonged period of struggle. Even though he didn't have a

single catch for nearly three months, his eyes are still cheerful and undefeated. Santiago's struggle finally turns into defeat because the great marlin is completely eaten up by the shark. However, he emerges as a victor because of his invincible spirit as exemplified in his words that a man may be destroyed but not defeated. Therefore, he advises Manolin to venture far out into the sea and never to accept defeat. He should always go that extra mile which other fisherman are reluctant to go.

Santiago's prolonged struggle makes him a symbol of endurance and persistent optimism in the face of troubles and tribulations. He is convinced that if he wants to achieve his dream he has to pass through this phase of public ignominy of being laughed at by the lesser mortals who are successful in the eyes of the world. Santiago is fully aware that he has to distance himself from the world and suffer everything in silence in order to achieve his dream of a big catch one day. However, Manolin constantly expresses his devotion, reverence and trust towards his mentor knowing fully well that Santiago is far superior to other fishermen in skill and professional knowledge. Santiago's only consolation is the boy whose belief finally becomes a reality. Santiago's endurance is singular quality that sustains him in this gigantic struggle. His crude hut, meager food and emaciated body are an enigmatic question before the readers regarding the old man's physical capacities. How could he wage the terrific battle with the great marlin with his emaciated physical frame? The ensuing struggle with the marlin and his titanic struggle finally achieve a spiritual dimension that is incomprehensible to an ordinary human mind.

The novel dwells at length on two significant symbols in the novel. The first symbol is the image of lions playing on the beaches of Africa and the second one is the continuous reference of the famous baseball player Joe DiMaggio throughout the novel. These two images are indelibly embedded in the unconscious psyche of Santiago. After suffering a bone spur in his heel, DiMaggio went on to become one of the most famous baseball players in the world. Throughout his struggle with the giant marlin at the sea, Santiago's thoughts on DiMaggio become an incessant obsession that spurs him into a triumphant survival during his epic struggle against the giant marlin. In addition, the enigmatic image of lions that has been in his dreams ever since he was a boy now comes back to him reinvigorated now to connect his old age with his vibrant boyhood and to provide his existence a kind of circularity that will strengthen him in his fight for survival. The lions

are hunters at the core of their being and the fact that Santiago's dreams about the lions at play can be seen as a reflection of his own basic nature of being a hunter. Finally, his irresistible attraction for hunting even at this old age is a clear indication of his great desire to break free from the mundane order of the natural world into an extraordinary world of transcendental reality.

Conclusion

Throughout the novel, Santiago has been portrayed as a close parallel to Christ and it becomes clearly evident towards close of the novel. The crucifixion imagery is singularly highlighted in the novel during Santiago's epic struggle with the marlin. The most obvious instance of the parallel between Santiago and Christ is evident when Santiago's palms are first cut by his fishing line. It can be compared to the suffering of Christ and his stigmata. Furthermore, when the sharks approach Santiago to destroy his prized catch the marlin, the old man is portrayed as a crucified martyr who makes a noise similar to that of a man having nails driven through his hands. Ultimately Santiago transforms himself into the prototype of Christ when he slogs his way up the hill with his mast across his shoulders. The image of Santiago's journey in this instance is highly identical to the march of Christ with his cross to Calvary for his crucifixion. As the novel approaches its final chapters, this parallel becomes so intense that Santiago virtually becomes another Christ who conquered death through excruciating suffering and entered into glory through his triumphant resurrection. Santiago, likewise, after his great trials and struggles at the sea with the marlin and the vengeful sharks reaches the shore with the remnants of his trophy, the skeleton of the marlin. Just as Christ appeared to his unbelieving disciples after his resurrection, Santiago too appears alive after his epic human struggle with the sharks to the utter amazement of his mocking adversaries.

Although death is a reality in the physical world, man is endowed with the spiritual strength to overcome death. According to Hemingway, death is never an end in itself it invariably embodies the possibility of the most ardent or vigorous life. Santiago is evidently reinvigorated by the very act of killing the marlin. Strangely enough, the fish also comes alive "with his death in him" proclaiming the basic concept that regeneration necessarily follows on the heels of death. The crucifixion imagery which the author employs throughout the book further underlines the cyclical connection between life and

death, as does Santiago's battle with the marlin. To sum up, it can be said that great nautical novels are inspired by the biblical concept of life and death.

REFERENCES

Bible: <https://www.bible.com/en-GB/versions/2020-rsv-revised-standard-version>

Cohen, M. (2010). The Novel and the Sea. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Nautical fiction: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nautical_fiction

The old man and the sea: <http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10571>

The old man and the sea: <https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/oldman/>