

Ship Novels in English Literature

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A kutatás a TÁMOP 4.2.4.A/2-11-1-2012-0001 azonosító számú „Nemzeti Kiválóság Program – Hazai hallgatói, illetve kutatói személyi támogatást biztosító rendszer kidolgozása és működtetése konvergencia program” című kiemelt projekt keretében zajlott. A projekt az Európai Unió támogatásával, az Európai Szociális Alap társfinanszírozásával valósul meg.

Introduction

The group of novels that provides the subject matter of my thesis is sometimes not even recognized as one genre. Thus my fundamental claim is that all the novels in question, and, of course, many others, can be identified as examples of what I call “Ship Novel” based on a large number of common features – be they technical, formal, narrative, or historical. The exact name chosen for the genre in this paper is not truly important; it is arbitrary due to the lack of preliminary extensive theoretical work that would contrive a classifying name for it. Simply put, a “Ship Novel” is generally about the adventures of a ship and her crew, the plot starting with the embarkation, and closing when the ship arrives at her final destination. Let this crude and rough “definition” suffice now, for one of the major aims of the paper is exactly to discover the shared features of these texts.

What definitely appears to be a genre in English literature might not be as obviously recognizable in the literature of other nations, for instance, in Hungarian. It is a matter of literary tradition and the number of texts falling into the genre in question. Hungarian literature has produced fewer ship novels, and even those few occupy less important places in the national literary canon than English texts such as Herman Melville’s great American novel *Moby Dick*, Joseph Conrad’s sea stories, or William Golding’s trilogy. This basic difference can be partly explained by geographical and historical facts. For around three hundred years, the navy of the British Empire was unmatched in the world, and even today it is remembered with pride and nostalgia among the English. Although it is not a general rule, literature usually takes its subject matter from the great topics of the age, thus it is no wonder Hungarian literature has produced far fewer ship novels than the English when our best-known admiral is famed for his political, rather than his naval career. So much about the

contrasts between the two countries, this detour was necessary only to highlight why it is important to think of the analysed novels in the foreign context.

Perhaps it is possible to identify the mythological origin(s) of this genre, and it might be worth trying to trace the thread of its development and change through the centuries. The first main section of the present paper makes an attempt to perform this task relying on the theoretical works of Jurij Lotman and Northrop Frye. Mythical stories were gradually turning into a linear narrative form, the first modern examples appeared; the second part intends to explore the consequences of this change both in narrative technique and content. Based on these results and Mikhail Bakhtin's chronotope theory, one can give a more precise and detailed definition of the ship novel, enumerating, and then separately investigating its main features with the help of examples.

Possible Origins of the Ship Novel, and Early Texts

“Moby Dick cannot remain in Melville’s novel: he is absorbed into our imaginative experience of leviathans and dragons of the deep from the Old Testament onward.”
(Fry 100)

Looking for the very origins of a genre rarely results in a spectacular success. One can never be sure how representative the remaining scripts and texts were in their own ages, and of course, there is the void of the vanished documents. In spite of this, reaching back to archaic texts is necessary, and by doing so, we probably follow in the footsteps of the authors of these novels. On the primary level, biblical and mythological examples listed below might be seen as influences, sources of inspiration for modern writers, but they also offer more than that. They appear as the age-old pillars of a traditional structure characterizing the genre. They use patterns that can be observed in ship novels, even though the narrative principles of mythological stories and the Old Testament are different from those of the novel.

Talking about the origins of *sjuzet* from a typological point of view, Jurij Lotman emphasizes that mythological texts are positioned in the centre of our cultural basis, and their main feature is that they are subordinated to a cyclic temporal movement. They are not trying to tell us the life-stories of unknown people, but want to demonstrate how the mechanic cycle of nature works through (very often allegorical) stories (Lotman 83). Indeed, what they offer is a worldview, where the mere existence of everyday objects, natural changes and other happenings (basically everything, because the system of myth does not exclude anything) can be explained by remembering their relating mythological stories. Characters (mostly Gods or other supernatural beings, since they have important roles in these stories, serving as a scale to know what we humans are) are usually not known for their personal characteristics, but rather they are personifications of elusive concepts, sometimes of natural powers and phenomena.

Furthermore, they give a precedent, a primary example of human types (of behaviour); they are, in a sense, archetypes.

Biblical stories and characters, especially those of the Old Testament are not very much different from that. The most salient difference is that instead of an unbreakable cyclic system, it operates within an eschatological framework. The point of origin is provided in the Creation, and the ultimate end in the Second Coming. There is, however, such a vast range between the two, that linearity is questionable to say the least, and examining separate books and stories reveals that they, just like mythological stories, create models with archetypal figures and scenes; they are always about *me*, they are permanent.

Undoing this cycle of the mythological system and spreading it out into a linear line leads to the emergence of a narrative with a plot. These modern narratives, as Lotman argues, are the products of the interference of two, typologically speaking, ancient types of text: mythologies and the reports of news, intelligence (86). The latter always recording occasional, singular events, those that happen by chance, meanwhile not trying to deliver any metaphysical ideas, or anything more than the related story itself (which is not about *me*, it is the story of someone else, and only his or hers). Since we are talking about an interference of two opposing types of text, it is worth considering if there can be a proximate standard proportion of the two regardless of genre, or the influence of the two varies per genre. I believe that in the case of ship novels, presences of both can be easily identified, respectively in the quasi-mythological elements of sea-folklore and the emphasized importance of narrating the life-story of a single, ordinary person. Since it would be impossible to nominate any of the two as generally prioritized over the other, Lotman's relevant words might come as praising: "In an artistic text it turns out to be possible to realize that optimal correlation of the

two groups in which the conflicting structures are disposed not hierarchically, that is to say on different levels, but dialogically – on one level” (175).

Noah, Charon and Odysseus

Before proceeding to examine the consequences of the transition from a cyclic order into a linear structure, it is essential to take a closer look at some mythical and biblical stories which are very much present in the background of modern ship novels. In the *Bible*, the word *ship* occurs first only in Isaiah, then Ezekiel, and a bit later, in Jonah’s book (in the well-known story to which I shall return). Whereas, the arch-example of a ship, the ark appears in Genesis 6,14: “Make thee an ark of gopher wood; rooms shalt thou make in the ark, and shalt pitch it within and without with pitch.” In fact, this is the very first man-made vessel according to the *Bible*; a fine example for future watercrafts, its grandiose size designed by the Lord himself: “And this is the fashion which thou shalt make it of: The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits” (Gen. 6,15).

This is exactly the starting point of Noah’s story; first he is mentioned in his lineage (Gen. 5,29), we also know that he “found grace in the eyes of the Lord” (Gen. 6,8) but his quest, or adventure starts with the order from God to build the ark. It is finished by the deadline, a couple of each animal species are captured and kept alive on board during the journey, the deluge comes, it purges and refreshes the land, and when after one hundred and fifty days the waters are abated, Noah’s story comes to an end. Although extremely simplified, this gist of the story is not very far from the usual structure of modern ship novels, in which the plot takes place between the set-off and the arrival. His archetypal story has been

used and reworked in famous later examples, and its popularity still has not declined – Julian Barnes’s *The History of the World in 10½ Chapters* is probably the best known example of them, and Darren Aronofsky’s film *Noah* (2014) is the most recent one.¹

Another very famous sea story in the Old Testament is that of Jonah and the Whale. Just like the story of Noah, it has been subject to numerous rewritings. Out of the uncountable paraphrases, one could mention *Pinocchio*, Babits Mihály’s Hungarian narrative poem “Jónás könyve,” or Ambrus Zoltán’s short-story entitled “Ninive pusztulása,” but the really important thing is that these archaic stories are present in modern texts of the genre without being direct and explicit sources of rewriting. Such an example is, of course, Melville’s *Moby Dick*, which is a thoroughly Old Testament text. The theme of vengeance itself, along with the rough sea already contributes to the creation of an atmosphere resembling biblical scenes, but the novel is not trying to veil the source of its inspiration: the whale is a given, *Moby Dick*’s unique colour and enormous size are like mementos of prehistoric (fictional, mythical or extinct) beasts, but the story also features a character called Jonah, who appears at the beginning of the novel, in a short, comic episode:

Projecting from the further angle of the room stands a dark-looking den – the bar – a rude attempt at a right whale’s head. Be that how it may, there stands the vast arched bone of the whale’s jaw, so wide, a coach might almost drive beneath it. [...] and in those jaws of swift destruction, like another cursed Jonah (by which name indeed they called him), bustles a little withered old man, who, for their money, dearly sells the sailors deliriums and death.

(31)

¹ Also, it is worth noting that sea stories are generally quite popular. This might be connected to another feature of ship novels, that is, they (no doubt in a modified and simplified mode, especially visible in the narrative technique) are convertible to juvenile literature, or at least, sometimes sold as such pieces of fiction (Verne’s works, Kurt Vonnegut’s *Galápagos*, or Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi*) In itself, there is nothing wrong in this practice, but unfortunately, it can swing the judgment of the whole genre, and brand it as unserious literature.

Another, though maybe less known Old Testament scene is repeated in the early chapters when a man called Elijah meets Captain Ahab and prophesies his fall. The choice of names is consistent, including Ishmael, whose name will be further discussed in a later section of my thesis. Only the cetology chapters ease the generally pervasive biblical air of the novel established already before the beginning of Ishmael's narrative. The book opens with an etymological overview discussing the origins of the word *whale*, and listing its equivalents in more than a dozen languages. Right after that, there stands a rather long list of extracts which include at least one reference to whales, or to the mythical creature Leviathan.² Among them one can find quotations from the *Bible* (Genesis, Job, Jonah and Isaiah), Plutarch, Lord Bacon, King Henry, *Hamlet*, *The Fairie Queen*, *Paradise Lost*, Dryden, *Rape of the Lock*, Thomas Jefferson, Edmund Burke, Hawthorne and others. Interestingly enough, it seems that Melville was also trying to establish some kind of linearity, as if he was in a search for the origins of the Leviathan myth and also interested in its development and influences on literary texts of all kinds.

Greek mythology overflows with sea stories, which, again, could be easily explained by their geographical and military position in ancient times. Out of the countless examples I chose two popular ones: the figure of Charon and the story of the Argonauts. Charon is the ferryman who carries the souls of the dead across the rivers of the underworld; so he is not a lone wanderer at sea, but has a duty. In charge of *carrying over* the dead into another realm, he can be seen as the embodiment or a metaphor (as etymology betrays) of change. To be precise, he is not the one who changes, for those are the passengers who just died. Modern sea stories are often read allegorically (enough to mention William Golding's novels, *Moby Dick*, or Joseph Conrad's novels and short stories), where the journey is like a spatial metaphor

² In modern Hebrew, *Leviathan* simply means *whale*.

illustrating the inner changes and developments of characters, very similarly to how the “path of life” trope is often literalized in literature. Similarly to the example of Noah’s ark, we have very clearly defined starting and ending points here; the passage starts when someone dies, and is properly buried, and it is over upon the arrival at the other side of the river. Burial is important so that who died can leave life behind, and descend into another plane, well separated and divided from the living. Charon makes crossing these boundaries possible for a fair price, and his story shows well how we tend to conceptualize crucial changes in matter or human behaviour. Traditionally, going to sea in fiction has been seen as an occasion when one can mature, grow up, change, or learn more about his own personality. At times it is also offered as a chance to redeem yourself, a chance that you would never be given on land. This “rite of passage” motif is present (or at least heavily reflected upon, at times even with a critical intent) in basically each and every sea novel, and the use of this pattern is surely more subtle than simply adopting the patterns of the traditional Bildungsroman to a watery environment. Undergoing a substantial change through the voyage, therefore, is already present in Charon’s myth, and the incredible frequency of this element in the plots of modern ship novels shows how little some of our associations and conceptualizations of impalpable processes have changed throughout thousands of years.

Besides this tradition, the etymology of Charon’s name and his usual portrayal (quite famous ones by Michelangelo, Jose Benlliure, Alexander Litovchenko or Gustave Doré just to name a few) might direct our attention to a type of character in ship novels. The original Greek translates onto “of keen gaze” (Liddell), and indeed in most of the paintings he is portrayed as a pop-eyed, angry man. This might remind some of the popular cartoon figure Popeye, the sailor, but also of the Ancient Mariner of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, whose flashing eyes paralyse the Wedding Guest. Calling it a stock character might be an

overstatement, but the figure of a grey-haired and much experienced elder man with flashing eyes in seas stories is very well-known. Noone can really make sure which connections are deliberate, and which have come to existence only by chance, but in themselves, these metaphors and images speak about how the sea is commonly imagined in the collective imagination.

The Argonauts are sailors of the ship *Argo*, who accompanied Jason to retrieve the Golden Fleece. In this group of around fifty people, one can find lots of well-known heroes, like Erginus, Heracles, Laërtes, Laokoön, Nestor, Phlias, Perseus, Orpheus, Theseus, Castor and Pollux. Their story is a typical quest, closely resembling Arthurian legends, or other medieval stories of chivalry in which a set of mighty heroes depart in hope of finding a precious (usually golden) item. In the mythical story, the ram's fleece is of course marked as the object of the quest by the gods themselves. What could be emphasized is the strong adventure theme of the story. The fleece is hung on the branch of a tree on a small island, and it is guarded by fire-breathing bulls, and in some versions of the story, also by a dragon.

In his essay "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the novel," Mikhail Bakhtin brings in several illustrative examples of the "relative stability of the novelistic chronotope" (85), and one of these is the chivalric romance. He starts discussing its features by remarking that it "functions with adventure time of the basically Greek type," and that "[a]ny adventure-time will contain a mixture of chance, fate, the gods and so forth." Very similarly to the mechanics of the story of the Argonauts – they are all about heroic deeds, idealized, yet symbolic heroes (think of Tristan or Lancelot) who can *glorify* themselves. Bakhtin compares the genre to *epic adventure* stories, because "like epic heroes, they [the main characters] belong to a common storehouse of images, although this is an international storehouse and

not, as in the epic, one that is merely national” (151-53).³ The significance of all this lies in the fact that these (although not standalone) sea stories show little sign of the cyclic logic of mythologies, rather they are akin to linear narratives with a plot recording a singular event. This applies to the Argonauts, but not to Charon, because the formers go on a quest once, whereas the ferryman is on duty for ever, and not known for any particular adventure, but as a recurring figure in many narratives in which someone’s story does not finish when he dies, or in some rare cases, when the living hero has to cross the rivers of the underworld. Modern sea stories have at least two prevalent characteristics that can be traced back to the point when these mythological stories were left behind and narratives started to work with a plot operating on a linear level: one of them is the disintegration of monolithic characters into pairs, couples, doubles or groups, and the other is the strengthening of sjuzet, and the increasing importance of narrating (Lotman 110).

Among the ancient texts, this duality is probably the easiest to observe in the case of Odysseus/the *Odyssey*. Because of Homer’s text, we are not able to think of Odysseus’ story simply as a myth. The epic takes over the “original” version of the story, probably it is much better-known and widely present in public awareness, but it is *not* due to the epic that his journey is like a thread or a spine which can hold a linear plot. His story starts when he defies Poseidon, and being driven off course on the sea, and it finishes when he arrives at Ithaca and kills the suitors. Again, it is the adventures that happen between the two events that govern the plot, but it is also interesting to add that together with the exposition set in Ithaca, showing Telemachus departing in search of his father, the story has a narrative framework; moreover, there are multiple frames in the recount of the voyage. The importance of the act of narrating is already felt, though maybe not as much as in future examples of the genre.

³ Which also reinforces one of my earlier statements, namely that in this genre one often encounters stereotypical or archetypal figures.

These are some ancient examples of sea stories, and even if they cannot be fixed with any certainty as originating points of the genre ship novel, it causes no difficulty to recognize some fundamental elements in them that are still pretty popular in modern texts of the same kind. These can vary from archetypal figures or scenes to the usual pattern and mechanism of sea novels, at times even showing signs of the delicate and particular narrative methods observable in modern narratives. Following a chronological order, next I examine some of the earliest modern examples of the genre, because very often, they have such a strong influence on later texts that it is comparable only to that of mythical or biblical instances.

First Modern Examples and Their Impact on the Genre

The modern English novel as such, as well as the birth of the modern hero, is often dated from 1719, the year when Daniel Defoe's most famous novel *Robinson Crusoe* was published. Due to this fortuitous coincidence, we do not have to search for the first modern example of ship novels, even though *Robinson Crusoe* is more like an island novel (the existence of which genre cannot really be questioned either). In any case, this sea story has the same structure as those mentioned before and analysed below, with the only difference that most of the time between leaving the homeland and returning to it after a series of adventures is spent on a deserted island. The irresistible original title summarizes the entire plot in a similar fashion to how I did the same with the story of Noah: *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures of Robinson Crusoe, Of York, Mariner: Who lived Eight and Twenty Years, all alone in an un-inhabited Island on the Coast of America, near the Mouth of the Great River of Oroonoke; Having been cast on Shore by Shipwreck, wherein all the Men perished but himself. With an Account how he was at last as strangely deliver'd by Pyrates.* The author holds out the promise of *adventures* to the reader, of a man whose origins and occupation are given, the title also including the seemingly superabundant detail about the precise location of the un-inhabited island, and the way how the protagonist gets there and (after twenty-eight years) away from it. The title advertises the book as a factual nautical narrative with a shipwreck and pirates – some elements that will very often recur in popular representatives of the genre and high-brow texts alike. Even changing the setting from a ship to an island is not rare, it is enough to think of H. G. Wells's *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*, Robert Merlé's *The Island*, or even some of the episodes in Álvaro Mutis's *The Adventures and Misadventures of Maqroll*.

Much less popular is Defoe's next novel, *Captain Singleton* (1720),⁴ which is also an adventure story, its first half set in Africa and the second on board of a pirate ship. The theme of piracy has developed into one of the most frequent components in sea stories intended for a juvenile audience. Also, *Captain Singleton* might be just one of the first fictitious works in which covering huge distances in the African continent is accompanied by some drastic inner changes of the protagonist – a trope that appears all over the spectrum of the genre, from Jules Verne's *Dick Sand, a Captain at Fifteen* (1878) to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899).

Another early text which today has achieved a quasi-mythical status is Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The ballad uses a narrative framework which is just as important as the inner story itself. The rime corresponds to the formula of ship novels in many major aspects: first of all, the tragic "adventure," or rather experience of the Mariner is placed in a plot following a linear line; it begins when he sails from home with the crew and ends when he returns with the hermit. Between the two he undergoes an immense change, something irreversible. The framework itself, however, operates with a cyclical logic. We learn that the Mariner has to retell his story again and again to absolute strangers, partly in an attempt to ease his conscience and also to make a lasting impact on the audience with his story. It is not by chance that he chooses his listener with special care, an act which could be well explained applying the theories of transference.⁵ The Wedding Guest is paralysed until the story is over, at which point he becomes "a sadder and a wiser man" (Coleridge), that is, together with the story, he inherits the Mariner's traumatic experience. The change of

⁴ Using the term in a loose sense, Bakhtin categorises *Captain Singleton* (along with another of Defoe's novels, *Colonel Jack*) as a picaresque novel (126). The picaresque novel as such resembles the ship novel genre in several ways, and might be called one of the closest "relatives" of it along with island novels.

⁵ In his book, *Narrative Ethics*, Zachary Newton starts introducing his theory with the Ancient Mariner's example, and devotes an entire chapter to the transference analysis of *Lord Jim*. Furthermore, he deals with other sea stories as well, such as *Robinson Crusoe*, and Melville's *Benito Cereno*.

personality caused by the horrors of the voyage is passed on, which really seems to underline the cyclicity of the narrative framework. What happens is exactly that, being traumatized, the Mariner is stuck in his otherwise linear story. As it is known, metaphysical and supernatural factors passivize the story, but they still leave the cause and effect logic visible. The only unexplainable moment is that of the Mariner shooting the albatross, and from that point on whatever follows is the direct consequence of previous events, and in part, of the unmotivated slaying.

The early texts mentioned in this chapter had such a strong and lasting influence on the ship novel genre that in this respect they are comparable only to the biblical and mythological stories discussed above. They are more or less present in all later ship novels, and many of their main features can be easily recognized in later narratives. For instance, *Robinson Crusoe* starts like a Curriculum Vitae, and the original title promises *The Life and Strange Surprising Adventures* of the narrator. It cannot be stated that each and every ship novel embraces the whole life story of its protagonist, not necessarily, but they are definitely either about crucial, life-changing happenings that befall the hero at sea, or, in more self-reflexive texts, as in Golding's trilogy, they question whether a sea voyage necessarily changes the life course and personality of someone – as suggested by the majority of the literary texts belonging to the genre. At the very end of *Fire Down Below*, the last instalment of the trilogy, the main character Mr Talbot observes:

[...] remembering all those old acquaintances – enemies who in retrospect now seem to be friends. They came up one by one, some I had forgotten entirely – Jacobs, Manley, yes, Howell. I seemed to touch them all with my mind, one by one, Bowles, Celia Brocklebank, Zenobia, little Pike, Wheeler, Bates, Colley – and so on, from Captain Anderson down. It was a curious exercise. I found that I could remember them without much emotion – even Lieutenant Summers. Even Mr and Mrs Prettiman.

In *Acts of Attention; Figure and Narrative in Postwar British Novels*, Béneyei Tamás also says that “[t]he voyage as a whole, thus, seems to be the repetition of the untellable, unintegrable bits within it. It is something that happened to Talbot but something that remains incomprehensible, an alien, shapeless lump in his life. In terms of the events of his life, his political career [...], the voyage made no difference whatsoever: he goes to the Antipodes only to return immediately” (169). Indeed, he returns to where he started from as soon as possible; he draws back from going over. Robinson might just want to do the very same, for he also keeps asking himself why he had to leave his home at all, why he wanted to be away from it, and what he expected from going out to sea. These questions often recur in ship novels, and for instance Malcolm Lowry’s first novel, *Ultramarine* (1933) is organised around these dilemmas. Dana Hilliot leaves his wealthy family and girlfriend behind, and signs up as ordinary seaman on the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Noone can see his motivation, not even himself, the only thing he knows is that he wants acknowledgement from his fellow crewmen. Feeling an outsider on board, he gradually grows aware that what he did was completely illogical, and starts questioning himself, not very differently from how Robinson does on his island.

Coleridge’s ballad relies heavily upon the narrative frame, highlighting the importance of telling these stories. Also, it shows the sea as a radically different experience, known only to those who have been on a voyage. Yet, those who have not can get a taste through directly hearing the story from the experienced seaman, someone who has already *gone over*, and transgressed the boundaries of ordinary life marked by the shores.⁶ To illustrate how strongly the szujet works in sea novels, one could mention Joseph Conrad’s Marlow, who is a sailor himself, but usually appears as a collector and teller of stories, usually recounting the

⁶ Perhaps this is the very reason why transference and narrating are of distinguished importance in the genre – since the narrator has been *over there*, we cannot understand his story, because it is untellable, but can be passed on in a transferential way.

adventures of others (as in *Lord Jim*, or *Heart of Darkness*) and much less frequently some of his own (as in his short-story *Youth* about himself as a young sailor in his early twenties, first time being Second Officer, sailing towards Bangkok and surviving the burning down of their ship). Álvaro Mutis's *The Adventures and Misadventures of Maqroll* gives the impression that the real life author is identical to the narrator of the novel, who is obsessed with collecting the adventure stories of his globe-trotter friend Maqroll. At some point of every episode he informs us how he got acquainted with the story, when and where he met Maqroll the last time, or when he heard something new about him. He is an entirely Marlowian character, more of a teller than a participant, with the only main difference that he is not generally interested in all sea stories, but "specialized" only to Maqroll's life. Andrea Barrett's *The Voyage of the Narwhal* (1998) also makes an extensive use of the narrating situation; moreover, it is a competition of different narratives all throughout the story, and makes this materially visible. Without going into details, let it suffice that every document, including the ship's log, newspapers, the scholars' and researchers' diaries, wildlife illustrations and publications, is placed in a power scale, and any conflict between two characters is decided by who has higher authority. Barrett spectacularly literalizes the strength of narratives, very similarly to how William Golding does it in his *To the Ends of the Earth* sea trilogy, especially in the first book, entitled *Rites of Passage*. By this point, the title itself might come as a tell-tale sign of the genre, and I chose to analyse this novel in detail in order to show how strongly language and narratives can guide the plot in sea stories.

The Power-Play of Rhetoric and Narratives in William Golding's *Rites of Passage*

The first book of William Golding's *To the End of the Earth* trilogy, entitled *Rites of Passage* (1980) is written in the style of early nineteenth century travelogues. The narrator protagonist Edmund Talbot is a young aristocratic passenger on an unnamed old British warship sailing to the Antipodes, and he records the happenings on board in a journal, which he keeps in order to entertain his wealthy and influential godfather. To make his journal more exciting than a simple travel log, Mr Talbot drifts towards more coherent and cohesive forms. Already when recording the first few days, he shows interest in imitating novelists of the eighteenth century, and later – as a result of some dreadful events – he starts referring to the ship as to a theatre,⁷ and their situation as a drama, or at times, as to a farce. The unique setting, or rather, the company prescribes and requires numerous adjustments from Mr Talbot; most conspicuously, he needs to get acquainted with the sailors' vocabulary. Although it can be said that he succeeds in this field, he regularly ends up disobeying the ship's code. Different uses of language and registers clash throughout the novel, which leads to a tragic power-play of rhetoric and narratives between Mr Talbot, Reverend Colley and Captain Anderson.

Mr Talbot can hardly make up his mind about the narrative's genre; he is writing it with the original intention of amusing his godfather, to let him live again through the eventful journal (Golding 11), but very often, especially in the first third of the text, Mr Talbot compares his records to the works of the first English novelists. He states in the very beginning that already as a child, he was much more attracted to “sentimental Goldsmith and

⁷ In an interview, Golding explains that the novel is “pretty theatrical in a way,” since it is founded on an actual historical incident, and he felt the need to invent the circumstances in which it is possible for a man to die of shame. For this, the ship had to be turned into a theatre where the parson could exhibit himself (Baker 132).

Richardson than lively old Fielding and Smollett” (3), but as he is getting more and more practiced in keeping his journal, he starts to disbelieve even his favourites:

I cannot give, nor would you wish or expect, a moment by moment description of my journey! I begin to understand the limitations of such a journal as I have time to keep. I no longer credit Mistress *Pamela*'s pietistic accounts of every shift in her calculated resistance to the advances of her master! I will get myself up, relieved, shaved, breakfasted in a single sentence. Another shall see me on deck in my oilskin suit.

(28)

This quote shows that he realizes the difference between a journal or diary and a novel quite early. Though Richardson, just like the majority of English novelists of the time, claimed that what he published was not fiction, but a “real” document originally written by a flesh-and-blood woman,⁸ Mr Talbot becomes aware of the problematic borderline between reality and fiction, and at the same time, also of the liberties available in recording the happenings of the day. He knows that he can make his chapters as short as some of Laurence Sterne's if he wishes to do so (72), or he can imitate a *romancier* if it enables him to give a more appropriate and expressive description of Captain Anderson (162). The same attitude is present in Mr Colley's letter as well; surprisingly enough, we learn that he is familiar not only with the Scriptures and the Classics (196), but also with “profane literature,” and compares his withdrawal to the cabin (his *kingdom* as he calls) to Robinson Crusoe's loneliness (209).

As tension grows, the ship becomes “theatrical” for Mr Talbot, and he sees himself as a “messenger” who will report the sometimes dramatic, sometimes farcical or melodramatic events (104).⁹ It is only by the end of the novel, after the funeral of Mr Colley, that he says:

⁸ This trend appeared later in Hungarian sentimental prose, cf. Kármán József's *Fanni hagyományai* (1794) – the author claims that the manuscripts were sent into his office, and arranging the text was his sole contribution.

⁹ William Nelson claims that the whole novel becomes grotesque because the perception which it embodies “differs from that of either comedy or tragedy in that it sees man as an inseparable mixture in a universe which denies him both dignity and certain knowledge. The ludicrous is combined with the pathetic, hideous evil with triviality, and every sacrifice, including martyrdom, tends toward self-serving melodrama” (193).

“Life is a formless business, Summers. Literature is much amiss in forcing a form on it!” (265) This epiphany is subtly signalled by his choice of a letter for the last chapter: “&”. At the beginning of the text (when it still resembles a journal rather than a novel) he starts to number the entries following the calendar, then he reluctantly introduces letters to mark the unknown quantity of days spent onboard (X, Y and Z), and when literature takes over (when the dramatic part is described), he chooses Greek letters with symbolic meaning (e.g. chapter Omega tells the story of the night when Reverend Colley got drunk). Thus he arrives at the conclusion that to loosen the strict form of literature when trying to convey life, he needs to avoid unnecessary or forced ordering devices like giving serial numbers to the described events based simply on chronology, or trying to moralize in his writing. The ampersand signifies that any point of time is connected both to the past and the future, and becomes meaningful only in relation to them. Life cannot be cut up into slices, the recorded part may stand on its own, but there is always more to it: the unrecorded events of the same period *and* the mental processes *and* the sensations *and* the past which grew into the present and allowed it to happen *and* the future, and so on. As Mr Talbot formulates: “I might have headed this section ‘addenda’ but that would have been dull – far too, too dull! For we have come to an end, there is nothing more to be said. I mean – there is, of course, there is the daily record, but my journal, I found on looking back through it, had insensibly turned to the record of a drama – Colley’s drama” (264).¹⁰

Before Mr Talbot and Reverend Colley could be initiated into seamen’s life, they need to go through the same vicissitudes, and both can take the first obstacles relatively easily. As long as they do not develop “sea legs” and overcome frequent illnesses at sea (e.g. colic), they cannot focus on their writings. More importantly, without getting acquainted with the sailors’

¹⁰ Mr Talbot hopes that his narrative will be known by the title *The Fall and Lamentable End of Robert James Colley together with a Brief Account of his Thalassian Obsequies*.

vocabulary, they can hardly understand the crew's life. Both enjoy learning Tarpaulin language (28, 65), moreover, Mr Talbot laments "What a pity this noble vehicle of expression has so small a literature!" (74). Falconer's *Marine Dictionary* holds the promise of perfect translation between the two registers for Mr Talbot; with its help he can identify and name the ship's parts more easily than by asking the crew members, can also expand his vocabulary, but when he consults it wondering "what is meant by the expression 'Badger Bag'?" Falconer is silent" (84). Thus he gets no answer from it in a crucial moment, because soon afterwards Mr Colley, among a few other passengers, is hauled out from his cabin in a bag, up to the deck where he is publicly humiliated. As the novel reinforces it at several points, perfect translation between languages (and class – since that is the British language according to Mr Summers) is impossible. The safety offered by the *Marine Dictionary* proves to be an illusion in the face of physical violence.

These linguistic differences and clashes between the passengers and the crew are shown not only in brutal scenes, but also in comic situations.¹¹ Since Mr Talbot is not an adept in sea life, and also somewhat naive, it takes him some time to realize that he cannot address the sailors as he does his fellow aristocrats, and should not expect them to converse with the same eloquence. Even speaking to the officers (with the exceptions of Captain Anderson and Mr Summers) is better to be done in plain, literal language, as he remarks: "Mr Cumbershum did not appear to take my point. I saw that my language must not be figurative with such a man and rephrased it" (22). Mr Talbot may sound patronizing, but in fact, these uneducated men can be more use aboard a ship than any aristocrat. Another comic scene emphasises this point: Mr Talbot is speaking to his servant Willis (one of the lowest ranked crew members on the

¹¹ Virginia Tiger even goes as far as saying that "*Rites of Passage* is a funny book. Golding makes good use of his satiric intention to castigate social snobberies and vices in the manner of the picaresque voyages of Defoe, Fielding, Swift, and Smollett" (220).

ship) on the fifth day, and he casually inserts a quote in Ancient Greek (translates to “the wide back of the sea”) in the middle of his sentence, to which Willis replies he does not speak French. Again, in a somewhat patronizing tone, Mr Talbot asks “What do you know then, lad?” and the answer excellently shows how useless the knowledge of Ancient Greek, French or any other foreign language is on a ship compared to all the practical things Willis can do: “The rigging sir, the parts of the ship, bends and hitches, the points of the compass, the marks of the leadline to take a bearing off a point of land or a mark and to shoot the sun” (35). Seemingly, Mr Talbot is impressed and says “We are in good hands I see,” only to be followed by another enumeration from Willis. This scene does not simply show that the practical things Willis is capable of doing are more important on a ship than Mr Talbot’s knowledge of Ancient Greek, but since the latter cannot understand what Willis means by “shooting the sun,” it also becomes evident that these sailors use figurative language and phrases that Mr Talbot himself cannot understand. The meaning of such expressions is as natural to Willis as Ancient Greek to Mr Talbot, no wonder he says: “Even a land-lubber I ask your pardon knows what shooting the sun is” (35). There is a mutual need to decode what the other is saying; language use in itself is not enough to overpower either side, the abuse of authority along with it leads to tragic consequences in *Rites of Passage*.

Throughout the entire novel one can notice how written documents influence the flow of events. The power of rhetoric, or at other times, the fragility of eloquence is made salient. Three journal-like documents are being written simultaneously on the ship: Edmund Talbot’s journal which becomes the final text we read once finished, the second is Reverend Colley’s letter to his sister,¹² which is taken by Mr Talbot and “glued” (184) into his own narrative, and

¹² As the story proceeds and the parson’s letter becomes more and more gruesome, he expresses his volition not to send the letter to his sister, but rather God should become the addressee: “Already what I have written would be too painful for you – for her – eyes. It must be amended, altered, softened; and yet – If not my sister then to

the third (the only one we have no direct access to!) is Captain Anderson's travel log. These three documents are considerably different in tone, content and use, but all are precious to the owner, and also powerful forces. Mr Talbot keeps his journal locked and hides it even from Mr Summers, Mr Colley calls the letter his only friend on the ship (212), and the Captain prefers to administer the primary official document of the ship under his command. These aspects alone would probably not bring forth any conflict, but the three characters have further motivations behind their actions. Initially, Mr Talbot aims to fulfil his obligation to entertain his influential godfather, but as he notes already at the end of the second day, he is not writing about what he originally wanted to (18). His attention is diverted to the Captain¹³ once his nausea is over, and maybe feeling a bit too self-important (just like Mr Colley somewhat later) he seeks Captain Anderson's company. By doing so, that is, disturbing him in the fore-castle, Mr Talbot violates his "Standing Orders" (the Word of the Captain, located near the living quarters in multiple copies, applying to everyone on the ship) and he is warned for the first time, but not harshly, for the Captain knows about his journal and his wealthy godfather. Fearing that he would be discharged by higher authorities, he wants to make a good impression on the godfather through Mr Talbot's journal. However, he has no such reason to hold back against the parson, and, enraged, he cruelly humiliates Mr Colley for the same transgression of the Standing Orders. We learn that Mr Talbot was advised by his godfather to practice the art of flattery, which is of course another telling example indicating that the importance of eloquence is a major issue in the text. The Captain never gets to read a single word of the journal, but feels threatened by it. To avoid being kept in check, he sends Mr Summers as a messenger to notify Mr Talbot that the journal "cannot be allowed to continue"

whom? To THEE? Can it be that like THY saints of old (particularly Saint Augustine) I am addressing THEE, OH MOST MERCIFUL SAVIOUR?" (208)

¹³ We shall also note that on the whole, the parson's story is gradually taking over the narrative; it dominates the journal by the end even though Mr Talbot glues the letter into his manuscript and not the other way around.

(148). Though Mr Talbot refuses to obey, he is surprised; one day before he was thinking about how the repentant Captain would spectacularly approach the dying parson in his hutch, only to get into the journal in a favourable sight (145).

In the Badger Bag scene, the eloquence, the verbal power of Mr Colley is literally demolished. Whenever he attempts to speak in order to defend himself, to protest and stop the seamen's madness, his mouth "was at once filled with such nauseous stuff I gag and am like to vomit remembering it [...] and when I would not open my mouth the stuff was smeared over my face" (237). He is supposed to mediate the Word of God, but he is brutally denied. He sinks into lethargy, but gets out of his cabin with great hopes later when called, naively accepts the rum as a toast for reconciliation, then ends up in such a shameful state that he rather wills himself to death than leaving his hutch again. During his last, motionless days, Mr Talbot cannot cheer him up or convince him to come outside, though even then, he is confident in his rhetoric. From the parson's letter we learn that Mr Talbot could have proved his skills by offering his company to him earlier. Regular conversations could have saved the man, and probably this is what Mr Summers meant by the term *Noblesse oblige* (180), not a vague word like *Justice* into which Mr Talbot translates both *Noblesse oblige* and *Fair Play*. In the end, he cannot do justice to the parson; Captain Anderson has the right over the official record of his death. He records in his travel log that *intemperance* destroyed the parson, and the cause of death was *low fever*, as opposed to Mr Talbot's final statement that "Men can die of shame" (278). However, "truth" (either regarding the exact circumstances of Mr Colley's death, or a final moral of the story) cannot be put together from all these different documents and narratives, and "this turns out to be in line with the narrative strategy of the last part of *Rites of Passage*, with this crucial difference that it will seek to make the reader aware of what 'truth' can be told, and what can never be" (Gregor 116).

At the beginning of chapter Omega, Mr Talbot offers the possibility of a big allegorical reading. He sees the Captain and the parson as elements of British society: Captain Anderson standing for the State, and Mr Colley representing the Church. He wonders which whip can be more effective on the people, the material cat-o'-nine-tails or "the *Platonic Idea* of a whip, the threat of hell fire?" (106) "Philosophy and religion" he wanders, "what are they when the wind blows and the water gets up in lumps?" (16) – possibly meaning that he and Mr Colley are both powerless against Captain Anderson on his ship. J. H. Stape argues that the complete sea trilogy can be read with special focus on "the nature of social institutions, and the individual's place in them" (226), but I believe that this series of clashes between different languages and registers contributed just as much to the final tragedy, and without this competition of narratives, the parson's death would not have occurred.

Although the first book of the trilogy is the most language-centred, Talbot's old and new diaries, and the impossibility of translation between different linguistic registers are organising points both in *Close Quarters* and *Fire Down Below* as well. These two factors lead Charles Summers's fate after meeting Talbot. After some misunderstandings and bitterness, the latter ensures the first mate of his patronage, emphasizing that in his diary written to his godfather he appears in a favourable light. The power of the diary in itself would probably be more than enough for the promotion of Charles, but sticking to his word, Talbot sends a letter to his godfather from Sydney Cove, in which he is asking for the commodore rank for his friend. During the all-night duties they spend together, we learn that Charles has his origins in the lower-classes, never enjoyed the patronage of influential people, and everything he has achieved so far is due to hard work, and, as he emphasizes, even more to his luck. He sees his promotion to cadet simply as a fortunate event – as an ordinary

seaman, he was reading the *Bible*, when an admiral visited their ship and seeing the young man's fervour, took him to his own ship as a new-made cadet.

From the beginning of Charles's advancements, written documents has played a great part, especially those conveying a higher authority or influence than his own origins, including a scroll, the temporary governorate paper brought by Talbot, which marks his promotion to commodore. The epaulette waiting too long for his promotion to captain looks pale on his. This last step on the naval ladder is in contrast with his background, and thus can be interpreted as an act of transgression, which could happen with the help of Talbot, but cannot be maintained because of the impossibility of translating between languages and class. Charles knew this very well when saying that the English class system means the English language, and eventually he becomes the physical victim of his own truth: following the French lieutenant Benét's advice, burning-hot staples were hammered into the aperture of the foremast, which help the ship into safe harbour, but as Charles suspected all along, they have not cooled down. The fire down below starts spreading when the ship is already under his command, engulfing her in flames in the port with the captain on board. After the nearly one-year-long journey, the award of Charles is not a lady's heart like in Talbot's case, but the long awaited promotion, which can come to pass in spite of the death of the godfather. Based on Charles's death, this last step forward was beyond the possible highest rank available to him, and as a result of his transgression, he falls, and in the burning corridors he vanishes away as though he has never been (Golding, *Fire* 282).

When seeing Mrs Prettiman for the last time, Talbot receives advice regarding the structure and genre build-up of his diary: "The voyage has been a considerable part of your whole life, sir. Do not refine upon its nature. As I told you, it was not an Odyssey. It is no type, emblem, metaphor of the human condition. It is, or rather it was, what it was. A series of

events” (Golding, *Fire* 275) Maybe Mrs Prettiman is right to discard the possibility of allegorical readings, but she ignores the necessarily fictionalizing nature of writing, and also its power, which has been made visible countless times in the three volumes. Considering the consequences brought forth by the diary and other pieces of writing, Talbot’s statement might be more than (using Mrs Prettiman’s phrase) “stuff and nonsense”: “I think there has been death in my hands” (276). On the other hand, it is fine literature – as he expresses at the ends of both the second and third volumes, now he sees the voyage as a distant, somewhat unrealistic part of his life, and the series of events recorded in the diaries make up a trilogy of novels, which three splendid printed volumes he often finds himself envisaging with gusto (Golding, *Qualm* 281).

Sea Folklore and Spatiality in Ship Novels

“For a shipwreck one must have a sea, but which particular sea (in the geographical and historical sense) makes no difference at all.”
(Bakhtin 100)

After devoting quite a bit of time to diaries and logs, it is only fair to mention that non-fictional texts, such as logbooks, journals, registers and diaries written by travellers or common sailors were also forerunners of the genre. Not aspiring to literary success or fame, these texts still contribute to our topic, and must have done so to the research of those few writers who decided to write a ship novel without having been professional seamen for at least a short duration in their lives. These are mostly very informative documents, but they can still carry adventure-like elements. Whether they contain features resembling the picaresque novel or not, they often include one of the most fascinating qualities of sea novels, namely, sea folklore – some very early “sights” of legendary creatures and phenomena were recorded at length in such texts, so much that with some exaggeration, we might call these documents bestiaries rather than ordinary diaries.

As it has already been suggested (borrowing the words of Jurij Lotman), spreading out mythological texts into a linear narrative with a plot results in at least two major changes. One of these is the strengthening of *sjuzet*, and the particular importance the act of narrating gains. Telling stories, and recounting the tales of the sea appear as guiding marks for plots, just as we have seen when briefly discussing the works of Coleridge, Conrad, or in more detail, of Golding. The other consequence is that monolithic characters break up into couples, doubles, or groups. The frequency and importance of double figures or *doppelgangers* are not as high in sea novels as in, let us say, gothic or crime fiction, but nevertheless, sometimes they can be easily identified, and the frequency of such instances is not entirely independent of which literary period we are looking at. Much more often than that, what we have in the genre is a

beautifully stereotypical range of crew members. With a slight exaggeration, one could say that stock characters are not alien even from some of the mostly highly esteemed representatives of the genre.¹⁴ After reading a number of novels and short-stories belonging to the genre, it is certainly possible to make at least a rough sketch of some ranks on board a ship. First of all, usually the ship's captain does not fill either the position of the protagonist, or the narrator. He is seen from the outside and mostly appears as a bad-tempered, strict, stubborn, reckless, at times intimidating and fanatic man (e.g. Captain Ahab, Captain Anderson, or Zeke Voorhees in *The Voyage of the Narwhal*). Second in rank, the first officer is mostly a very ambivalent character due to his position. He is the one who is supposed to have almost total control on deck, but because of the authority of the captain, his orders can be contradicted, which indicates his frailty to the crew – this is exactly what causes the downfall of Charles Summers from *Close Quarters* on, and also the reason why Starbuck in *Moby Dick* is an utterly powerless figure, who cannot change the course of their voyage even though he is aware of the potential dangers of Ahab's zealous chase after the white whale. We could go on listing how basically all the important ranks and positions follow a scheme, but the pattern is already clear and drawing an imaginary fleet would be redundant here. For readers of ship novels, these naval ranks are easy to conceptualize, and they work similarly to how we tend to imagine figures like blacksmiths or thieves, who, in theory, can be diverse, but for some reason the way they live in the mind of the public could be expressed with one single picture. Of course there are times when this theory of stereotypical characters does not hold water, there are surely exceptions, but it can hardly be denied that all these figures have

¹⁴ Just as in *Lord Jim*, where Jim gets a second chance in life thanks to Stein, who sends him to the "custom-made" made island of romance, Patusan. There he might take the position of the hero coming from the outside, gaining the trust of the colossal, old and wise chief, Doramin, befriending his son, who is also the military leader of the men (typical warrior figure), and falling in love with Jewel, a beautiful lady, whose name says it all, just as intended.

leaked into less famous and acknowledged examples of the genre as well;¹⁵ they are associated with the naval environment, almost taken for granted, and as the result of this, they can be easily identified in popular sea stories, also in cartoons, or in movies.

There are, however, some other fields where mythical patterns and forms are preserved. No matter which century we take a modern example from, the environment in sea novels is heavily loaded with mythological elements, something that is best described with the term “sea folklore.” This is a specific, very rich setting filled with legendary creatures, effects and phenomena. Everyone knows stories about the Leviathan, or Kraken, Nessie, Davy Jones, *The Flying Dutchman* and other ghost ships, and generally seamen are portrayed as superstitious people. Moreover, even if some on board are not openly shown in that way, the validity of those legends mentioned above is never questioned. These stock characters, and the strong presence of sea folklore itself, as Northrop Frye says about archetypes in general, connect one text within the genre to another, thus favouring the unity and integrity of our literary experience (87). Indeed, we can also find countless examples of archetype-like scenes and images in ship novels, like the sinking ship, an iceberg, a huge vortex pulling down the vessel, being frozen into an ice-field, grounding, caught in a huge storm, and so on. These are all threatening forces of nature, and one could freely try to analyse them, like for instance how the lull in *Close Quarters* influences the plot, and on the most basic level, why it is disturbing to be utterly still on the ever flowing water, but these overwhelming images do not really require any explanation. Their effect is elemental, and they command awe immediately.

It should be made clear that even though the sea is a place for mythical or legendary creatures, they are not amassed and piled up there without logic or restraint. The main point is

¹⁵ The same tendency can be observed in other plot-driven genres, for example in romances, in adventure stories, or even in detective fiction.

that a special set of conventional naval myths is given here, and new elements cannot be arbitrarily added to it. For instance, there are no shape-shifters, succubi or fairies in sea stories; simply because they do not belong to this environment, but there might be some other creatures that fulfil almost the same role in a different form, and under a different name. Instead of a fairy, one can meet the will-o'-the-wisp (not exclusively a naval phenomenon, since it often appears around marshes too), and sirens charm the sailors instead of a succubus. These elements had been present in the forerunners of the genre thousands of years ago, are not given to change, and do not show signs of disappearance. Modern and contemporary novels, films, musical compositions and other texts use these even today; countless rewritings were made of these stories, and when they are not central in term of importance, they can still be present as quite dominant themes.¹⁶

Archetypal scenes, however, can join this set of conventions more easily. Noone can really deny that the tragedy of the *Titanic* reinforced the image of the monstrous iceberg as a threatening force at sea in the public imagination, neither that the film with the same title (made more than 80 years after the real life event) further reinforced this. The sea has always been seen as a mysterious agent, much more than just a passive environment over which people can take control. Several legends (like the Bermuda, or as others call it, the Devil's Triangle) attached to it exemplify this very well, and these recurring images can create mental connections between the texts dealing with the topic. As Northrop Frye articulates: “[b]ecause of the larger communicative context of education, it is possible for a story about the sea to be archetypal, to make a profound imaginative impact, on a reader who has never been out of Saskatchewan” (99). And indeed, these archetypes and sets of images have been

¹⁶ We may think of how differently the legend of *The Flying Dutchman* is handled by Wagner, by Füst Milán in *A feleségem története*, or by the film *Pirates of the Caribbean* (2003).

communicating very effectively for centuries, regardless of the recipient's background (be it cultural, social, class, or even nationality, age, and so forth).

Sea novels are very much aware of all these, and they make an extensive use of the elements taken from sea folklore. It is obvious that the common ground in ship novels is the sea. It is not by chance that even in the Bakhtin quotation used as an epigraph for this chapter, the basic requirement for a shipwreck is not a ship, but a sea. Of course, a ship is needed as well, but our attention is deliberately directed to the environment. The usual portrayal of the sea, its importance and inherent metaphysical meaning, along with how it appears in relation to the crew of a ship, to individuals, is what the next section will focus on.

Being at Home, and Homelessness on the Sea

Northrop Frye says that the study of genres is based on formal analogies (83), and so far we have discussed a good number of these specific to the ship novel genre; in the following paragraphs this search continues based on Bakhtin's chronotope theory. He argues that "[i]t can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions, for in literature the primary category in the chronotope is time" (85). Not forgetting the importance of adventure time operating within texts belonging to the genre, we could say that spatiality in sea novels is just as important, or even more important than time, for the most salient factor connecting all the texts of the genre is the sea, which, as a result of being regularly used, gains a set of qualities and attributes. Its personification is probably one of the most common tropes in the genre. From another perspective, it is possible to say that the factors of time and space fuse into one, and the whole "takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot and

history” (Bakhtin 84). This apposite idea of Bakhtin might remind one how the inner and mental developments or changes of the characters follow the spatial course of the voyage, how sea stories are about the “sea-change” brought forth by the journey.

First of all, it should be noted that the sea is an abstract space. It is cut off from the field of everyday experience, and for the vast majority of people this exotic, peregrine environment remains alien even if they sail out a few times. It is a place outside everyday life, a very restricted one where one’s space is limited to the ship. The vessel takes on the role of one’s house without allowing him to leave it, and compressing all her passengers densely. Usually, members of the crew are separated from the passengers and tourists, and in most cases, one can only avoid the crowded quarters for a rather huge amount of money.¹⁷ Sea life appears as radically different from the mainland way of life and habits, and in spite of lacking comfort, the ship is still the closest substitute for a home. There is also a kind of everyday life of a ship – when everyone is doing his regular duty; they are in the middle of their voyage and do not have to worry about disembarkation, paying-off or unloading, neither about bad weather at the moment, and so on. These calm moments, of course, are relatively rare and short in sea novels, partly because the genre needs progression and the development of events, and also because these descriptions of naval still life might not be the most entertaining pages for the readership. The significance of this alternative home becomes even clearer if we remember the superstitious nature of seamen, the threatening natural forces on sea, and the legendary monsters hiding in the depths. At times the sea is portrayed as something beautiful, and at these times it is a wonder to be *out there*, but much more often, people have to fight against its harsh conditions.

¹⁷ Probably most visible in Joseph O’Connor’s historical novel, *Star of the Sea* (2004).

The notion of the “sublime” explains this ambivalence, and perhaps also an important consequence present in sea stories, which is the unfamiliarity of the sea. It is not just an exotic, but also an alien and threatening environment. Passengers might get their “sea-legs” within a week, as Mr Talbot’s example shows, but in itself it is not nearly enough to feel at home in a ship. It is always important who is being at home on the sea; it shows some fundamental differences between seamen and “land-lubbers.” Examining some commonly used metaphors leads us towards the same idea. It is as if there were a racial difference between the “Children of the Sea” and those who never set sail and thus are not taken in by “Our mighty mother!”, as Buck Mulligan says in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* quoting George Russell, and also referring to Swinburne. It is not easy to identify whether it is a self-implemented distinction created by seamen ages ago, or a result of the actual experience of sailing and its radical otherness, but these two factors are certainly tied together, and a pattern has been built out of it in sea novels.

Taking a closer look at some literary examples in order to see how this element works in fiction, Malcolm Lowry’s *Ultramarine* is a fine starting point. Dana Hilliot strives to become one of the shipmen, wants to be accepted in their circles. His hopes, however, are vague from the beginning, for he is taken to the harbour by his wealthy father, in an expensive car. This is exactly how *not* to start integrating into a crew – the obvious signs of his higher class origins do not escape anyone on board, and even after leaving the mainland, they cannot view Dana as one of them. Well-to-do people never enlist on a ship, they can choose from much better jobs on the land, and Dana’s counter-example evokes suspicion in the crew. It is not easy to accept that he enlisted only for the sake of adventure and the romance of sea life living in his imagination. This novel effectively shows how conventional images living in the public’s mind influence the general judgement of sea life, and also that many of these images cannot

be encountered on one's first voyage, if at all. It is, in a way, a deglamourizing method, and it is not by hard work that Dana can win the sympathy of others, especially of the cook, Andy, but by insulting him heavily in a drunk and enraged state. On the whole, this partial success is not in the least convincing; Dana's place is clearly not on board of a ship. He goes on a journey on the *Oedipus Tyrannus* in search of adventure, a rite of passage, a sea change, a chance to "officially" grow up in everyone's eyes, but the sea is just not his realm, not his place to prove himself. Realizing how he was led by some common fantasies, he spends most of his time wondering why he signed up and left his beloved ones behind, and what he expected at all.

Having or not having a family is usually an important factor in these texts. Families tie seamen to the land, but those who do not have any relatives, or view family and settlement as alien concepts often choose an alternative way of life. There is an undeniable metaphysical stake in spending one's entire life at sea. Some radical examples would include Captain Ahab himself, who just before the final chase after Moby Dick confesses to Ishmael that he has spent only three days on land in the last four decades. He has no place to go home to, and has thus found a substitute in the ship. In fact, his strongest bond of all is the revenge driving him after Moby Dick. Still, he probably could not break up with his dire way of living even after destroying the whale. It seems only fitting that his enemy of mythical proportions hurls him down to the deeps, leaving Ishmael as the sole survivor to tell the tale. In addition, already in the first paragraph of the novel, we get to know when and why Ishmael himself goes to the sea:

[...] nothing particular to interest me on shore, I thought I would sail about a little and see the watery part of the world. It is a way I have of driving off the spleen, and regulating the circulation. Whenever I find myself growing grim about the mouth; whenever it is a damp, drizzly November in my soul; whenever I find myself involuntarily pausing before coffin warehouses, and bringing up the rear of

every funeral I meet; and especially whenever my hypos get such an upper hand of me, that it requires a strong moral principle to prevent me from deliberately stepping into the street, and methodically knocking people's hats off – then, I account it high time to get to sea as soon as I can

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It is clear that his motivations are very different from those of Ahab. He sees every voyage as an escape from real life, or a pause, a break in it. In other words, his life can be divided into two halves: one spent on the “watery part of the world,” the other on land. And the novel seems to reinforce this idea, because right when he signs up and leaves the shore on board of the *Pequod*, he ceases to be an active agent. He turns into a story-teller, never saying what he did on the ship, or how he contributed to catching a whale. He simply records the events, becomes a spectator immune to all physical affections, and left unscratched even by Moby Dick.

Another fairly radical example can be found in Joseph Conrad's *The Nigger of Narcissus*. There is an old seaman called Singleton serving on the ship – which name, of course echoes Defoe's character. Throughout the voyage he is of little importance, does not really have a huge impact on the flow of events. However, his superior experience on the sea and his prowess are shown several times. He completes a twenty-four-hour service during a huge storm, although he collapses right after. He seems to stand above the petty arguments and jestings of the riff-raff crew, and the proportion of days he has spent on sea and shore is comparable to Ahab's account (with the only difference that those few inland days he spent in utter and incessant drunkenness). Without a doubt, Singleton appears as the archetypal figure of the elderly seaman. Eventually, however, this glorified image of his gets destroyed on land, when the crew is paid off:

Singleton came up, venerable – and uncertain as to daylight; brown drops of tobacco juice hung in his white beard; his hands, that never hesitated in the great

light of the open sea, could hardly find the small pile of gold in the profound darkness of the shore. “Can’t write?” said the clerk, shocked. “Make a mark, then.” Singleton painfully sketched in a heavy cross, blotted the page. “What a disgusting old brute,” muttered the clerk. Somebody opened the door for him, and the patriarchal seaman passed through unsteadily, without as much as a glance at any of us.

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There is a reversed order of things at work on the mainland for him, darkness is on the shore, on the continent (think of the centre of Africa and London in *Heart of Darkness*), and it is at the “great light” of the sea where he knows the meaning of things and also where he is at home. To reinforce this huge contrast between the two territories, the vile Donkin is the next to get paid. Throughout the novel, he stands closest to filling the role of the villain; he shirks work on the ship, undermines the morale of the crew and encourages them to revolt against the officers. He arrogantly claims that “[n]o more bloomin’ sea fur me,” because he will find a job on shore, and since he can imitate good manners very well, he makes a good impression on the clerk, too – no surprise that the narrator remarks: he “appeared more at home than any of us” (132). When asking his former crew mates, no one agrees to go out and have a drink with him. He is irrecoverably rejected by the community of sea people; not that he really minds though.

Belonging to the land or the sea is pretty much to belong to an exclusive set – only one of them can be said of a person at the same time. There are figures like Marlow, who are not awkward inland, but their preferences are still clear. In his case, it is the collection of sea stories which makes his life meaningful. He has no family either, but has access to something like a substitute through all the stories he has gathered, and as the teller of these, his place is not very difficult to identify. Restlessness and wandering might be other key words when we are trying to understand this aspect of the genre. Seamen are driven to the sea very often because they feel homeless on the land. One of the most genuine examples of this can be

found in the figure of Alvaro Mutis's Maqroll. He travels all around the world aimlessly, accepting the lowest jobs. He does not have a valid passport, his birthplace is unknown to all, has many friends, men and women alike, but they are all related to sailing, or this wandering way of living. Not feeling at home anywhere in the world is his most prevalent feature, he is truly like those tramp steamers on which he occasionally works – taking jobs here and there across the world, wandering from one port to the next without a fixed headquarters or knowing what awaits him in the next city. All his stations are temporary and the reader is aware of this, just like the forgiving women friends and lovers of Maqroll. Everyone knows that it is hopeless to try to stop him and make him settle, but the most important thing is that in spite of all these, he is never portrayed as an irresponsible man, but rather as someone who allows himself to be carefree because of his existential worries and because he feels the fragility of concepts like home and family. He is an amiable figure, who has learned to accept the hardships of life, and acts as if consciously paying a debt every time he goes through an ordeal.

Conclusion

The full merits of this topic are yet to be explored, but hopefully my searches show the richness of the genre. In ship novels, it is easy to identify literary archetypes, and interestingly enough, reading some texts of the Classical and Christian heritage, one can recognize several narrative patterns, archetypal figures or scenes which are also present in modern and contemporary examples of the genre. I drew up some parallels between ancient and modern texts using the symbolism of the Bible and Greek mythology, accepting Northrop Frye's statement about the structural principles of literature, and how they "are to be derived from archetypal and anagogic criticism, the only kinds that assume a larger context of literature as a whole" (134). Calling it a general truth might be an exaggeration, but ship novels usually have a pervasive mythical air. It might be due to the metaphysical importance of the journey, to transgressing the boundaries of everyday life and getting punished (or on rare occasions awarded) for it, to the extremely strong biblical and mythical images evoked during the reading experience, to the image, or at times, personification of the sea as it lives in the collective imagination, and also to the enchanting sea folklore which saturates the environment of the entire journey and way of living.

The earliest modern examples are most helpful in analysing the narrative typology of the genre, and I tried to emphasize how the act of telling has been significant since Defoe's and Coleridge's texts (and of course, already in the Classics). This feature has grown so salient that some sea novels discuss the importance of language and narrating as central themes. From this perspective, William Golding's *Rite of Passage* was examined in detail, but Andrea Barrett's *The Voyage of the Narwhal* is another notable example of the dominance of narrating, and a very similar analysis could have been made, probably with the most important difference being how the story refuses to end once the crew (except for the captain)

returns from Greenland, and instead starts thinking about how the written texts (logs, journals, diaries, and so on) shape the experience of the journey, and how they help to digest its horrors for the survivors.

By taking a closer look at sea folklore and the importance of the sea itself, I tried to show that sea stories are not simply Bildungsroman displaced to a watery environment. The sea is usually offered as an alternative space to those who are unsatisfied on land, or in other cases to those who are not bound to the continent by any personal relations. These often romanticized figures can find a substitute home at sea, and as it is suggested in Conrad's *The Nigger of Narcissus*, it is something to be *earned*, and not available to everyone. Without a doubt, the sea is an existential place, it is outside everyday existence, and this radical change of environment confronts travellers, tourists, pilgrims and inexperienced seamen alike. Dealing with this sudden shift in one's life, that is, going to sea in itself seems sufficient for a story; a good narrator can "spin a yard" from it. To me, this topic and the entire genre look inexhaustible, and so does the potential of research: we can reach back thousands of years for the first mythological forerunners, but sea stories are not absent from contemporary literature either, and beside countless other things, it would be probably rewarding to examine how these texts accustomed to former literary periods and different cultural environments.

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