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Five open boat narratives

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Introduction

Open-boat narratives relate experiences of suffering in a small lifeboat or on a precarious raft. In these stories, survivors attempt to translate what has happened to them into clear and ordered narrative. These accounts are not just interesting from a literal, survival point of view: as they suffer, these characters reveal the malleability of moral values and social ideologies. Literal openness to the elements (wind, rain, sun, sea, hunger, thirst) blurs into ideological openness, leading to a crisis of meaning. Despite the smallness of the boat and the relative simplicity of the setting, these stories comment on and engage broader concerns by distilling and intensifying existing political, social, and existential concerns. As such, this mode of storytelling has, from its historical origins in true accounts, endured well into modern times. This study is concerned with exploring how five authors have used open-boat narratives for their particular purposes, and begins with an overview of the enduring interest, through history, in shipwrecks and those who survive them.

This study is focused on five works of fiction, although the genre now known as shipwreck literature has its origin in true accounts of real survivors. These were published in huge numbers, both formally and informally. Individual cheap pamphlets strung across bookstore windows in the eighteenth century were known as 'string literature'; at the same time, there were multi-volume books that chronicled famous maritime battles and disasters, such as Archibald Duncan's *The Mariner's Chronicle*, published in 1804. In any form, shipwreck narratives have been incredibly popular with a variety of readers, from the general public, who loved the inherent drama and horror of these tales, to philosophical and religious readers who found, in shipwreck stories, rich metaphorical ground. One event could generate multiple accounts: a sensationalized pamphlet for the public, an academic chapter in a book about a country's naval history, or a didactic religious sermon proclaiming Providence at work. This level of engagement speaks to the power of the metaphor of shipwreck, and how people have consistently sought to 'grasp the movement of their existence… through a metaphoric of the perilous sea voyage' (in Blumenberg 1).

Shipwreck narratives are classified based on their content and not their form, which means that there are multiple genres and influences at work within them. Shipwreck stories, particularly survival stories, might embody the characteristics of wider literary forms, such as the epic hero, who undertakes a hazardous journey fraught with misadventure – we recall Odysseus, the great maritime epic hero. A shipwreck survivor might also be the embodiment

of man and his battle against nature, as in *Robinson Crusoe*. The perilous sea voyage can likewise be seen as the religious trial during which man is made perfect and comes closer to God through hardship and suffering. Many historical survivors characterized their experiences in this way, such as the men from the whaleship *Essex*. Man vs the sea recalls other epic battles of survival and their corresponding archetypal stories: man vs the mountain, vs the snow, vs the desert. The challenges and suffering of survival stories are endlessly and sometimes macabrely fascinating, as we witness human beings poised between life and death. When those people are in a group, we wait to see if they will band together or turn on one another.

For the purposes of this study, the specific maritime survival story under consideration is the 'open-boat narrative'. An open boat is any small vessel that has no deck; in other words, there is no barrier under which to shelter, and the inhabitants are literally 'open' to the elements. A makeshift raft could also be considered a kind of open boat, as are almost all historical lifeboats[1], which until the twentieth century, were commonly under-equipped and wildly unregulated.[2] These vessels provide a dynamic setting for a narrative. If the ship can be considered a microcosm of society, a stage on which a drama may be acted out, then an open boat is a smaller, often fractured, and more intense version of that stage. No one enters an open boat willingly; there is always a disaster or shipwreck that forces an arbitrary group of passengers and crew on board into the small vessel. This group is both exposed and confined: adrift on the vast and open expanse of the ocean, but uncomfortably trapped on a tiny, often overcrowded boat. Suffering is a given in these stories, perhaps beginning with injuries from the shipwreck, but mostly the result of exposure and dwindling supplies. Such conditions, to an important degree, determine the social and psychological situation aboard the boat. As the situation becomes more extreme, the tension rises and order and calm give way to additional conflict and threat. Death looms, as does uncertainty: will they be rescued or saved, drowned or sunk, starved or murdered by one another?

These thoughts and concerns are so typical of open-boat narratives that, despite generic diversity, there is a remarkable consistency to these stories: all open-boat narratives seem to be versions of one another. These recurring predicaments are what Carl Thompson calls 'stock

[1] In the modern day, there are subtle differences between lifeboats (which are typically enclosed and motorized) and life rafts (inflatables that may or may not have a canopy). For the purposes of this study, when I say 'lifeboat' or 'open boat' I mean a small, flimsy boat that has no motor or canopy and is generally unsuited for long dangerous journeys on the open ocean.

[2] Maritime law only established a rule that ships should carry enough lifeboats for all passengers aboard after the infamous sinking of the *Titanic* in 1912. Only a third of those aboard were initially accommodated for, and only a quarter of all crew and passengers survived (IMO 2019).

situations', revealing a set of topoi that amount to a 'master narrative' (63). This is an archive on which writers of open-boat narratives begin to draw, giving rise to radical intertextuality. However, despite or even because of this limited scope, open-boat narratives have an ability to engage a diverse range of broader concerns. By interchanging certain variables, an author may create a unique set of circumstances that, through the distilling powers of a traumatic survival experience, can be explored to their logical ends.

These differences are key to the choice of texts in this study, which it is suggested display the breadth of possibilities in this genre. For example, the social and personal identity of the survivors is an interesting variable that an author may adjust. Open boats that contain sailors function differently from those that contain passengers, and differently again to those that contain a combination of both. The political and social reality from which the survivors originate can also play a role in how their open boat functions or fails to function. Texts may investigate oppressive gender expectations, international states of war, or immigration policies by placing various competing characters in an open boat and allowing these social factors to influence how they survive not just the elements, but one another. The length of the ordeal is also significant, with drawn-out scenarios often bringing the survivors to a turning (or, more commonly, breaking) point where a fundamental shift or rupture is necessary in order to remain alive. Such points are always indicative of the degree to which, as Thompson writes, those 'less tangible structures that make us human' have disintegrated (68).

This study selects and examines five open-boat narratives and analyses the particular social, political, and existential concerns raised by each. This is done in an attempt, first, to trace a certain trajectory of preoccupations, and, second, to highlight the abundance of possibilities available to authors writing in this genre. The texts themselves, outlined below, come from a range of international authors, and include three men and two women. Their publication dates range over more than a century, from 1897 to 2012, and their settings are equally diverse. Although all are fictional, two are based on actual historical disasters. This wide range of origins and settings is reflected in the wide range of concerns within them. A brief outline of each author and the concerns discussed in each text is given below.

Stephen Crane's short story 'The Open Boat' (1897) is thematically concerned with the power of brotherhood and masculine collaboration. The narrative establishes a model of success for facing the 'crisis of meaning' experienced after a devastating shipwreck: follow orders, work together, and keep going. Though exposed to the vast indifference of nature, almost all the men survive their ordeal by adhering to this philosophy – only one of the men

drowns, and this happens once the boat overturns in the breakers near shore and the brotherhood disintegrates. Formally, 'The Open Boat' also engages the philosophical difficulty of representing episodes of intense suffering. The story is closely based on a real shipwreck experienced by Crane, who, although a journalist by profession, chose to limit any public discussion of the ordeal to fiction, raising a more general question about the function of narrative in processing a violent and unnerving experience.

Crane is used as a starting point for this study because, although not all the men in the story survive, 'The Open Boat' provides a somewhat ideal model for survival that later authors problematize and complicate. Such is the case in James Hanley's 1941 novel *The Ocean*. The men in this small boat have survived a torpedo attack from a German submarine, as well as the subsequent machine-gunning of their lifeboat. Joseph Curtain, the only sailor on board, becomes the natural leader, but instead of a loyal crew devoted to his authority (as was the case in 'The Open Boat'), the boat is occupied by a disparate collection of apathetic passengers. Curtain must care for, manage, and distract them. When the men become silent, and thus fall prey to the worst and most anxious excesses of their imagination, Curtain initiates a campaign of banal small talk to buoy up and sustain the group and himself. Instead of the group facing their crisis of meaning together, *The Ocean* highlights how the individual subjective experience can lead to a sense of isolation that must be avoided in order to survive. In addition to the more negative aspects of subjectivity, Hanley's novel also suggests how human beings, when not avoiding reality, might succeed in constructing subjective meaning using a framework or language that makes sense to them. This is most evident in the way in which one of the passengers, a priest, configures their rescue in religious terms. This could be seen as an exemplar of modernist ideas around the individual creation of meaning. Hanley and Crane are both considered to be modernists, and these engagements with the open-boat narrative show a historical shift or development in that movement with regards to individual meaning, evidence of the open-boat narrative as a form to which multiple modernist writers are successively drawn.

The subsequent three texts chosen for this study are all examples of contemporary fiction, proof that this genre remains relevant and apposite today. The first of these is *The Lifeboat* (2012) by Charlotte Rogan. Set in 1914, it raises questions that focus on gender roles and patriarchy. Using a common protocol from the time period, Rogan fills her lifeboat with 'women and children first', and uses the rising tension of a prolonged survival situation to explore models of power and how that power is often gendered in male authority. As the

situation on their dangerously overloaded lifeboat worsens, various men are forced off the boat, culminating in a dramatic shift of power and the murder of the male leader, the only crewman. *The Lifeboat* brings social dynamics in a survival situation to the forefront, and highlights how sometimes the most dangerous aspect of these situations is not the ocean, but the other people in the boat. In terms of form, the novel also participates intertextually with a significant contributor to the archive of shipwreck survival stories: legal documentation. The narrative is presented as a written statement intended for use in a trial, as the protagonist, subsequent to her rescue, has been arrested and charged with murder.

Like patriarchy in *The Lifeboat*, social and political climate affects the survivors in *The God of Spring* (2005) by Arabella Edge. The novel re-imagines the real maritime disaster of the French ship *Medusa*, which ran aground a long way from shore in 1816. As the ship slowly sank, a large raft was built from the deck. Although the rich and powerful in the few boats promised to tow the raft to shore, the ropes were cut and the raft was abandoned. The situation on the raft soon became chaotic. *The God of Spring* investigates the complex politics that led to this disaster as well as the political scandal it later caused. The novel also deals with the representation of suffering, as the protagonist is not a survivor himself, but the French Romantic painter Théodore Géricault, who is researching the story and creating his masterpiece *The Raft of the Medusa*. Of particular interest is the novel's engagement with the most macabre and traumatic of events in an open boat: cannibalism.

The final text chosen for this study is arguably the best known: Yann Martel's Booker-prize-winning novel *The Life of Pi* (2001). It provides a nuanced account of the psychological trauma experienced by shipwreck survivors, particularly those who experience inter-personal violence like murder and cannibalism. The conceit of the novel involves two versions of the same open-boat ordeal: one in which Pi (the young protagonist) is on a lifeboat with his mother and two crew members, and one in which Pi is on a lifeboat with a collection of zoo animals, including an adult Bengal tiger. Each animal represents one of the people. Because of the acute nature of his trauma, Pi has reduced the violence he has experienced (murder and cannibalism) to a story in which animals and not humans attack and eat each other. What is of interest is what is gained and lost in this reduction, as well as how Pi insists his story be 'interpreted' by others. The novel also participates in the genre's history of 'found texts' such as depositions and interviews, and the long history of shipwreck stories being understood in terms of a religious explicatory framework: the author character in *Life of Pi* is told that the story 'will make him believe in God' (xxi).

The power of the open-boat narrative is its ability to distill and intensify the particular conditions that characterize humanity's existential, social, and political realities. Although these stories take place in a remarkably similar setting (arguably, there is not much difference between a lifeboat survivor in the 2010s and one in the 1810s), by adjusting certain variables authors are able to use this setting to investigate a wide range of questions. These variables include historical context, the manner of shipwreck, the length of the ordeal, and the composition of the group. The texts in this study come from a wide range of authors of varying nationalities, genders, and preoccupations, and yet each has chosen the same setting for the action their fiction narrates, showing that the open-boat narrative remains an appealing metaphorical mode for contemporary readers.

‘The Open Boat’ by Stephen Crane

Stephen Crane’s ‘The Open Boat’ is a short story written in 1897. It is a fictional account of Crane’s own experience in a lifeboat, and forms a counterpart to Crane’s own journalism about the same event. An examination of the literary criticism of ‘The Open Boat’ shows that Crane’s story is one that does not necessarily relate the abject experience directly, but concerns the avoidance of abjection and catastrophe through a version of co-operation, where the men employ a collective leadership to maintain their sanity and hope. By doing so, they ultimately ensure the survival of all but one of their group. As a modernist text, ‘The Open Boat’ represents, within a chaotic and uncaring universe, the modernist search for meaning and a manner with which to construct it.

On New Year’s Eve, 1896, Stephen Crane was aboard the *Commodore*, a steamship carrying weapons to Cuban insurrectionists. Now in the third iteration of an attempted revolution[3], Cuba was again attempting to overthrow Spanish colonial rule. A year later, prompted by repressive colonial policies, violence toward non-combatants, and severe economic decline, the United States would enter into war with Spain over Cuban independence (Wayne Morgan 6). In the meantime exiles in America gathered arms and performed filibustering missions to the island from Florida, its closest American shoreline. Crane was travelling to Cuba on one of these filibustering missions. Already well-known for his novel *The Red Badge of Courage*, he was planning to work and write in Cuba in his capacity as a newspaper correspondent.

However, the *Commodore*’s hull was damaged on New Year’s Day after hitting a sand bar in heavy fog. In the early hours of January 2nd 1897, after a night of pumping in the engine room, the lifeboats were lowered and the *Commodore* sank. Crane made his way into the smallest and most fragile of the boats with three other men: Captain Edward Murphy, the cook C. B. Montgomery, and Chief Engineer William (Billie) Higgins. Seven other crew members flailed in the water around the wreck, their lifeboat having broken up as it struck the side of the ship. Although Crane’s boat managed to cast a tow line to the swimmers, it was in danger of being swamped. The captain gave the order to release the tow line, and the seven men drowned. This difficult decision fresh in their minds, the four men in the dinghy rowed towards the Florida coast, roughly 26km away. After 30 hours, their boat overturned in the surf near Mosquito Inlet. Higgins drowned in the process.

[3] Revolts occurred in the 1860s, and again in 1878, beginning the Ten Years’ War.

Crane published two accounts of this ordeal, which together tell the story from start to finish. The first, a newspaper article entitled 'Stephen Crane's Own Story,' was published within a week of the shipwreck in the New York *Press*. It explains why and how the ship sank, and the difficult decision on the part of Captain Murphy to release the tow line, but ends before the men's ordeal in the boat. Crane's rationale for stopping short of the most harrowing aspect of his experience is explained towards the end of his 'Own Story':

> The history of life in an open boat for thirty hours would no doubt be instructive for the young, but none is to be told here and now. For my part I would prefer to tell the story at once, because from it would shine the splendid manhood of Captain Edward Murphy and of William Higgins, the oiler… (475)

Crane thus intended to 'save' the ordeal in the lifeboat for fiction. Something about the experience was specifically suited to this genre, and so 'The Open Boat' appeared in *Scribner's Magazine* in June 1897, six months after the shipwreck. It is the same story as Crane's ordeal, though none of the characters are named except Billie, the oiler. Even though 'The Open Boat' is a fictional work, Crane indicated its close relationship with the journalism already published and the true event he experienced by subtitling the story 'A tale intended to be after the fact. Being the experience of four men from the sunk steamer *Commodore*' (68).

This subtitle indicates an interplay between fact and fiction. It promises a sense of realism, and, in fact, 'The Open Boat' mirrors Crane's ordeal closely. However, the fictional text is also highly impressionistic, engaging with abstract notions of meaninglessness and camaraderie that, while indicative of the suffering the men underwent, is meticulously constructed. The interplay between the three instances of Crane himself are also difficult to delineate: the author (who experienced the ordeal), the distant narrator in 'The Open Boat', and the character of the correspondent. Crane does allow us a more intimate glance into the mind of the correspondent in the story, but the correspondent is not identical to Crane, and can be viewed as more of a captured disposition, rather than a true representation of Crane himself. Likewise, the narrator is not identical with a reflective or retrospective Crane. His role and tone position him as representative of the hopelessness of the situation in the dinghy, rather than an optimistic omniscient being who knows that the men (save Higgins) will survive the open boat. This hopelessness is central to the modernist preoccupation in the text, seen in the men's efforts to establish a sense of meaning despite the meaninglessness that surrounds them.

Viewed in this way, 'The Open Boat' goes beyond the label of 'literary non-fiction'. Crane's rationale was not to simply recount the events on the boat, but to carefully construct a narrative with specific purposes, a text with interwoven tones and considered preoccupations. These contribute to the highly modernist nature of the text; although scholars have noted the interplay between meaninglessness and co-operative camaraderie, the link between that interplay and modernist notions of breakage and re-construction has not been made as clearly. Through a closer look at modernism as a literary movement, the connection can be made. Modernism scholars Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane describe this movement as 'not so much a revolution, which implies a turning over, even a turning back, but rather a break-up, devolution, some would say a dissolution. Its character is catastrophic' (20). If we think metaphorically about shipwreck and open boats, their ability to represent modernism is evident. The shipwreck event is the moment of breakage and rupture, not only of the physical world protecting the crew, but of meaning itself. Open boats themselves expose inhabitants to the physical elements, which leads to a crisis of meaning. The pull of the oar towards the distant shore becomes a metaphor for building some sense of meaning or security from the wreckage that has come before.

This modernist reading of Crane differs from how he has been read historically as a naturalist. However, taking into account the tenets of naturalism and the nature of 'The Open Boat' specifically, a modernist reading of Crane could hold more weight. Thomas Claviez highlights this idea when he contrasts the emphasis in naturalism to convert experience 'in the most exact terms possible, with an absolute and clear sense of proportion' with Crane's well-known dictum: 'A man is sure to fail at [reconstruction]… but there is something in that failure' (144; in Claviez 137). Crane's rationale in preserving part of his story for fiction involved rejecting the idea of a possible 'exact' recreation of his trauma (he is 'sure to fail at it'); instead, by choosing the short story form, he deliberately indicates his intention for 'The Open Boat' to act as a symbolic reservoir for his opinions concerning suffering and loss, and the mechanisms available to us to mitigate their consequences (in this case, brotherhood and co-operation). These, perhaps, are the 'something' one is able to achieve despite the failure of accurate reconstruction.

These ideas of breakage and reconstruction are not just metaphorically tied to the modernist project through the genre of shipwreck writing, but integral to how one understands modernism itself. Gabriel Josipovici writes:

> We are all of us critics as soon as we put down a book and try to explain it to ourselves. Modern art protects itself from such explanation, prods us into an awareness of the distortions which occur when we try to do this. (117)

Crane's text is one such example of 'modern art'. The fact that he chose to save arguably the most harrowing part of his experience for fiction means that Crane is dealing in uncertainty from the very beginning. We may argue about the truth or authenticity of the tale, but 'The Open Boat' defies these kinds of explanations, and instead raises questions about the distortions that occur during the process of reconstruction.

'The Open Boat' begins with the words 'None of them knew the color of the sky' (68). Joseph Conrad called it 'a phrase that anybody could have uttered, but which, in relation to what is to follow, acquires the poignancy of a meaning almost universal' ('Introduction' 14). Conrad's assessment captures the simplicity and accessibility of the text as well as its highly symbolic and constructed nature. That 'anybody could have uttered' the opening lines implies the ordinariness of the men (none is more heroic than another), and it is perhaps this ordinariness and simplicity that allows 'The Open Boat' to represent a broader (modernist) human condition, a 'meaning almost universal'.

The opening lines also serve to highlight Crane's epistemological concerns and how these relate to suffering. From the start, the suffering of the men is connected to what they can have knowledge of: 'None of them knew the color of the sky. Their eyes glanced level, and were fastened upon the waves that swept towards them' (68). The deadly threat of the sea is so apparent and consuming that it requires the men's complete and absolute attention. There is no time to take their bearings, to look outwards or upwards. For the four men in the dinghy, knowing the 'color of the sky' would mean possessing a broader sense of their place in the world, an ability to contain their situation and make sense of it. It would suggest that they were able to view themselves from afar. This is an opportunity they are not afforded. The opening lines thus create a sense of danger and fear by delineating what the men *can* 'know' and make sense of (the mortal hazard of the oncoming waves) and what they cannot (the colour of the sky, and ultimately, a sense of meaning and containment).

Thomas Kent claims this emphasis reveals Crane's intention to 'remind [his] readers of the impossibility of man's knowing anything, even that which he experiences' (262). He sees the opening line as confirming a philosophical theory of scepticism: that not only is the world around us unknowable, but our experiences of that world cannot be trusted to bring us any

closer to the truth. A traumatic experience in an open boat may indeed expose one to this deep an unnerving doubt. In addition, the onslaught of the waves prevents an opportunity for one to resolve this doubt; thus it can be met only with indifference. His reading has validity, as the men in 'The Open Boat' exhibit a profound sense of indifference in the face of their circumstances. However, Kent precludes any knowledge to the men. To say any knowledge is 'impossible' is to ignore the importance of that which mitigates that meaninglessness, which perhaps the men *do* come to know: that intimate sense of community and the powerful difference it makes.

And it is only by virtue of *having* the experience in the boat that the men can attain this particular knowledge. This is what Bert Bender's approach to 'The Open Boat' offers where Kent falls short. Bender acknowledges a development in the story, where the men learn something by the end of their harrowing experience. This 'something' is what he calls 'the ultimate knowledge of reality – the kind of knowledge one feels and clings to in the face of death' (72). The importance of the experience is made clear: this is knowledge *a posteriori*, only available to those who have faced death. The men in the dinghy might begin by not knowing the colour of the sky, but they do not remain that way. Exactly what that 'ultimate knowledge' consists in is further elaborated later in the text, and will be discussed during an examination of the closing line.

'The Open Boat' continues with the narrator introducing the characters in the dinghy one by one: the cook who bails, the oiler who steers (and later rows), the correspondent who rows (who 'watched the waves and wondered why he was there') and the captain, 'injured… lying in the bow' (68). The captain's 'portrait' is the longest of the four, and like the opening line, establishes the melancholic and distant tone that characterizes much of the story. He is preoccupied with a 'profound dejection and indifference,' which the narrator attributes to both the tendency of captains to feel earnestly connected to their ships (his mind 'is rooted deep in the timbers of her'), as well as the specific memory of 'seven turned faces' (68-69). Though not made explicit, these are the seven crew members whom Captain Murphy was forced to cut loose.

Passages such as this imply that Crane is not simply engaged in a factual re-telling of an experience, but that he is using the shipwreck event and the situation in the lifeboat metaphorically. The world of the men in the dinghy is a world without boundaries. The wrecked ship that haunts the captain's mind represents a contained space, a structure that protected them from both the physical elements of the universe and the metaphorical indifference of that

universe. It is both the captain's mind as well as his sense of self and meaning, that is 'rooted deep in the timbers of her' (69). Furthermore, with a metaphorical reading of the boat, the men in the dinghy are not only radically open to the world (a formless ocean, wave after unrelenting wave), but to meaning itself. In other words, they become *un*-contained, consumed by 'profound dejection and indifference' (68).

Passages like the portrait of the captain achieve this effect through Crane's careful manipulation of tone: 'formal and distanced language' that employs abstraction, generalisation, and interrupting qualifiers to capture not only the men's physical peril, but their dawning sense of an oblivious universe (Schirmer 223). Crane's use of language and style are paramount to conveying the sense of indifference he is trying to capture in the story, evident as the text continues. It does so with the revelation that the sea's 'singular disadvantage' is 'that after successfully surmounting one wave you discover that there is another behind it just as important and just as nervously anxious to do something effective in the way of swamping boats' (69). This knowledge is particular to the experience they are having, which the narrator notes 'is not probable to the average experience, which is never at sea in a dingey [sic]' (69).

The description of the waves as 'nervously anxious' has been labelled by Anthony Hilfer as a case of 'ludicrous anthropocentrism' (248). This is supposed to form part of Crane's project to criticize our human-centred descriptions of nature: our descriptions, falling short, only reify nature's indifference and violence (248). The close reading of Crane's style acknowledges the highly constructed nature of 'The Open Boat' and his careful and deliberate use of language. Others agree. A similar reading by Claviez makes use of the sublime to explain Crane's rejection of true reconstruction: instead of adhering to naturalism and attempting to 'depict life as authentically as possible,' Crane 'uses the concept of the sublime as the unrepresentable. … He dramatizes the different degrees and stages of distance [to show the] impossibility of representation' (137). In other words, by 'declining' the sublime – by refusing to depict the sublime directly through the creation of a gap between the reader and the experience – Crane emphasizes the difficulty of reconstructing trauma, of representing the unrepresentable sublime that the characters experience in the story (that he experienced himself). By further distancing Crane from naturalism, these readings open the text to modernist approaches that seem more appropriate.

Furthermore, this passage engages the idea that, when experiencing the radical openness entailed by a lifeboat, it is impossible to extricate oneself and reflect on how one's situation resembles (or differs from) 'the average experience' (69). A similar sentiment is

echoed in an earlier description of the lifeboat as being smaller than the average man's bathtub: although one might 'have a bath-tub larger than the boat which here rode upon the sea,' one might never experience the singular discomfort of being in an open boat (68). The comparison tries to give us an insight into what the men are experiencing, and yet the ironic tone implies that we could never really empathize fully or completely. We might know what it feels like to sit in a bathtub, but this does not make us aware of how the men are experiencing the open and dangerous ocean (in fact, the experiences are quite the opposite, in that, while water is *supposed* to be in a bath, its presence is most unwelcome in a dinghy at sea; this is what makes the comparison ironic) (Billingslea 25). This relates to the difficulty of reconstruction in general, and the complexity of what Crane is trying to achieve with his story: Crane is faced with the problem of 'how to communicate the significance of so shaking an experience to an audience whose *in*experience in such matters would necessarily distance them from his drama' (Bender 70, his emphasis). His project is both to *attempt* this reconstruction (a narrative project) and convey its difficulty (a critique of the project's overall feasibility).

Again, the idea of comparing one's situation to 'the average experience' involves a kind of extrication or reflection, and Crane further elaborates on the impossibility of such contemplation in an open boat a few moments later:

> As each slaty wall of water approached, it shut all else from the view of the men in the boat … Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would, doubtless, have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had not time to see it… (69)

The men are too absorbed by the process of survival, and have 'other things to occupy their minds,' so much so that they only notice the sunrise because it changes the colour of the waves (70). The sea becomes their only frame of reference, their whole world, and yet the narrator chooses to highlight another viewpoint: from a balcony, a leisurely position removed from danger. The balcony is only an abstract possibility to the men. This is emphasized a few lines later when the narrator describes the sea as 'a broad tumultuous expanse, shining and wind-riven. It was probably splendid. It was probably glorious…' (70). These descriptions stand in ironic contrast to the position of the men in the boat, brought into focus by the narrator's use of the ambivalent 'probably.' If no such perspective is available to the men in the boat, the question becomes why Crane includes it at all. According to James Colvert, the contradiction and ambivalence represent our incoherent and confusing experience of the world, one where

we struggle to construct meaning (40). This corroborates a reading of 'The Open Boat' as a metaphor for the modernist project.

Another critical framework through which to read the balcony scene is through Michel de Certeau's observations in *A Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). Such a reading speaks to (a) the lasting relevance of Crane's work, (b) the argument that Crane is aiming to do more than simply recount a true story, but is in fact carefully constructing a considered text, and (c) the attentive positioning of both the narrator and the reader in 'The Open Boat'. De Certeau imagines looking down on New York City from the 110th floor of the World Trade Centre:

> To be lifted to the summit of the World Trade Center is to be lifted out of the city's grasp. One's body is no longer clasped by the streets that turn and return it according to an anonymous law; nor is it possessed, whether as player or played, by the rumble of so many differences and by the nervousness of New York traffic. When one goes up there, he leaves behind the mass that carries off and mixes up in itself any identity of authors or spectators. (92)

To map de Certeau onto Crane's text directly means to see the men struggling in the dinghy as 'possessed… by the rumble of so many differences.' This corresponds to what Colvert calls 'the confusion and contradictions of experience'; to be extricated from such a cacophony is a mechanism by which one may organize such an experience (De Certeau 92; Colvert 40). Such a position is only an abstract possibility for the men in the boat, but it is, at times, the position of the distant narrator.

De Certeau writes of the figure on the 110th floor that '[h]is elevation transfigures him into a voyeur. It puts him at a distance,' transforms him into what he calls 'a voyeur-god,' who must 'disentangle himself from the murky intertwining daily behaviors and make himself alien to them' (92-93). In 'The Open Boat,' it is the narrator who makes himself alien through his use of a 'distant and ironic tone' (Schirmer 222). He is omniscient, but not comforting; instead, he looks down on the men in the boat, 'observing their situation from afar, seeing it then critically, dispassionately, or even mockingly' (Colvert 43). An example of this occurs after the men spot a lighthouse, and wonder whether it is equipped as a life-saving station. Suddenly, the narrator remarks:

> It is fair to say here that there was not a life-saving station within twenty miles in either direction, but the men did not know this fact and in consequence they made dark remarks concerning the eyesight of the nation's life-savers. (76)

The omniscience displayed by the narrator is not comforting to the reader. Rather, he comes to represent a particular view of man that Crane is intent on displaying in his story: 'as a helpless being adrift in a universe that is wholly indifferent to him and his ambitions,' (Schirmer 222). In addition, the use of a third-person narrator is a deliberate distancing, especially considering the fact that, having actually gone through the experience in the boat, a first-person narrator seems the obvious choice for Crane. Thus the narration often appears mocking and dispassionate, where it could otherwise have appeared intimate and compassionate (Claviez 145).

The narrator's indifference, felt by the reader, is synonymous with the indifference of nature felt by the men in the boat. The most compelling image of this apathy appears in Part VII, when another landmark, this time a windmill, looms from the shore. The correspondent sees it as representing 'the serenity of nature amid the struggles of the individual'; nature that is not 'cruel … nor beneficent, nor treacherous, nor wise. But … indifferent, flatly indifferent' (88).

The men in the boat, as exposed as they are to the elements of the wind and sea via a process of shipwreck, are simultaneously exposed to the unrelenting indifference of nature to their fate. This view of man and nature is echoed in an overall tone that defines particular sections of 'The Open Boat.' However, Crane counteracts this indifferent tone with a colloquial one, modulating between tones to reflect his presentation of not just an uncaring and overwhelmingly dangerous universe, but 'a certain human brotherhood opposed to the storm of the universe' (Shulman 447). Thus a mechanism exists with which the men can push forwards, and ultimately, survive.

The warm exchanges between the men in the boat represent this sense of brotherhood that the men come to know, and these exchanges are strategically placed alongside passages of cool indifference. For example, after narrating the captain's despair at the wreck, the following exchange occurs:

> 'Keep'er a little more south, Billie,' said he.
>
> 'A little more south, sir,' said the oiler in the stern. (69)

The moment is familiar and affectionate, despite the memories weighing on the captain's (indeed, everyone's) mind. The personal way in which the captain addresses the oiler (by name) is complemented by Billie's calling the captain 'sir', which Gregory Schirmer believes suggests 'his loyalty and faith in a code of conduct, specifically that of the seaman, that binds men together in an ordered way in the face of an inherently unordered universe' (224). The connection between brotherhood and a seaman's code is essential. Despite his injury, the captain still serves a purpose on board the dinghy, and that is his symbolic role as a leader. His command provides a sense of continuity to the men. Even though they are confronted by the imminent / immanent danger of the waves (ever-approaching as well as pervasive), they can rely on this sense of structured authority, a remnant of the same structure that existed on the ship. It is a cursory reproduction of that structure (the captain is injured, unequipped, and master of a 10-foot rickety boat with a 'motley three' as crew), but its importance is vital (73). The authority is both an emotional comfort (the captain is described as 'soothing his children') and a practical necessity: each man knows his place, does his duty willingly, and contributes to the group's survival with vigour. The correspondent comes to realize this a few pages on:

> They were a captain, an oiler, a cook, and a correspondent, and they were friends, friends in a more curiously iron-bound degree than may be common. The hurt captain, lying against the water-jar in the bow, spoke always in a low voice and calmly, but he could never command a more ready and swiftly obedient crew than the motley three of the dinghy. It was more than a mere recognition of what was best for the common safety. There was surely in it a quality that was personal and heartfelt. (73)

It is this feeling of a 'personal and heartfelt' brotherhood that punctuates passages of despair and hopelessness, and it is through the building of this 'iron-bound' friendship that the men are able to make sense of their world and construct meaning. However, the value of this sense of brotherhood is only felt because of its presence alongside passages that exemplify nature's indifference and the cruel absurdity of the universe, and in some ways the story's significance is founded in 'a constant tension and interplay between these two views,' achieved through 'the modulation of different tones' (Schirmer 222). Schirmer's argument has merit in that he recognizes the value of this modulation over and above the importance of the individual tones present in the text.

In addition to two different tones, there are a set of refrains that Crane also modulates to create this 'constant tension.' Symbolically, manning a small dinghy on the open ocean might be experienced as kind of refrain: waves approach in relentless succession, and each demands the same attention as the one before. Cruelly, the men must learn 'that after successfully surmounting one wave,' 'there is another behind it just as important' (69). This repetition is echoed in two textual refrains in the story, representing indifference and collaboration respectively. The first is introduced and formulated by the narrator, who reflects that the men might express their frustrations as follows:

> 'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees? … [Fate] cannot mean to drown me. She dare not drown me. She cannot drown me. Not after all this work.' (77)

The repetition in this passage emphasizes the desperation with which the men might contemplate their situation. Instead of using repetition to build tension and a sense of dramatic triumph, Crane carefully structures the sentences to press a sense of absurdity and senselessness, particularly in the circular progression from 'she cannot' to 'she dare not' and back to 'she cannot.' There is no forward movement, only distress. This is echoed in the process of approaching shore: the dinghy approaches, but they find the breakers too dangerous, and have to retreat to the relative safety of the open sea once more.

However, this repetition, like the tones and expressions before it, is counterpointed with a chorus embodying brotherhood and co-operation. The story repeatedly turns to a simple description of the men at work:

> In the meantime the oiler and the correspondent rowed. And also they rowed. They sat together in the same seat, and each rowed an oar. Then the oiler took both oars; then the correspondent took both oars; then the oiler; then the correspondent. They rowed and they rowed. (72)

This passage is repetitive, reflecting the monotonous experience in the boat. But through this repetition, Crane deliberately emphasizes the men's co-operation, to such an extent that its importance cannot be understated. The repeated movement of the oars, and the co-operation

required for that action to take place, connects the brotherhood of the men to the practical project of moving towards safety. This working together does not simply ensure their physical survival, but re-constructs that which the wreck destroyed: meaning itself. There are further examples of repeated camaraderie that encapsulate the warm and intimate tone described by Schirmer. As the correspondent and the oiler exchange places at the oars, they ask meekly of one another, 'Will you spell me?' (Crane 82). After a long night at sea, Part VI ends:

> At last there was a short conversation. 'Billie. . . . Billie, will you spell me?'
>
> 'Sure,' said the oiler. (87)

It is this practical question, with a definite answer, that provides some respite to the men whose world is unknowingly dangerous and unimaginably frightening. In an epistemological sense, being able to know and expect something certain (for the answer to the question 'Will you spell me?' is necessarily 'Sure') works to counterpoint the epistemological *uncertainty* implied by the desperate repetition 'If I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned—if I am going to be drowned, why, in the name of the seven mad gods who rule the sea, was I allowed to come thus far and contemplate sand and trees?' (87, 77). In a world where the men are 'open' to the meaninglessness of the universe, they can be confident of one thing: that, in time, they will be asked 'Will you spell me?' and their answer will be 'Sure' (87).

Crane elaborates on this interplay between knowing and not knowing, seeing but not understanding. The uncertainly presented by their precarious position in the dinghy is represented by the many contradictory viewpoints of the men. One example of contradiction and epistemological uncertainty is with regards to the two animals they encounter, which are described inconsistently as both 'allies of the hostile sea' (the sea gulls) and 'admirable and horrifying' (the shark) (Colvert 43). A second example is clear when the men in the dinghy glimpse a man on the shore; his signals, however, prove impossible to ascertain. Crane writes the voices of the men unrestrained, without narration:

> 'Well, I wish I could make something out of those signals. What do you suppose he means?'
>
> 'He doesn't mean anything. He's just playing.'

> ‘Well, if he’d signal us to try the surf again, or to go to sea and wait, or go north, or go south, or go to hell – there would be some reason to it. But look at him. He just stands there and keeps his coat revolving like a wheel. The ass.’ (80)

This confusion is emphasized by the passage’s lack of narration. Just as the men are uncertain as to what the signals mean, so too is the reader uncertain as to who exactly is speaking (Kent 263). Kent also calls attention to a further way in which this scene is frustrating, when it appears that ‘the ‘omniscient’ narrator could easily reveal to the reader the meaning of the signal,’ as he has done in the case of the life-saving station in a previous section (Kent 263). Crane is playing with the idea of knowing and not knowing, and how the literary breakage of a ship might result in the metaphorical breakage of certainty and constancy. If the men themselves become ‘open’ to alternate readings of their experience (such as their disagreement about what the man’s signals mean), then Crane will make the meaning of his text deliberately ‘open’; that is to say, not explicit or simple to interpret. Although Kent’s overall claims about ‘The Open Boat’ tend to be immoderate, he is right to highlight the importance of knowledge in the text and how it affects both the men and the reader. This correlates with what Oliver Billingslea says about the story as a whole, and our experience of interpreting it. The ‘most important’ aspect of our reading, he writes, ‘is the process of deciphering, repeating the process the men undergo as they try to be ‘interpreters – readers of their own experience’ (28).

As in the balcony description before, Crane is carefully positioning the reader in relation to the men, so as to explain the nature of their experience as best he can. If we think of ‘The Open Boat’ as not merely a reconstruction of an event, but an attempt to explain and perhaps replicate what the experience of that event was *like,* then the appearance of uncertainty at both a plot level (the men do not know what the man *means* by his signals) and a textual level (we do not know who is speaking, and the narrator will not explain what the man *means* to us, either), then readings such as Kent’s and Billingslea’s align with a view of ‘The Open Boat’ as a carefully constructed story, not simply a failed attempt at reconstruction.

One such way in which Crane can explain what his experience was *like* (in other words, to elicit empathy in his readers) is through the use of poetry and art. For Burt Bender, this is how Crane solves the problem of how to ‘communicate the significance of so shaking an experience to an audience whose *in*experience in such matters would necessarily distance them from his drama’ (Bender, 70, his emphasis). This correlates with the notion that Crane chose the short story format for very specific reasons: in this case, because fiction allows the reader

a special opportunity to imagine what something is like for a character. This notion – of empathising with a character – is actually experienced by the character of the correspondent himself, when, during a lonesome night watch, he remembers a poem he learned in childhood about a Legionnaire who lies dying in Algiers. Prior to that moment in the boat, the correspondent was unaffected by the picture – 'It was less to him than breaking of a pencil's point' (85). Now, however,

> …it quaintly came to him as a human, living thing. It was no longer merely a picture of a few throes in the breast of a poet, meanwhile drinking tea and warming his feet at the grate; it was an actuality—stern, mournful, and fine. … The correspondent, plying the oars and dreaming of the slow and slower movements of the lips of the soldier, was moved by a profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension. He was sorry for the soldier of the Legion who lay dying in Algiers. (85-86)

Poetry is the medium through which the correspondent is able to suddenly comprehend true sorrow and empathy. Made vulnerable by his own suffering, he now able to relate to a character in a half-forgotten poem. Crane is perhaps attempting to elicit a similar response in the reader. In the same way that the correspondent is able to 'know another man's suffering… through the mystery of the poetic experience,' so the reader can come to empathise with and understand the experience of the men in 'The Open Boat' (Bender 77). Bender's view on the correspondent's engagement with the poem aligns with the text's highly constructed nature. As seen earlier, Crane builds repetition into the text to give the reader a sense of his experience; here, he give us an example of empathy as instigated by art so that we might learn to empathise with his characters through his art.

The final section (Part VII) of 'The Open Boat' begins, in contrast to Part I, with the correspondent noticing the colour of the sky, 'the grey hue of dawning' that marks the beginning of the end of their journey in the little boat. The danger of landing the dinghy amidst 'monstrous inshore rollers' suddenly becomes real, and although the captain knows 'she will swamp sure,' he does his best to reassure his crew (88). Inevitably, a wave topples the craft, and then men are thrown into the sea, separated for the first time since leaving the *Commodore*. This moment can be compared to and contrasted with the moment of shipwreck that initiated 'The Open Boat'. Again, the men must experience a breakage. Instead of the dissolution of ordinary structures of making meaning (which the safety of the ship represents, and the

shipwreck collapses), the capsize represents the overturning of the community (brotherhood) that has been so 'unusually hard-won' by the men (Shulman 458).

The correspondent notices little else but the coldness of the water ('almost a proper reason for tears'). He sees the oiler swimming strongly towards the shore, the beach so close it appears to the correspondent 'like a bit of scenery on a stage' (88). Just when he considers that 'drowning must really be a comfortable arrangement, a cessation of hostilities accompanied by a large degree of relief,' he is caught by a large wave, and by means of what he thinks is 'a true miracle of the sea,' he is deposited safely on shore (91). Though the correspondent is happy and relieved at his rescue, he cannot forget that this is the same sea which has threatened to kill them the entire story, the same sea that engulfed the seven abandoned crew members of the *Commodore*, and the same sea that will shortly take the oiler's life. In showing nature as both kind and cruel, Crane solidifies its utter ambivalence to the fate of these men (and men in general). In the case of the correspondent's miraculous wave, Anthony Hilfer thinks Crane is showing the correspondent in 'an ironically passive relation to his own survival… the wave and not the man has controlled the event' (249).

Though the correspondent is safe, the rest of men are still struggling in the shallows. A man approaches to help, perhaps the same man who signalled to them the day before. He helps the cook, and then wades 'toward the captain, but the captain [waves] him away, and [sends] him to the correspondent' (91). The narrator describes this rescuer as 'naked, naked as a tree in winter, but a halo was about his head, and he shone like a saint' (92). The Christian iconography is unmistakable. However, although the man appears in the moment of their salvation, he does not save them – even the injured captain is able to make it to shore without his assistance, indicating that they are all but safe. George Monteiro thus sees this inclusion of Christian iconography as 'deeply and explicitly ironic' (331). The man is described as saintly but does not represent a Christian ideal or conform to the Christian message that might utilize a traumatic experience like a shipwreck as an opportunity for 'the Christian to grow strong in faith' (331).[4] The correspondent might see a halo, but 'The Open Boat' is a story of men working together to survive 30 hours at sea, not how they were rescued at last by an unnamed, holy bystander. Crane is not enthusiastically affirming Christianity, but neither is his overarching project an outright dismissal of religion, as Monteiro suggests. There are no further overt dismissals of religion (save, perhaps, the temptation for a man to 'throw bricks at the

[4] Monteiro alludes to a long tradition in shipwreck writing to interpret the suffering endured by survivors as punishment for sin, and their rescue as God's benevolent mercy.

temple' in his distress, which is only mockingly suggested by the narrator – 'there are no bricks and no temple') (84). Crane's project focuses more on offering an alternative to the indifference of the universe – clearly, brotherhood – than on discrediting alternative ways of managing this apathy and hopelessness.

In any case, the saintly picture of the man and their relief at surviving the capsized boat is quickly undercut when he suddenly cries out, pointing to a figure down the shoreline.

> In the shallows, face downward, lay the oiler. His forehead touched the sand that was periodically, between each wave, clear of the sea. […]
>
> The welcome of the land to the men from the sea was warm and generous, but a still and dripping shape was carried slowly up the beach, and the land's welcome for it could only be the different and sinister hospitality of the grave. (92)

The tragic end to 'The Open Boat' is that despite their absolute best efforts, the oiler inexplicably drowns, confirming the ocean as random and terrifying. In the same way that the seven drowned crew haunt the minds of the men in the dingy, so the death of the oiler haunts the story of 'The Open Boat.' Billie's death is not simply tragic on its own: the story is tragic overall because despite the fierce co-operation that ensured their survival up to this point, it 'is unable to prevent the death [of the oiler]', reinforcing 'our sense of human capacity, limitation, and the mystery of power and existence' (Shulman 460).

Further, the oiler's death is significant in that it brings together the two tropes that Crane has been emphasising throughout the text: indifference and brotherhood. Billie's death is the culmination of the indifference the correspondent has been coming to terms with for the entire story – the frightful realisation that Fate would drown a man even 'after all this work' (77). However, the indifference of nature does not stand as the only way in which one can conceptualise one's place in the universe: it stands, as it has done throughout 'The Open Boat', in contrast to co-operation and camaraderie. Billie's death comes to symbolise the importance of camaraderie in the face of nature's indifference, the profound value of 'a certain human brotherhood opposed to the storm of the universe' (Shulman 448).

The end of 'The Open Boat' can be read as an attempt to bring together the ideas that have preoccupied it throughout. Crane writes that 'when it came night, the white waves paced to and fro in the moonlight, and the wind brought the sound of the great sea's voice to the men on shore, and they felt that they could then be interpreters' (92). Their ordeal, sealed by Billie's

death, seems to have established the men's ability to understand and interpret for others. Colvert and others have read the line as being deeply ironic – that interpretation (or one cohesive interpretation), like reconstruction, is an ideal that cannot be achieved:

> Who can say in what various ways the survivors interpret their experience or what one way could be understood to exclude the others? In the reverberating ironies of the last word ['interpreters']… the final meaning of the men's experience escapes at last into mystery. (45)

This reading correlates with the overarching irony present in the text that is likewise highlighted by Robert Shulman and Anthony Hilfer. In addition, Crane does not explicitly tell us what the men's interpretation is, only that they have, perhaps individually or as an insular group, come to some 'profound and perfectly impersonal comprehension,' known only to them simply because they were the only ones present in that experience (85). Linking the interpretation of the 'great sea's voice' to the specific experience in the lifeboat infers that, in the final line, Crane reinforces what he has established concerning reconstruction in general: that 'a man is sure to fail at it… but there is something in that failure' (in Claviez 137).

An alternate way to read the final line is through Crane's dual preoccupation throughout the text – that of establishing nature's indifference, as well as elucidating a manner in which to face that indifference. From this perspective, the men have become interpreters in terms of their specific experience: they have become cruelly and intimately acquainted with the indifference of nature, and though their co-operation failed, in the end, to save the oiler, they can safely say that the brotherhood experienced in the boat was of incalculable worth, 'a comradeship that the correspondent, for instance, who had been taught to be cynical of men, knew even at the time was the best experience of his life' (73).

Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat' engages in a process of reconstruction while being very aware that such a reconstruction is impossible to achieve authentically. Thus, Crane's rationale with presenting his experience in the short story mode is to achieve a sense of intimacy and empathy with the reader that brings them as close as possible to his experience without supposing one could relate this experience with complete accuracy. The story is a highly constructed impressionistic portrait, concerned with revealing the universe's indifference as encountered during the survival experience, as well as offering a means with which to face that indifference. In doing so, Crane paints an intimate portrait of a fierce and

hard-won brotherhood among four men in a dinghy, whose suffering and survival generates a meaningful understanding of the world.

The Ocean by James Hanley

James Hanley was a British author who published over thirty novels from 1930–1980.[5] His body of work also includes several short story collections and over a dozen radio plays. Hanley's most well-known work is the novel *Boy* (1931), famous mostly due to its being banned for obscenity. It is also his first novel set at sea, of which he wrote several, *The Ocean* (1941) included. Hanley was drawn to the sea as a novelist because he spent much of his life working on it. He joined his father at sea as a ship's boy when he was only fourteen (around 1910), later working on merchant ships during World War I (Stokes 1). In subsequent works, Hanley detailed the desperation and complexity of the proletariat in his series *The Furys Chronicles*, set in his home city of Liverpool. According to Edward Stokes, the 'two dominant themes' in Hanley's oeuvre are 'ships and the sea' and 'the worker on shore,' though all of his maritime novels might be described as straddling these categories (3). This is partly due to the kinds of ships Hanley is concerned with: not the romantic sail ships of the past, but steam ships crewed by engineers. Joseph Conrad lamented this transition from sail to steam when he wrote in a letter that '[t]here is not much difference now between a deck and a factory hand' (in Jean-Aubrey 334). Hanley's maritime novels are written from the perspective of these 'factory hands.' The industrial transition from sail to steam can be seen as representative of the ways in which novels about the sea, and Modernist engagements with that specific context, developed over the course of the early twentieth century.[6]

Prolific though he was, and despite critical acclaim, Hanley never achieved commercial success as a writer (Stokes 4). Despite being described as 'far and away the best writer of the sea and of seafaring men since Conrad' (in Stokes 3), only two critical studies have been produced concerning his work. These are Edward Stokes' *The Novels of James Hanley* (1964) and John Fordham's *James Hanley: Modernism and the Working Class* (2002). Both of these volumes touch on his 1941 novel, *The Ocean*, but only briefly. This is because both Stokes and Fordham are attempting a comprehensive 'life and works' survey of Hanley's oeuvre, intended

[5] A version of this chapter was published as an article in December of 2019. Engela, Judy (2019) 'Modernist Doubt in James Hanley's *The Ocean*', *English Studies in Africa*, 62:2, 70-84.

[6] Margaret Cohen, in her book *The Novel and the Sea*, outlines how this transition can be traced in the representations, in fiction, of the ideal mariner. The sailor hero of the high seas is an archetype of what she describes as 'the maritime picturesque' (88), a master of the 'craft' of sailing. Her detailed unpacking of the concept of 'craft' is useful when characterizing the nature of Conrad's hero captains, and how the mastery of sea legs and prudence (two of Cohen's fourteen elements of 'craft') gave way to the less skillful duties of tending to the machine of a steamship's engine. These descriptions help emphasize the ordinariness of Hanley's protagonists.

to expand the public engagement with the work of a once widely-acclaimed author. In addition, both studies emphasise Hanley's aesthetic and philosophical relationship to Joseph Conrad and Stephen Crane's maritime novels. Hanley, Conrad, and Crane are all Modernist writers who engage meaning and its construction during what we may call 'a crisis of meaning'. As discussed in the previous chapter, this preoccupation finds distinct realisation in each new text, but it may be generally characterised as the sense of complete alienation and the loss of consensual meaning that pervaded the early twentieth century. In Crane's 'The Open Boat', meaning can be constructed in the face of meaninglessness; importantly, this endeavour is a group effort in the face of a world that is 'flatly indifferent' (88). This is approached differently in *The Ocean*. The characters are strangers, not a 'motley crew,' and their attempts to make meaning together are unsuccessful. In Hanley's novel, meaning can be constructed, but only as an individual. There is an idealism in Crane's 'brotherhood' that Hanley interrogates in *The Ocean*, extending the possibilities of the Modernist search for meaning in atomistic, individual terms.

At the opening of *The Ocean*, ordinary seaman Joseph Curtain rises the morning after a shipwreck to find himself in a lifeboat with the dead body of his friend and ship's mate, Crilley, and four passengers. In the darkness, the night before, the passenger liner *Aurora* was hit by a German torpedo, and Curtain found his way to a boat through the chaos onboard the ship. When a spotlight suddenly found their small boat, Crilley, protecting the emergency supply of water with his body, was machine-gunned to death. That morning, Curtain takes stock of their supplies (the water cask miraculously saved) and introduces himself to the other survivors: four men named Stone, Benton, Gaunt, and Father Michaels – an elderly priest. Curtain buries Crilley at sea, and then, as the only seaman on board, takes it upon himself to care for and govern his fellow survivors. He sets watches, distributes rations, and instructs the able-bodied men to row. He insists everyone keep talking so as to avoid a dangerous silence, maintaining that 'with words, one [can] build walls, shut out the ocean' (20).

While Curtain maintains control and buoys morale for a few days, their circumstances quickly deteriorate: first, when Benton loses one of the oars while they are distracted by a breaching whale, and, second, when Curtain eventually falls into a coma-like sleep, during which the other men steal most of the remaining water. Towards the end of *The Ocean*, Curtain, delirious with exhaustion and deprivation, notices another lifeboat containing a lone survivor. Even though the man is a German soldier, Curtain expends his last stores of energy dragging him on board. He saves the man by giving him the last of their water. In the final chapter, as

all the men approach death, and as though in a dream, the priest sees a figure through the mist. Their boat is finally rescued by a fisherman, who appears to the priest as 'the shape of Christ' (152).

One of the most striking features of *The Ocean* is the way in which it references World War II.[7] Fordham credits Hanley's 'representations of modern warfare' as some of his most engaging, polemical work, yet *The Ocean* does not make straightforward references to contemporary wartime events (23). The novel is bookended by two specific references to wartime: the sinking of the ship by a German submarine and the German survivor at the close. An integral aspect of the initial attack is the submarine machine-gunning the survivors in the lifeboat. This incident is a specifically controversial detail for Hanley to include. During World War II in 1941, when *The Ocean* was published, Allied and Axis vessels followed a certain code when attacking and sinking enemy vessels. According to this code, the winning vessel was obliged to offer assistance to any survivors of an attack. This assistance often came in the form of placing men into lifeboats, distributing supplies to them, and giving them their current coordinates (Hood 316). In the case of one historical account, the U-boat[8] captain wished the survivors 'a pleasant voyage and good liberty' (in Letterns 2014). The German navy was generally considered superior to other Allied forces in this matter, and its treatment of survivors was considered 'perhaps even better than the treatment of enemy merchant ship survivors by American submarines' (Dunn 2003). This practice was regulated by the Naval Protocol of 1936, which compelled submarines to rescue survivors of sunken merchant vessels (Hood 238). This maritime practice was derived from older codes pertaining to admiralty law regarding 'prize' (vessels, cargo, and other bounty claimed from defeated ships). The law dictated that attackers could only claim 'prize' legally if the survivors of the defeated ship were treated fairly once they surrendered (Upton). Later, such sentiments were enshrined in the 1949 Geneva Convention, which prescribes that enemies 'take all possible measures to search for and collect the wounded and sick, to protect them against pillage and ill-treatment, to ensure their adequate care' (Article 15).

In 1942, this good-faith practice ceased following the infamous sinking of the British troopship *Laconia*.[9] When *Laconia* was sunk by the German *U-156*, over 2000 survivors were cast into the sea (Hood 322). The U-boat began rescue operations and sent out requests for

[7] Stokes does mention that the novel could be set during WWI, as the references to war are somewhat ambiguous (119).
[8] The German term for 'submarine'.
[9] Notably, after *The Ocean* was published in 1941.

assistance on open channels to vessels in the area, 'promising immunity to ships sent to the scene, provided that [they themselves] were not attacked' (Roskill 224). Three U-boats nearby responded immediately. Shortly afterwards, an American B-24 (a heavy bomber plane) caught sight of the scene and was ordered to attack despite the presence of Allied survivors. The Germans had to abandon those they were rescuing, and over half of the *Laconia* passengers were subsequently killed or drowned. Following these events, the German navy issued the 'Laconia Orders,' which commanded that 'all attempts to rescue the crews of sunken ships ... cease forthwith' (in Roskill 225). The attack by the Americans was never appropriately labelled a war crime. The subsequent legislation changed the nature of naval battle for the remainder of World War II.

Only one documented case of machine-gunning survivors exists, involving the attacks on the sinking wreck of the *SS Peleus* in 1944. The captain of *U-852*, Heinz-Wilhelm Eck, gunned the debris of the ship to which some of the survivors were clinging in order to sink evidence of the attack. A visible wreck would have alerted Allied forces to the presence of U-boats in the area. However, some of the shipwrecked men survived. When the war ended in 1945, Eck and two of his crew members were tried as war criminals and executed (Dunn 2003).

The question remains as to why Hanley included the machine-gunning if this practice was, at that time, an unconfirmed practice. Rumours of German forces actively killing survivors by machine-gun (instead of 'killing' them by refusing to offer them assistance) is considered, today, to be an instance of propaganda from the British and American war offices. Fordham accuses Hanley of 'vulgar complicity' with these lies, and the opening of the novel 'propagandist' (64). In fact, it might have been an element in smear campaigns against the Allies in Germany as well. Records exist of German navy officers yelling 'Don't shoot us!' to American ships while struggling in the water, revealing their fear that they, too, would be machine-gunned by the enemy (Thiessen 2019). More recent studies have suggested that the propaganda may have been borne of inaccurate interpretations of military events that were already difficult to interpret. False reports of lifeboats damaged by machine-guns have been re-investigated and the damage ascribed to shrapnel. Testimony of gunfire near survivors treading water can also be attributed to rounds from U-boats that had fallen short of their primary target of the enemy vessel (Dunn 2003). The nature of submarine warfare also meant that U-Boats were generally out of machine-gunning range, as their hulls were susceptible to gunfire from armed ships, placing further doubt on the historical accuracy of this alleged practice (Dunn 2003). In general, the machine-gunning of survivors is considered 'a common

misconception,' perpetuated more recently by Hollywood portrayals of World War II combat, such as the 2000 film *U-571* (Dunn 2003).

Obviously, the absence of records of German (or other) forces using machine-guns on survivors does not preclude the possibility that attacks happened. Other war crimes were committed during World War II, so the question is not whether any force was morally incapable of such an attack. A lack of first-hand evidence is also understandable, especially since the supposed point of killing survivors in the water was so that no one remained to report the war crime itself. However, by including it, Hanley gives credence to not just the 'expected' or monotonous violence of war, but a much more sinister version of it – a version that would have broken not just standard laws, but the entrenched and historical codes of maritime practice.

If the machine-gunning is not strictly historically accurate, then its inclusion can be linked to its senselessness. Hanley establishes the meaninglessness of war and of the world more generally by including this war crime at the start of *The Ocean*. It is not just a shipwreck that creates 'existential exposure to meaninglessness and absurdity,' but a destruction of codes and standards by which we agree to operate (Bradbury *et al.* 26). A war crime is essentially an action that breaks international rules of war. These rules attempt to define the universal precepts that inform the way in which society should operate. This is the kind of overarching principle that is broken or betrayed at the start of *The Ocean*. This betrayal can be compared to the event that haunts Crane's 'The Open Boat,' when Captain Murphy cut the rope to which other survivors were clinging so that his small boat would not be swamped. It is an action that was truly necessary for survival, but also in direct conflict with a Captain's sense of duty towards his men, and the more universal duty of people towards one another. In Hanley's novel, the cruelty and senselessness are externalized as an attacking force, faceless on the other side of a spotlight that blinds the men in the boat. As Modernists, both writers foreground the instability of meaning and the structures from which we derive meaning, such as a sense of duty to one's fellow man.

Hanley's portrayal of this meaninglessness is informed by his WWII context, making *The Ocean* one of many anti-war texts produced by Modernist writers. Not all Modernist texts were anti-war or even anti-fascist, but MacKay highlights opposition to war as a recurrent concern in Modernism. That WWII was 'post-imperial, anti-heroic, and totally unwanted' (MacKay 2) made it a rich context in which to explore Modernist concerns, such as the senseless deaths of ordinary men, like Crilley at the start of *The Ocean*. Fordham writes that Hanley 'brings the sea resolutely into the twentieth century, particularly through his

representations of modern warfare' (23). Hanley's recourse to the brute facticity of death and suffering, particularly of ordinary seaman, sets him apart from more Romantic representations of the ocean, as seen previously in Crane and Conrad.

The way in which Hanley writes Crilley's death and Curtain's reaction to it highlights the absurdity of these events. Curtain's response to Crilley's death is replete with inexpressible anger and loss. His very first action on the boat is to lay Crilley's body 'in a more respectable position,' as Crilley is found over the water keg, which he died protecting (3). Curtain covers him with a length of the tarp, and his friend is hereafter referred to as 'a heap under the canvas' (4). This deliberate objectification reveals a link between trauma and different levels of survival. In an open boat, staying alive is one level of survival. Where there is the physical trauma of injury or dehydration, one can engage in a practical effort to respond to this trauma. Wounds can be bandaged and supplies can be rationed and distributed.

There is also a further level of survival, which involves trying to maintain some sense of coherent meaning. The psychological trauma of death, especially senseless death, is what one must guard against in order to survive mentally. Covering Crilley with the tarp and objectifying the body by referring to it as 'a heap under the canvas' is part of Curtain's effort to survive psychologically. He cannot engage the body empathetically through a process of mourning because of his own instinct for survival. He must also repress his anger in order to survive. Other than a thought, later, that 'the devil could see in the dark' (referring to the German gunners), Curtain cannot 'make sense' of this trauma through conventional psychological processes of blame and regret (22). To cover the corpse physically and to objectify it mentally are survival mechanisms that help Curtain avoid (or survive) the absurd nature of Crilley's death. Hanley's foregrounding of the way in which individuals construct meaning in order to make their world habitable is another example of how the author engages Modernist preoccupations.

An important aspect of that constructed meaning, specifically in response to psychological trauma, is speech in response to silence. As with the novel's anti-war sentiments, Hanley introduces these aspects with Crilley's death. During the shooting, the narrator highlights Curtain's calling out for Crilley, and the silence he receives in return.

> 'Crilley.' No answer.
>
> 'Crilley.'
>
> No answer.

'Cril-ley.'

Silence. (6)

Later, when Curtain mentions burying the body at sea to the other passengers, 'There was a sudden silence. They looked anywhere but at each other' (15). Silence becomes associated with trauma and death and is incongruous with survival. Conversely, speech becomes associated with surviving trauma through an urgent attempt to construct meaning. We see this in Curtain's obsession with avoiding silence in the boat, which we can read as his rejection of death. His avoidance of silence is part of his attempt to forge the men into a group that will survive and not die. As long as they continue to speak with one another, things 'make sense' to Curtain. He reflects, repeatedly, on the importance of talking, saying that 'silence in the boat would be the worst of all,' relying on words with which 'one could build walls, shut out the ocean' (20).[10]

Here, the ocean represents the vast and formless realm of meaninglessness. The idea of 'building walls' to 'shut it out' highlights a Modernist preoccupation with constructed meaning, even if that construction is a desperate and fragile undertaking. Curtain will speak meaning into reality one innocuous conversation at a time in a Modernist attempt to control the surface of a deep and unimaginable expanse. The 'walls' Curtain builds will be small and flimsy, not unlike the lifeboat itself, a far cry from the ship that, in his assessment of European ships of empire, Josiah Blackmore describes as 'the victory of form over formlessness' (2). Yet, Curtain's attempt is ultimately successful. The men survive both the physical trauma of the open boat, and the psychological trauma of exposure to meaninglessness. *The Ocean* expresses the Modernist optimism that in the presence of meaninglessness, meaning can be constructed on an individual level. This optimism is embodied in Curtain's steady faith in his ability to 'keep his nerve.' Whether their little boat is rescued or not, they will not (and do not) succumb to meaninglessness, to their nerves, to silence.

That they do not succumb does not mean the men in *The Ocean* do not suffer. Hanley often describes the psychological suffering of the men in terms of how the ocean unnerves and confuses them. At the beginning of their ordeal, Gaunt, who sustained a head injury during the escape from the sinking ship, is receiving his water ration from Curtain but fails to really notice what is happening: 'He saw only the seas that raced towards him ... there was no hold' (10).

[10] *The Ocean* can be seen as engaging intertextually with other well-known open-boat stories, such as Captain Bligh's survival following the mutiny on the *Bounty* in 1789. Bligh attributed the maintenance of their fortitude over 7000 miles of their journey to constant storytelling and singing of hymns and songs.

For Gaunt, there is no solid ground, literally or figuratively, from which he can gain his bearings or make sense of what is happening. Later, he sits with 'a trance-like expression on his face,' the monotony of their setting reflected in his mind and his actions, specifically his face, perhaps draining him of a sense of personhood or self (14). Other passengers are similarly overwhelmed and confused. For Stone, the ocean is 'dizzying,' and he is disturbed by 'the immensity of the ocean, to which there seemed no end, no beginning' (19, 41). Even Curtain hears 'the rhythmic lap-lap of the water against the sides of the boat,' which becomes 'a gentle whirring in his mind' (41). The old priest's mind is described as moving 'slow, ponderous, like the ocean itself. ... The murmur of the ocean floated into his mind like a fog. His ears were flooded with sounds like music' (42). The imagery of penetration, coupled with the watery verbs 'float' and 'flood', create an eerie sense of the men *already drowned*. The ocean has overtaken them, psychologically if not in reality. Hanley's prose is heavily influenced by the context of the ocean. As with other Modernist writers, such as Conrad, the ocean becomes a trope or textual construct for Hanley, which can be populated with multiple meanings by multiple characters. The men's confusions are all brought about by the sea, but are individually experienced as unnerving and unclear.

This sense of disorientation pervades the text as a whole. The infinitude of their context at sea becomes both physically and psychologically confusing. The men struggle to find their bearings, with no physical landmarks to help them orientate themselves. This is especially prevalent when the narrative perspective shifts to the men who have no experience navigating at sea. Even Curtain, who should be skilled in finding bearings, is disadvantaged due to the time of day and weather conditions. Interestingly, Hanley sets most of the action during the day, such that even the stars (a standard tool of navigation) cannot be used to provide a sense of structure and security. On several occasions, the boat is also surrounded by fog, further obscuring any means with which the men can gain a sense of their geographical position. Hanley chooses to omit specific details, such as which sea they are on, or what land they are trying to reach. Stokes writes that 'since the boat's equipment consists of nothing more elaborate than a keg of water, a tin of ship's biscuits, three tins of milk, four oars and some canvas, it might be almost any time since boats were invented' (Stokes 120). These ambiguities lend *The Ocean* to intertextual reading with other lifeboat stories that utilise the same context and props – the same tropes. Curtain's lifeboat could be any and all lifeboats that were ever on the sea, and these men could come to represent the broader struggle of man 'against nature, in the form of the infinite, indifferent, ever-threatening sea' (Stokes 120). That infinitude takes

on a particularly negative connotation in an open boat, emphasising a sense of boundarylessness, or that the world is uncertain, immeasurable, and therefore uncontrollable.

Hanley also explores this sense of the uncontrollable abyss in relation to the unconscious in the episode where Benton, the youngest survivor, has a vivid nightmare. Asleep at the oars, he dreams of his childhood bedroom. The turmoil of his unstable home life is externalised as a cockroach that grows until it fills the ceiling above him. Hanley's prose moves quickly; Benton's 'mind raced, words tumbled over one another, scattered, got lost, he dived after them, caught them' (92). As the line between his dreams and reality blur, the monstrous cockroach appears in the ocean beside the little boat, and Benton screams in horror: 'A submarine, a submarine' (95). The attack on the *Aurora* hangs over Benton so much so that his fear of another attack by submarine informs his interpretation of a dark shape in the water. What he is actually looking at is a whale, breaching beside their boat. Hanley's use of perspective is key in this episode. Just as Benton is physically exposed in the open boat, his mind becomes vulnerable to the worst excesses of his imagination. Because there is constant danger in the boat and no respite from their abject experience, these worst excesses emerge as fear and distress. When Benton tries to construct meaning in this context – when he tries to discern what the shape in the water *is* or *means* – he is using the 'language' of fear to do so, and his failure of interpretation is inevitable. The shape becomes the thing he fears most, that which haunts their boat: a submarine.

This episode is indicative of the overall structure of *The Ocean*. The reader is given a glimpse into a dream, a memory, a nightmare, a vision, so that the psychological is prominent alongside Hanley's emphasis on the material reality of their physical suffering. These psychological episodes are also experienced by a different character each time. By shifting between the perspectives of different men in the boat, Hanley is able to reveal the various ways in which each of the men make meaning. Not only is meaning being constructed, but it is being shaped individually, by the use of different regimes or languages of meaning. These regimes are informed by each individual's personal experience of their world. Hanley highlights a Modernist interest in the multiplicity of meaning and how different individuals inhabit their own unique systems of created meaning, as well as the connection between multiple interpretations and certain characteristics of Modernist texts.

This particular connection is explored by David Leitch in his book *Deconstructive Criticism*. He relates the 'crisis of interpretation' experienced by Hector of Troy before a battle in the *Iliad*, and how this could serve as a model of the Modernist belief in multiple meanings

(3). Before the battle, the Trojans observe an eagle above them with a snake in its talons, still alive. The snake strikes the eagle, and both fall to their death. Hector's friend Polydamas thinks it may be a portent of defeat in the battle to come. However, he also admits that his interpretation depends on whether 'the bird sign… was a true one,' in other words, whether it is a sign at all (3). Hector refuses to believe that the bird means anything, so perhaps it is just 'a nonsignifying natural phenomenon' (5). But even 'this refusal is a reading,' according to Leitch (4). 'Thus,' he writes, 'any eventual meaning must be, to some extent, arbitrated and arbitrary' (5). There is room not just between 'the sign and its potential meaning' but between 'an assigned meaning … and the actual reality' – room for multiple and variant interpretations (5). Leitch sees this episode with Hector as a model for later Modernist ideas about how meaning is constructed. For Modernists, meaning is not innate or intrinsic, but arises from observation and description and is, therefore, multiple.

Stories of people at sea are particularly suited to investigations of this kind. In the setting of an open boat, Modernist writers like Crane and Hanley explore how characters are not able to inhabit a perspective outside of their boat experience. Describing the lifeboat from the *Commodore* amongst towering waves, Crane writes in 'The Open Boat' that 'Viewed from a balcony, the whole thing would, doubtless, have been weirdly picturesque. But the men in the boat had not time to see it' (69). The 'balcony' would offer an objective viewpoint from which to assess their situation and make sense of it. Modernists preclude the possibility of this extraction because experience is paramount, forcing us to engage in a complex negotiation with meaning in which there is no absolute, no objective truth, no 'set' way to read the eagle and the snake. For Crane, the complex negotiation with meaning was a group effort. For Hanley, there are discrepant and individual meanings, as is evident in Hanley's shifting psychological perspectives and the various interpretations of the whale. Importantly, Hanley engages with the concept that meaning is not only constructed individually, but that multiple interpretations are fashioned via the use of a language particular to that individual.

This is evident in the ways the men on the boat variously interpret and respond to the appearance of the whale. Benton panics when he first sees the whale, thinking it a submarine. He has constructed meaning though his regime of fear and the context of submarine warfare more generally, heavily influenced by the way in which the *Aurora* was sunk. Curtain, however, and perhaps as the only experienced seaman on board, views the whale more positively. Curtain grabs Benton, and, holding the panicking youth to him, placates him by comparing the whale to a child playing in the water:

> It's playing, see! Look how that water spouts up from his snout, high into the air. You never saw a whale below – then sit down here with me and just watch. That's no submarine. A submarine wouldn't know how to play. (95)

Curtain's response is informed by his context as a sailor, but perhaps also by his awareness of how watching something outside of their boat will calm and 'ground' Benton. He encourages Benton to 'see,' to 'watch'. Because action is now occurring outside of their boat, the men can gain a certain modicum of perspective. Their fragile boat is not 'the balcony' described by Crane, and there is no suspension from their immediate experience of suffering, but they can become 'observers' for a short while in a small way. This allows them to cultivate a sense of control and composure, as 'friction melted. They forgot, care went, water smiled at them – they were quiet, watching' (96). This scenario also differs to Curtain's previous lifeboat experience, which he mentions elsewhere in the text. It is perhaps this previous experience of the drastic effects of monotony ('the emptiness, the indifferent sky, the monotony of slow, of swift moving waters') that informs his reading of and reaction to the whale (98). Thus Curtain's interpretation, too, is individual and contextual.

Yet, despite Curtain's ability to observe the whale, he struggles to interpret exactly what it means. 'Meaning' here could relate either to their survival (does sighting a whale mean they are close to or far from land?) or, more simply, whether or not it is good or bad luck to see a whale. Curtain says it is 'a good sign' but will not say of what, rendering his interpretation empty of analytic value and making the whale 'a nonsignifying natural phenomenon' (Hanley 96, Leitch 5). In line with Leitch's description of Hector's 'crisis of interpretation,' there is no set connection between the whale and their interpretation of it, no 'actual' or 'correct' way to accord it meaning. In the same way, the observation that a 'submarine wouldn't know how to play' is meaningless. Submarines do not 'know' anything. Whether or not they are playing is *not* how we distinguish them from whales. This statement by Curtain indicates the further mobility of meaning. The confusion of a living being and an inanimate thing shows a further level of interpretive fluidity. Curtain's attribution of knowing / not knowing 'how to play' to a submarine is an example of constructed meaning for the purpose of calming and placating Benton's fear.

Although the whale may be a recurring 'trope' in maritime fiction[11], Hanley points to no 'standard' interpretation in order to allow his characters, and the reader, the opportunity to construct individual conclusions about what the whale means. Curtain himself offers no definitive judgement on the whale. Even the way he describes it ('You never saw a whale below') signals a distinction between what the men can see and how the whale appears under the surface (95). Likewise, there is a difference between what each man interprets the whale to mean, and what it actually means. Alternatively, if we cannot 'see' the whale underwater, then it does not matter what it actually 'means' because this 'meaning' is inaccessible to us. Fordham writes that, traditionally, the sea is seen as 'the archetype of the sublime in nature,' a Romantic concept (26). If we are to read the whale breaking the surface as the Sublime emerging in some way, this emergence does not allow us access to its meaning, as a Romantic text might imply. The Sublime may exist in Modernism, but we do not know how to interpret or understand it. It is something to observe, to fear, to wonder at as it emerges, terrifyingly, in the distance.

The consequence of these multiple interpretations is negative. On the subject of the whale and what it means, there is no cohesion, no 'great sea's voice' that gives the men interpretive powers, as at the close of Crane's 'The Open Boat' (92). Curtain can only note the whale's distinction from themselves (as an external object to observe) and from submarines. The priest is half-terrified, sees 'Jonah stirring in the depths there'; Stone is convinced it will swamp them (97, 98). This division is made clearer when, because he is distracted by the whale, Benton loses one of the precious oars. Curtain explodes in fury, and compares losing an oar to 'losing a man' (99). Later, obviously guilt-stricken but in denial, Benton repeats these words, altering their meaning in a sinister way: 'He said he'd rather a man was lost than an oar' (104). Whereas the arrival of the whale provided social cohesion ('friction melted'), it is the diverse and competing *interpretations* of external events that undoes their oneness, unpicks the fragile brotherhood on board (96). By placing the hopeful episode with the whale alongside the tragic loss of the oar, Hanley highlights the volatility of meaning, its instability, and the human tendency to distort it.

The loss of the oar is also a point at which Hanley links physical disorientation in space with psychological turmoil. The physical effort of rowing towards land is one of the practical ways in which the men make progress and maintain a sense of control. With four oars, this action is also communal, as two men row together synchronous harmony. As such, the loss of

[11] We think, obviously, of Melville's *Moby Dick*, or Jonah's whale.

an oar is socially destructive or disorienting as it obstructs this collaborative activity. Just as it physically disables the boat and hinders their progress, losing the oar hinders their ability to control their existential situation. They are 'at sea,' both physically and psychologically. Shifting between moments of physical and mental victory (such as maintaining small talk, rowing together, watching the whale) and devastation (such as moments of silence, disagreeing on what the whale means, and losing the oar) is one of Hanley's major stylistic strengths. It maintains tension and momentum throughout the novel. The reader oscillates between hope and despair in what Stokes calls 'elliptical prose' that 'does not … distract us from the artistic effect intended, but [is] a necessary part of it' (93). Hanley's style, as is evident in this section about the nightmare, the whale, and the oar, also highlights a predisposition in Modernist writing to move between the effect of meaninglessness on the individual, and how the individual may respond by attempting to construct meaning to make their reality habitable and safe.

Of all the men, it is Joseph Curtain who works the hardest to make his and the others' reality habitable and safe through the construction of meaning. Generally, Hanley establishes his protagonists in contrast to Conrad's sailor-heroes. He is 'unequivocally opposed to the idea of individual heroism [especially] in wartime,' preferring the collaboration of ordinary, working-class seamen (Fordham 56). However, Hanley's main characters 'often assume the identity of a representative, even heroic individual as a kind of maritime 'Everyman'' (56). The fact that the men survive is 'due entirely' to Curtain's coolheadedness and physical effort, and he becomes 'the backbone of the story; he holds it together as he holds his companions together' (Stokes 120). This is achieved through Curtain's careful and balanced awareness of the physical and psychological dangers that threaten to overwhelm them. He reflects that '[c]oolness, control, these were the ballast in your boat, her even keel, the power in the hand, behind each stroke of the oar,' linking their physical progress towards land and rescue (one level of survival) with their ability to keep their minds under 'control' (another level of survival) (78).

The other characters recognize Curtain's embodiment of this 'coolness' and 'control,' how he speaks and rows his reality (and their survival) into existence. Benton observes, of their sailor-leader:

> Curtain was the plan working. He was the cause and the effect, the order and the hope, the plan and its achievement. Not hurried, not confused, believing, certain. (21)

This description may appear to idealise Curtain, but Stokes writes that he remains 'an ordinary seaman ... no saint or superman' (121). He may even be self-serving when he says aloud that he does not 'want to be left in a boat with people who lose their nerve. It's too dangerous' (35). Thus, Curtain's motivation to maintain a sense of order in the boat is his 'will to survive' rather than 'selfless love of his fellow' (Stokes 121). This selfishness forms part of Curtain's practical approach to their survival. It is through practical work (the work of surviving in an open boat) that Curtain creates meaning, culminating in his last act of rescuing the German survivor.

The chapter opens with Curtain trying to pull the sea anchor[12] back in, and his physical exhaustion is clear. The anchor 'held the weight of the ocean, of the world. Again he pulled, it moved, he held on, not seeing, not thinking, only feeling the rough rope against his blistered hands' (131). All mental capacity spent, his companions in the boat appear '[l]ike oars, like ropes, like framework of this boat. Things' (131). In this abject state, he notices another lifeboat containing a lone survivor. Its emergence from the mist implies the effect these physical and mental conditions have on Curtain's ability to interpret what is happening:

> A tower in the ocean round and grey, flag flying in the mist, a bloated whale, its belly up, shining in the sun. A rounded ship, a great dead fish. They watched. It swelled as it approached, a monstrous fish, a head, a bugaboo. It floated slowly towards them. And then he saw a rubber boat and in it was a man. (140)

Like the whale before, this appearance breaks the monotony of their ordeal. It also gives Curtain something to do, some action to perform, someone to rescue. Hanley writes that at the sight of this one man, 'his head was cleared of mist, dull dragging thoughts' (142). Rescuing the man becomes, for Curtain, the rescue of himself, such that when he gets a hold of the body, he pulls 'with all his strength as though he pulled a boat towards the land' (143). It is a way for Curtain to construct meaning out of an absurd and impossible situation: two lifeboats drifting together in the vastness of the ocean.

Hanley politicises this passage by having Curtain rescue not just any survivor, but a German soldier. The man is described as 'an airman,' wearing 'an iron cross' (a German military award) and a helmet, a 'German sod ... not the first [Curtain's] seen' (144-145). But

[12] A parachute-type device that helps to prevent a boat from drifting, or keeps it pointed in a safe direction relative to tall waves in rough weather. This was standard equipment on a lifeboat.

as Curtain drags him on board, he is described more generally as 'the man from the sea', a 'poor bastard' like them (145). The man's suffering has humanised him, made him equal and worth saving. This is an important anti-war message for Hanley to send, and reveals a certain archetypal development for Curtain as a character, who redeems his comments of 'the devil' who 'could see in the dark' through this act of 'saint-like charity' (Hanley 22, Stokes 121). On the boundaryless sea, there are no political boundaries either. In the face of abject suffering, conventions of nationhood and patriotism are shown to be poor sources from which to derive meaning. In his boat, Curtain will create his own meaning and his own order of the world that helps him make sense of what is happening to him. As the priest watches Curtain carry the last of the water to the man, it appears as if 'the baler was the Host and [Curtain] was carrying it' (146). Curtain looks down at their new companion, declares 'he'll live,' and sees Crilley in the man's place. In this action, he has made sense of the death of the ship's mate as well. Soon after, Curtain collapses, the sea rocking him to sleep in a 'language that he knew,' because he himself has created a reality that makes sense to him (147).

Even though Curtain is the hero of *The Ocean,* the novel ends from a different character's perspective: Father Michaels, the elderly priest. Their supplies exhausted, dehydration and starvation looming, the priest has a vision. Through the fog that surrounds their little boat, he sees 'a rock, and on this rock, a man' (148). Despite 'great rollers moving up, converging on this rock,' and waves that sound 'like many million mouths, murmuring at its base,' the rock is stable, so stable it is 'holding up the sky' (148-149). The vision shifts. The rock becomes a hiding place from 'the [grief] that flooded the whole world,' behind which Father Michaels sees Crilley, the dead sailor, unburdened of suffering, of a world 'riddled with belief, belief in other mouths, belief in other cries' (149). As he drifts in and out of consciousness, he sees a bird, and that the 'skyline was a shadowline' – signs of nearby land that the priest does not recognize. A wave (most likely a breaker at the shore) even crashes over the bow, knocking the priest down. Finally, the narrator makes clear that the figure is a 'fisherman … standing in a boat, pipe in his mouth, waving with both hands' (152). As he shouts 'Ahoy there! Ahoy there!' the priest finds the strength to raise himself up. He looks towards the figure, 'and in his eyes, his was the shape of Christ' (152).

Despite this religious imagery at the close of *The Ocean*, Hanley's novel does not fall into the confines of theological interpretation which may suggest that their rescue is the result of divine intervention. This is because the narrative leading up to the priest's seeing 'the shape of Christ' has espoused the thread in Modernism that posits that individuals create meaning

through recourse to a familiar language of interpretation. Religion is but one 'regime of meaning' that a person can inhabit, one way in which the experience of the men on the boat can be understood. The priest has consistently 'seen God' in their experience, from the reference to Jonah and the whale, to when he sees Curtain's administering life-saving sustenance to the German as holy communion. This is how he has made individual sense of their traumatic experience, by referencing a familiar language to avoid being overwhelmed by fear and hopelessness.

The Ocean is shot through with Modernist concerns, evident in both its content and its form. By setting his novel during World War II, Hanley establishes a theme of destruction and meaninglessness, especially in his inclusion of a senseless war crime. This context allows Hanley to explore, in more detail, the effects of suffering on ordinary people as the war pervaded all strata of society, especially the working class. This was true on the sea as much as anywhere else, as merchant ships were diverted to the war effort and men who had gone to sea to work were now embroiled in the conflict. One of the few facts we learn about Curtain's past is that he has previous experience in a lifeboat, meaning that he had worked on a ship, experienced shipwreck and the particular trauma of an open boat, and returned to the sea. Curtain, like so many others, like Hanley himself, went to sea because it was where one found employment. Hanley inhabits what Stokes calls 'the view from the fo'c'sle,' in contrast to Conrad's captains and officers. Hanley's major criticism of Conrad was that he was 'not a sailor, but a writer that happened to go to sea' (in Fordham 72).

Though different, the fact that Hanley and Conrad can both be called Modernists is indicative of the movement's variance. In Bradbury and McFarlane's words, Modernism was

> … an extraordinary compound of the futuristic and the nihilistic, the revolutionary and the conservative, the naturalistic and the symbolistic, the romantic and the classical. It was a celebration of a technological age and a condemnation of it; an excited acceptance of the belief that the old régimes of culture were over, and a deep despairing in the face of that fear … . (46)

Conrad, 'still deep in the spirit of Symbolism … in the 1890s,' can be seen as representing one side of this spectrum of Modernism (Bradbury *et al.* 185). This is echoed in the works of Stephen Crane. Like Conrad's *The Mirror of the Sea* (1906), 'The Open Boat' tends towards eulogy, a common characteristic of maritime works during the last decades of sail boats (Cohen

17). Hanley, on the other end of the spectrum, develops a more materialist, a more working-class Modernism in response to the intellectual and aesthetic Modernism that comes before him. Hanley condemns, as Bradbury puts it, the technological age of war, firm in the belief 'that the old régimes of culture were over.' Hanley's characters are not intellectuals who have access to 'the mystery of the poetic experience' in order to make meaning of their suffering, especially suffering engendered by war. They are not poets. They are working-class people who have to find meaning on their own, using a language that makes sense to them based on their limited experience of the world.

Fordham has written extensively on Hanley as a writer of the working class. In his analysis of Hanley's other novels (set on land, in working-class families), he highlights 'the inherent dialectic or ideological complexity in working-class texts' where others have overlooked this aspect in favour of the genre's 'conformity to a prevailing political orthodoxy,' in this case, Marxism (2). In Hanley's sea novels, Fordham sees traces of Conrad throughout. He cites the ending of *The Ocean* in particular, and the priest's vision as representative of Hanley's 'conception of the sea as the repository for the values and traditions of remote antiquity,' which is a 'key component of the Conradian aesthetic' (70). There are definitely aspects of Hanley's writing that cannot help but be influenced by Conrad's conception of the sea. They are both Modernist writers, as is Crane, and Crane and Hanley are exploring similar broad themes of suffering and meaninglessness in the confined and specific setting of an open boat following a shipwreck. There will be, and is, an overlap, an intertextuality. But where Crane's conception of suffering is aesthetically represented, Hanley's is tied to his commitment to 'the view from the fo'c'sle,' the working-class perspective. Crane and Hanley exist on a spectrum of Modernism that itself encompasses a diverse range of texts and assumptions. *The Ocean* is underpinned by a Modernist logic regarding meaning but does so in a way that is both influenced by and divergent from its predecessors.

The Lifeboat by Charlotte Rogan

Published in 2012, *The Lifeboat* is the first novel by American author Charlotte Rogan. Set in 1914, the novel opens with the reader meeting Grace Winter, a 22-year-old who is standing trial for murder. She has recently survived three weeks in a lifeboat in the Atlantic Ocean and is asked by her lawyers to submit a written account of the ordeal as part of her defence. The novel then shifts between Grace's trial and her experience in the boat. The reader eventually discovers that Grace and two other women have been accused of murder for pushing the de facto leader, a crew member named Hardie, out of their overcrowded lifeboat.

The conceit of Rogan's novel has several historical parallels. When the *Titanic* sank in 1912, she was shockingly under-equipped in terms of lifeboats (although, instead of being overloaded, hers were regrettably under-filled). As in the shipwreck in the novel, the crew of the *Titanic* prioritised the rescue of women and children; in addition, the *Titanic* did not have nearly enough lifeboats for everyone aboard, as does the ship in the novel. There are also historical cases where, for various reasons, people in lifeboats were killed by their fellow survivors, and where those survivors faced legal consequences following their rescue. When the *William Brown* sank in 1841, first mate Francis Rhodes, like the fictional Mr Hardie, decided that passengers in their overcrowded lifeboat should be thrown overboard. Unlike the fictional Mr Hardie, Rhodes was plain about who should go: he selected sixteen passengers (fourteen men and two women) to be sacrificed, saving his fellow crew members. The captain of this ship, George Harris, was later tried for manslaughter because Rhodes, under his command, had not used a seemingly fair system of selection: 'no lots were cast, nor had the passengers, at any time, been either informed or consulted' (*United States vs. Holmes*). Other men in open boats have also been tried and convicted for sacrificing others so they might live; notably, some of these cases involved eating the victim to avoid starvation instead of throwing them overboard to avoid sinking. A famous example is *Regina vs. Dudley and Stephens*, an 1884 trial that concerned the survivors of the yacht *Mignonette*. The men, who had killed and eaten one of their crew to ward off starvation, were tried and convicted for murder. The case was unprecedented at the time. People from maritime communities were outraged that the men had been arrested in the first place, and those who were unfamiliar with the maritime world were horrified at the very idea of survival cannibalism. The case remains prominent today: it is still referred to in legal cases that deal with what was coined 'the defence of necessity' (Simpson 161).

Although Rogan's novel does not deal with survival cannibalism, the overcrowding in their lifeboat activates a new threat not seen in Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat': the threat of being murdered to ensure the survival of the group as a whole is not unlike the process of murdering and eating someone to avoid starvation. This is a shift away from the brotherhood in the little dinghy from the *Commodore* ('The Open Boat'), in which working together is the best option for survival. In *The Lifeboat*, the passengers must survive not just the ocean, but also one another. Rogan also genders this process of survival, as the boat contains mostly women and relatively few men.[13]

As their ordeal continues (lasting three weeks, as opposed to the 30 or so hours that the men from the *Commodore* spend at sea), the needs of the group shift and change, placing additional pressure on the fragile social cohesion in the boat. Thus, by writing an open-boat narrative that involves women in an overcrowded boat who are later involved in a legal case, Rogan is able to investigate several social and existential concerns that have historical analogues. In addition, they are exemplars of how open-boat narratives can be used to explore various existential, political, and social concerns.

The novel's protagonist is Grace, who is returning to New York from London aboard the ocean liner *Empress Alexandra*. The ship contains many passengers who are attempting to escape the impending war in Europe. After a mysterious explosion, the ship begins to sink. Grace's new husband, Henry, talks to and presumably bargains with a crew member (John Hardie), and she is ushered aboard a very full lifeboat. There are 38 passengers on board (30 women, 7 men, and one child), and Hardie, the single crew member, for a total of 39 survivors. Grace later learns during her trial that the lifeboat was designed to safely hold a maximum of 32 people, and only that many in calm weather.

In the immediate aftermath of the wreck, Hardie becomes the natural leader, and though his actions appear cruel to the passengers, they obey his instructions. Only one woman, Mrs Grant, vocally criticises Hardie for refusing to rescue a small child, whom they can see clinging to his mother's floating corpse in the water. A contrast is thus established between them, based on Grant's position as a compassionate person who is unfamiliar with the ocean, and Hardie's

13 This is because the maxim, known in shorthand as simply 'women and children first', prioritised the rescue of passengers, particularly those seen as more vulnerable (i.e. women and children). This practice was common from the nineteenth century onwards; as stated above, it was perhaps most famously adhered to during the sinking of the *Titanic*.

position as an expert sailor but also someone who is willing to make difficult decisions in order for those in the boat to survive.

The novel goes on to chronicle the hardships faced by the passengers in the lifeboat and the declining social cohesion within it. Several people die: one woman commits suicide by drinking seawater; another falls overboard during rough weather and although she is retrieved, she dies of exposure. Just before a particularly dangerous storm, three men voluntarily jump overboard after Hardie contrives a lottery (he and the strongest of the men survive). As the days go on, the tension between Hardie and Grant reaches a climax. His skill as a sailor (on which his authority relies) has failed to result in their rescue and thus ceases to be relevant. Grant holds a vote to cast him overboard. Grace and another woman (Hannah) help Mrs Grant physically throw Hardie out of the boat. Under Grant's command, the remaining survivors sail east and are eventually rescued. Grace, Hannah, and Grant are tried for murder, but although Grant and Hannah are convicted, Grace is acquitted, owing mostly to the fact that she was not part of the 'plot' to overthrow Hardy – only his murder.

The shift in power from Hardie to Grant is based on the changing needs of the passengers as their situation in the boat worsens. In order to understand this shift, it is important to outline the structures of maritime authority that enable Hardie to embody a sense of power and apply it in the lifeboat at the very beginning of their ordeal. Maritime structures of power are hierarchical and strict in nature. This is partly due to the influence of the military in the maritime world, as the ocean has and continues to be an important arena of politics and war; as such, military vessels were run according to strict hierarchical structures. Yet these firm systems also existed on non-military vessels, and even on pirate ships: especially in the days of sail, a crew's ability to follow orders and work together meant the difference between life and death. Thus, his ability to contribute to the project of keeping the ship afloat was the main standard upon which a sailor (pirate or otherwise) was judged. In other words, his skill was vital to his position in the ship.[14]

Not only was capability the measure of one's worth aboard a ship, but the measure of one's authority. A. W. Brian Simpson describes officers as men whose skill 'gave them the power of indispensability' (106). The more skilled one was, the more vital and more powerful one became. Cabin boys not only had the least authority on a ship (they occupied the lowest position) but were also the least skilled, given simple responsibilities such as relaying messages

[14] This is one of the reasons Joseph Conrad lamented the transition from sail to steam, writing in a letter that '[t]here is not much difference now between a deck and a factory hand' (in Jean-Aubrey 334).

or waiting on officers during meals. As a sailor developed his skills, he was able to move up the ranks, and thus, according to this system, the captain was the most skilled man on board. The career of Horatio Nelson is relevant, here. He began as an ordinary seaman, and was promoted through the ranks to midshipman, coxswain (in charge of a small boat), Lieutenant (after passing an examination that covered navigation, rigging sails, and battle tactics), Captain, Commodore, Rear Admiral, and finally Vice-Admiral of the Royal Navy (Sugden 131). By the time Nelson fought in the battle of Trafalgar, he would have occupied and mastered almost every position on board. Nelson's authority and the reverence with which he was (and continues to be) treated are in no small part due to this extensive experience, which contributed enormously to his success as Vice-Admiral. He was considered an ideal sailor, someone whom Margaret Cohen might describe as a master of the 'craft' of sailing. In her book *The Novel and the Sea*, Cohen highlights 'compleat knowledge' as one of the fourteen elements of 'craft', something Nelson undoubtedly possessed (38).[15]

This idea of meritocracy, where authority and ability are closely related, becomes even more essential in times of stress or where the consequences of inadequate skill (and thus inadequate leadership) are a matter of life or death. As stated earlier, this describes the situation on a ship at most if not all times, because navigating at sea is a complex undertaking in the best conditions. In a lifeboat, such consequences are condensed and made even more severe. Thus, when Hardie (as the only crew member) takes charge of the lifeboat following the shipwreck of the *Empress Alexandra*, his knowledge and ability do not just help him embody power and exercise authority: they are the exact elements in which his power consists. His knowledge and ability are the necessary and sufficient conditions for his authority. And it is this authority, and Hardie's skill, that ensures their survival in the moments following the wreck. Grace notes a particularly traumatic decision on Hardie's part to beat away swimmers from the area surrounding their boat, who would have certainly swamped and sunk them. She remarks that although the decision is 'horrendous', it is necessary, because they cannot 'save everybody and save ourselves' (14, 15). Of all the people on board, it is Hardie who realises the severity of

[15] We can identify the importance placed on competency by the ways in which incompetent captains (those without 'compleat knowledge') were viewed and treated, revealing the extent to which one's skill as a captain and one's authority in that position were linked. In the following chapter, for example, the incompetence of the captain of the *Medusa*, Hugues Duroy de Chaumareys is highlighted as the primary cause of that disaster. Political activists amongst the survivors urged the authorities to put Chaumareys to death for his crimes, the chief of which was abandoning his ship (and later, the hastily-constructed raft). This was a crime for which the death penalty was considered a fair punishment (Miles 178).

their situation and the need for these actions, actions which Grace admits 'spelled the difference between continued existence and a watery grave' (15).

Hardie is not the captain of the lifeboat, and he was not captain of the *Empress Alexandra*, but his experience as the only seaman on board gives him power, and the situation in the boat allows him to exert that power in an authoritative way. However, this power is not absolute or given, for various reasons. N. A. M. Roger describes the Navy as not 'a fleet of ships or an instrument of national policy, but as a society in miniature, a floating world with its own customs and way of life' (14). However, if the ship is 'a minute world'[16], representative of the society from which it sails, it does not necessarily follow that the lifeboat is a smaller version of the ship. Because a shipwreck has occurred, the lifeboat is a broken or fractured version of the world of the ship. In his book *Manifest Perdition*, Josiah Blackmore writes that 'shipwreck is the sign of [an] epistemological break, of a previous world crashing against the shoals of its own demise' (40). This is the context in which the lifeboat can be viewed. It is a fairly random collection of the population from the ship (as opposed to a relatively representative version of society on land), skewed even more because the evacuation of women and children is prioritised. In addition, every person on board has experienced the trauma of the shipwreck and the 'epistemological break' that Blackmore describes. Because the passengers are psychologically vulnerable after this trauma, Hardie is able to take charge more easily. Likewise, the boat is occupied by women for the most part, and in 1914, women would still have been viewed as particularly weak and in need of protection. This is the protective role into which Hardie so easily fits in the moments following the wreck, both as an experienced sailor and as a strong man.

It is significant to note that Hardie's position is contingent on the needs of the passengers at that moment in time and their vulnerability, unlike the absolute authority of a captain, whose crew follows him for both technical and personal reasons. Although captains were the most experienced of the crew (and thus 'worth' following in a meritocratic sense), the crew was also bound by a sense of duty to the captain, both legally (especially on naval vessels, where disrespect was strictly punished) and in their personal commitment to obedience (a more ethical sense of duty).[17] The passengers in the lifeboat feel no such sense of duty towards

[16] As Joseph Conrad describes it in *The Nigger of the 'Narcissus'*.

[17] 'Duty' is a context-specific notion that is influenced by the socio-economic makeup of the time period in which it is studied. Although we would like to think that those serving under Vice-Admiral Nelson, for example, felt duty-bound to him through a sense of personal honour alone, the Georgian time-period is important to understanding duty as a norm. John Sugden writes in his biography of Nelson that he lived in 'a naturally

Hardie, and this is one of the reasons why his leadership is criticised and questioned later in the novel. This differs from Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat', where the crew's sense of duty towards the captain is part of how they maintain a sense of control and calm (even though the captain in their case is injured, and thus not able to contribute meaningfully to their survival). Although Crane's boat also carries a combination of crew and passengers, the correspondent in 'The Open Boat' shares this sense of duty and plays his part in the brotherhood on board. Rogan interrogates a different social tension by populating her boat with not simply a combination of crew and passengers, but men and women who are not bound by a sense of maritime duty, and who occupy a particularly tense social context of inequality.

The first sign of Hardie's unstable hold on his leadership position comes when, while they are navigating the debris and bodies around the shipwreck, they all see a small child in the water, clinging to his mother's floating corpse. When someone mentions the possibility of reaching him, Hardie responds: 'Fine, and which one o' ye wants to trade places with 'im?' (12). No one moves to sacrifice themselves for the boy, but Mrs Grant vocally criticises Hardie anyway:

> Mrs Grant said, 'Brute! Go back and save the child, at least,' but it must have been clear to her that we could not go back and escape with our lives. With those words, however, Mrs Grant was branded a humanitarian and Hardie a fiend. (15)

Mrs Grant's attack on Hardie is a moral one. Hardie's actions, which prioritise the survival of everyone in the boat (by beating away swimmers who might swamp her, and refusing to save the child, who will add additional weight), can be characterised as utilitarian.[18] It is not the action, but the consequences of an action, which determine its moral value, and because abandoning the child ensures the survival of the entire boat, is the right decision. Grant, on the other hand, thinks that abandoning the child is wrong, irrespective of the consequences. This fundamental tension is indicative of the broader differences between the maritime world and the world on land. Ships, especially after the Enlightenment period (1715 onwards), generally

hierarchical society in which deferential inferiors were bound to betters by a system of paternalism … with [an] emphasis upon mutual obligations between governors and governed' (12). The early 20th century still boasted similar hierarchical structures, particularly at sea, but the lack of duty towards Hardie might be symbolic of these ideas giving way to more democratic ones that emphasise equality. The transition from sail to steam is also important when studying shifting hierarchical structures at sea.

18 Obviously this is also a moral framework that is self-serving for Hardie: if he protects the boat, he ensures his own survival as well.

operated on a utilitarian understanding of the world 'based on necessity and inspired by pragmatic considerations' (Avramescu 35). Thus a custom, as opposed to a formal law, emerged, where the community understood and condoned the behaviour. Survival cannibalism, which became known as 'the custom of the sea', was not frowned upon by communities familiar with the circumstances of extreme survival situations, but was seen as morally reprehensible (and technically illegal) by those outside of that realm of understanding.

Grant's mode of criticism is also significant, as she voices her censure in such a way that she is absolved of any responsibility in the matter. Grace notes this clever use of rhetoric and its timing ('it must have been clear to her that we could not go back'). Mrs Grant successfully highlights what she perceives as moral flaws in Hardie's decisions without having to offer a solution herself. Thus Grant begins to explore the possibility that meritocracy should give way to rule by the most just or most moral. Because Hardie's authority in the boat is not bolstered by a sense of duty towards him on the part of the passengers, this shift becomes possible, and Grant's use of rhetoric allows her to criticise Hardie's morality without having to make similar life-or-death decisions for the good of the group.

Grant's idea of who should have power is based on moral principles, but not religion: although there is a deacon on board, Grant does not turn to him for help or ask him to support her opinion of Hardie with a religious moral framework. The deacon and his worldview are shown to be weak and ineffectual in the specific situation in the lifeboat. Quite soon after the wreck, the deacon offers a religious reading of their situation, a practice that has been common throughout the genre's history.[19] He remarks that the wreck has 'renewed his faith in God – or if it hadn't yet, it was bound to,' but Grant says it has 'renewed her conviction that there [is] no God' (37-38). These contrasting readings are based on the two extremes of a lifeboat scenario: the intense joy of rescue and salvation, and the intense suffering and physical pain of the experience in the boat. The deacon's faith in God is contingent on rescue and a joy or relief that, according to him, is 'bound to' occur; Grant's atheism is based on the intense suffering they are experiencing and will continue to experience. As the rescue has not occurred, and is not certain, the deacon's attempt to encourage the passengers fails. Until they are rescued, Grant's conviction that God does not exist stands unchallenged.

[19] Blackmore notes the religious symbolism embedded in works like Alfonso X's *Cantigas de Santa Maria*'. The poems become examples of an 'allegorical narrative of Christian devotion,' where characters suffer (a sense of perdition) and are rescued (salvation) (3). Later broadsheets and pamphlets that narrated shipwreck disasters were religious and didactic in nature.

This failure on the part of the deacon, understood in terms of God's failure to rescue them, is similar to the way in which Hardie's failure is conceptualised by Grace. She views and characterises Hardie in religious terms that shift in tone as their ordeal continues. In the beginning, Grace views Hardie with reverence, feeling, when she looks at him, 'the kind of terror the Virgin Mary must have felt when the angel Gabriel came down' (60). When Hardie manages to catch two fish for them[20], five days into their ordeal, many of the passengers begin to 'turn their worshipful eyes on him' (92). However, after this, Hardie's absolute power begins to deteriorate, based on his inability to continue providing for them or to manifest rescue. Grace reflects:

> But after those two, we caught no more fish. Every day we expected the ocean to yield more of its bounty, and when Hardie failed to make this happen, we saw it as a willful withholding on his part rather than bad luck […] The fish became a symbol of what Hardie could do if he wanted, of what he might do if we would only behave and stop questioning his plan for us. (92-93)

It is Hardie's perceived[21] lack of skill that makes him vulnerable to criticism from the passengers. This is emphasised by the change in circumstance in the boat, because the dangers faced in the immediate aftermath of a shipwreck are different to those faced during the drawn-out, ultimately immeasurable period awaiting rescue. Hardie can rise to the challenges of a shipwreck: he can navigate safely away from it, deny rescue to others, ration and distribute food, set watches. As the situation worsens, and rescue appears less likely, Hardie must make even more difficult decisions, and add to the list of (in her opinion) unethical decisions that Grant is holding against him.

One such decision that Hardie has to make occurs just before a storm, and an underlying tension that has existed since the beginning of their ordeal comes to the surface: that some

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[20] The symbolism of fish, rain, salvation, and suffering make survival stories in lifeboats easy to interpret in religious ways, as these tropes often occur in Biblical stories (the feeding of the five thousand, or Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, which is compared to Jonah being swallowed by a whale and vomited up three days later in Matthew 12:40).

[21] As people unfamiliar with the ocean, they obviously do not understand the difficulty of fishing, or how unlikely catching a fish might be. Medium sized, easily-consumed fish are relatively rare in the open ocean, as opposed to sharks, which might appear more often but would be more difficult to catch, kill, and eat, especially in an overcrowded boat. Hardie is also fishing with a knife straight off the side of the boat, not a line and hook, which would be easier.

people must sacrifice themselves and jump overboard so that the whole group can survive. As there are no volunteers, Hardie decides that the fairest way to decide who must die is by drawing lots amongst the eight men (he includes himself), where two straws are short and two men must go overboard.

Drawing lots has a long history in maritime literature, in both real and fictional accounts. The practice was not always viewed uncritically, for various reasons: these included the association of lotteries with the un-Christian practices of gambling and fortune telling, as well as the idea that lotteries are an affront to God's divine will, forcing God to 'show his hand … [or] reveal His intentions for the future' (Avramescu 32). But it is also associated with an ancient concept of equality, which is different to a more nuanced concept of justice, where what is fair (just) is not always what is completely equal.[22] This is what Avramescu calls 'a primitive form of democracy, where perfect equality dominates' (32). This can be seen as suited to lifeboat situations, where 'extreme necessity knows no law' and where the 'epistemological break' described by Blackmore can be applied to normal, more nuanced structures of law and fairness (Avramescu 32, Blackmore 40). In essence, the practice of drawing lots depends on the formation of a social contract, where each member decides to participate and agrees to the consequences, no matter the outcome, because each other person has agreed to the same (Avramescu 33).[23] Some scholars also believe it to be in line with the general idea that maritime practices are utilitarian in nature. Emer de Vattel argues that drawing lots, specifically for survival cannibalism, 'is in better harmony with our duties to ourselves and with our duties to others than the decision to allow all to die of hunger' (Avramescu 35).

When they were used, lotteries were a way of outsourcing or avoiding moral responsibility. This was true in both an emotional and legal capacity: not only did people feel less guilty about the consequences of a lottery, but they were technically less guilty. In *United States vs. Holmes*, Captain George Harris was accused of manslaughter because the victims *were not* chosen by lottery (Avramescu 32). The same charge was laid against the survivors of the *Mignonette*, discussed in further detail later in this chapter. Drawing lots was not only considered a fair way of determining the victims of sacrifice, (whether the victim was thrown overboard, or killed and eaten) but also their executioner (Philbrick 174, Simpson 123). Thus

[22] For example, it is **fair** to give a pregnant woman a seat on a bus, even if it is not **equal** treatment.

[23] Although Avramescu would say that this creates a 'model of the body politic' in the lifeboat, there is room to describe this 'model' as a damaged or traumatised version of the original: the consequence of this particular contract is severe and traumatic, where one of the group agrees to be murdered, and the group to be murderers (33).

no one person on board could be held truly responsible for the murder.[24] Although not true in every case, where the survivors were Christian, lots were seen as a way by which the survivors might 'admit providence,' in other words, allow the process to be guided by God as opposed to controlled by the individual.

By suggesting they draw lots, Hardie attempts to absolve himself of the moral responsibility of deciding who should jump overboard. Although he is the one who has the requisite knowledge to explain to the others that unless they draw lots and someone go overboard, they will surely sink, he firmly states before they draw that he is 'not forcing anybody' (172). First, Michael Turner, one of the weakest men, draws a short straw and, 'laugh[ing] crazily', leaps overboard. Several of the stronger men (Colonel Marsh, Mr Hoffman, Mr Nilsson, Mr Preston, Hardie himself) draw the longer straws. When it is down to two lots (one of which is a short straw) between the old deacon and a wheelchair-bound man named Sinclair, the priest sacrifices himself before Sinclair can draw. Overwhelmed by guilt, Sinclair pushes himself overboard as well. The squall hits, and Hardie and the remaining men work hard to keep the boat positioned safely relative to the waves, while the women bail. They survive, and as Grace reflects on this episode, she realises that Hardie had not left their survival up to chance at all. It was the 'five strong men' who survived, and the three weakest who went over the side (178).

> With a shudder of horror, I realized that it could not have been luck that had arranged it so, even if I had not noticed the sleight of hand by which this result had been accomplished. Hardie had left nothing to chance, but had chosen who would live and who would die. (178)

Hardie's strategy has shifted, and his contrivance of the lots shows how he is taking both his agenda (ensuring the survival of the most number of people) and Grant's ethical criticisms into account. He knows that some people must go overboard in order to ensure the safety of the group, and knows that he requires the stronger men to row during the storm. However, he also realises that he cannot openly suggest that the weakest passengers sacrifice themselves without seeming, in Grant's eyes, like 'a brute'. Hardie protects himself in two ways. First, he suggests

[24] This was the case on the lifeboat of Captain Pollard of the ship *Essex* following their shipwreck by whale in 1820. The first lot (for the victim) fell on Pollard's nephew, Owen Coffin, and the second (for the executioner) fell on Owen's best friend, Charles Ramsdell (Philbrick 176).

that the lottery only take place among the men. As the storm approaches, one of the men suggests that 'if anyone should be sacrificed, it should be a woman,' as men are more physically useful in the boat during a storm (169). The women are outraged, and thus Hardie (although he would definitely agree with the suggestion to sacrifice a woman) protects himself from criticism by confining the lottery to the men. Secondly, Hardie cheats, and contrives that the weakest of the men draw the shortest straws.[25] The deacon's sacrifice for Sinclair, and Sinclair's subsequent suicide, only work in Hardie's favour. These two strategies, and Hardie's successful navigation of the storm (his skill and ability as a sailor) help to prolong his position of authority in the boat, as he abides by his utilitarian principles and avoids appearing unethical to his main opponent, Mrs Grant, who is not utilitarian.

The storm prolongs Hardie's authority in the boat because it gives him the opportunity to show his skills as a sailor, and it is on these skills that the survival of the boat depends. However, after the storm, when Hardie's skills and abilities do not result in rescue, his authority begins to wane. Nathaniel Philbrick notes the need for this change in leadership requirements, particularly in relation to shipwrecks and lifeboat scenarios. In his book *In the Heart of the Sea*, in which he studies the case of the *Essex* and the survivors in the boats following the shipwreck, he writes that authoritarian leadership is more 'suited to the early stages of a disaster, when decisions must be made quickly and firmly,' while the situation later calls for different 'leadership skills' that revolve around maintaining morale (100).

Maintaining morale in a lifeboat can be seen as equally important as the practical skills of navigating, rationing supplies, and surviving the weather conditions of the open ocean. Morale also becomes more important the longer people are in the boat, and the more hopeless their situation becomes. There are several significant historical examples of how leaders in lifeboats worked to keep hope alive despite the difficulties they were facing. In the case of the survivors following the mutiny on his ship *Bounty*, Captain Bligh 'directed every person to attend prayers' and regularly updated and encouraged his men with regards to their journey (Bligh navigated more than 6000km over a period of 47 days in a ship's launch[26]) (Chapter 16). On Owen Chase's boat, following the shipwreck of the *Essex*, morale was maintained by giving the men specific tasks, such as making alterations to their boat to better prepare it for

[25] Contrived lots have also been common throughout historical accounts of open-boat experiences. A famous example is that of the *Peggy* in 1765, where the lot 'fell' on a black slave 'who was part of the cargo' (Simpson 124).

[26] A kind of ship's boat.

their long journey East[27] (Philbrick 93). One of the survivors, Benjamin Lawrence, kept his mind busy by twisting together pieces of thread into a length of twine, which was 12-inches (30cm) long by the time they were rescued (184). It is still on display at the Nantucket Historical Association (229).

From the very beginning of *The Lifeboat*, Grant is the person who prioritises morale, and her efforts are placed in contrast to Hardie's efforts to practically survive the shipwreck. On the first evening, she moves along the boat, trying to 'console the most stricken', until Mr Hardie '[cautions] her to sit still', presumably to prevent the overcrowded boat from rocking in the water (23). It is Mrs Grant who fashions a sling for another woman; Grant who takes charge of the bailer into which the women awkwardly urinate; Grant who distributes cloth to those who are menstruating. Hardie's skills as a sailor ensure their survival, but Grant's skills as a mother (or mother-figure) ensure their dignity. This is a practical service, but has an additional social quality. Importantly, Grant's ability to fulfill the social requirements of the passengers is based on early twentieth-century stigmas about women, especially women's bodies and bodily functions. These stigmas are more pronounced at sea, where women were historically regarded as more vulnerable.

From the nineteenth century onwards[28], female passengers benefitted from an intersection of their roles as both women and passengers. Legally, shipwrecks were not investigated if only crew members died, but were investigated if passengers were lost; this was because 'cargo owners and seamen were expected to look after themselves; but passengers, it was thought, required paternalistic care' (Simpson 6). A captain had a 'moral and familial duty ... to ensure the safety of his passengers,' particularly female passengers (Miskolcze [a] 172-173). This paternalistic care, grounded in the imbalance of patriarchy, meant that women were simultaneously powerless and provided for, and cared for only because of their perceived vulnerability. According to Robin Miskolcze, how nineteenth-century women were treated during shipwrecks became a standard test of not just individual character (for the men who saved them), but of the strength and character of the nation as a whole. The notion that saving or not saving women and children could act as 'a gauge of national character' is what engendered the maxim of 'women and children first'. Miskolcze calls this maxim not only 'a

[27] Chase's boat, and the boat of the captain of the *Essex* George Pollard Jr., were rescued after 89 and 93 days at sea respectively. They had travelled over 3000km through the Pacific Ocean.

[28] Prior to this, women were not much distinguished from other passengers, and passengers themselves not much from cargo. The nineteenth century saw an increased focus on the protection of women as a symbol of national success, as explained in the following paragraph.

lifesaving procedure,' but 'a principle to which [men] would be held' ([b] xvi, xi).[29] Saving women and children first was still the standard practice in the 1910s, the era in which *The Lifeboat* is set. Famously, this maxim was employed during the sinking of the *Titanic* (which the characters in Rogan's novel reference as a contemporary disaster), and was applied during their own shipwreck, accounting for a disproportionate number of women in their boat.

The social standing of women was changing in the early twentieth century, and although women were prioritised in disaster situations due to their perceived vulnerability, the suffragette movement was growing in England and the United States. The campaign, which included mass rallies and a series of covert bombing and arson attacks, reached its height just before the outbreak of World War I in August 1914. Just a year before *The Lifeboat* is set, in 1913, Emily Davidson stepped onto the track at Epsom racecourse and was trampled by George V's own horse, a martyr for suffrage (Grant 262). Later that year, Emmeline Pankhurst would deliver her 'Freedom or Death' speech on a political tour of the United States, where women would get the vote in 1920, two years after women in the UK[30] (McCann 88). Those years were, wrote Sylvia Pankhurst, 'full of stern fighting and bitter hardship,' bringing to all women 'a courage, a self-reliance, a comradeship, and above all a spiritual growth, a conscious dwelling in company with the ideal' which no longer belittled them, but made them 'heroic' (Chapter 24).

This is the context that informs Grant's position in the novel. She is an example of a physically strong woman – she is the only one who takes a turn at the oars – but also someone who feels she has the 'courage [and] self-reliance' of the suffragettes to stand up to the problematic men on board. While other women fall apart (one woman has a mental breakdown and drinks seawater, essentially committing suicide), or remain passive (as Grace does throughout the majority of the novel), it is Grant who vocalises her criticism of Hardie and other men in the boat. While Hardie distances himself from the women when it comes to their bodily functions (his instructions for urination, for example, are awkwardly given and quickly handed over to Mrs Grant), Grant's focus on keeping the dignity of the women intact shows her commitment to maintaining a sense of stability and normalcy in the lifeboat. Of course, her

[29] Historically, this procedure was first enacted by the captain and crew of the *Birkenhead*, which foundered off the coast of South Africa's Western Cape in 1852. In an almost picturesque display of masculine sacrifice, 'the men of the 74th Highland Regiment stood at attention on deck, the band playing, while the women and children were saved, and the captain very properly went down with the ship' (Simpson 97).

[30] For both countries, this right was extended to only certain women. In the UK, this meant property-owning women over the age of 30. Black women in America did not get the vote until 1965.

position is complicated, because although Grant criticises Hardie and calls the other men in the boat violent and brutish, it is her position as a woman, and thus as a member of the more vulnerable sex, that has determined her position in the lifeboat. 'Women and children first' is a concept that has benefitted all the women , despite it being patriarchal. This complexity is perhaps mirrored in how Grant uses her criticism of Hardie to her own advantage which Grace comments on:

> The division between Mrs Grant and Hardie has been working under the surface for some time, but I now saw how she had played several situations to her advantage since the first day, when she had come out in favour of picking up the child. She had been the first to suggest trying to sail, which had seemed like a good idea to us, even if the boat had been too overcrowded for it to work. Then, she had loudly criticized the entire notion of drawing lots without objecting to it in a way that would have caused it not to happen. That the men had died had benefited us all, but Mrs Grant had emerged from the incident as the one holding the higher moral ground. (194-195)

Just as Grant must straddle the categories of the vulnerable (in order to be classified as 'worth saving' by patriarchal maritime systems) and the strong (in order to criticise Hardie), her language is purposefully unclear. She equivocates, using rhetoric to find fault with Hardie without committing herself to action. When Hardie is no longer able to act, or his actions are no longer able to manifest salvation for them (he has overcome the initial wreck, and the storm, but cannot produce rescue), his power wanes, and Grant's campaign against him allows for enough doubt to be sown so that Hardie cannot exercise his power with authority anymore. It is at this point, on Day 14, when Hardie is no longer needed, that Grant moves against him and calls for a vote to throw him overboard. Grace admits that their consent to this extreme measure is due to their absolute physical and mental exhaustion; they are 'hungry for absolutes', and making a decision is an opportunity to make some meaning and have some agency in their hopeless position (226). Grace's view of Hardie has also swung from one extreme to the other, again characterised in religious terms:

> When I looked at Mr Hardie that morning, I was hard-pressed to recognize the superhuman figure of those first days in the boat. If Mr Hardie was still godlike, he had become god in his human form, and we all know what happens to gods like that. (228)

When Grant calls for a vote to murder Hardie, Grace notes a strange calm that comes over the boat. Grant aims 'to keep things as normal as possible' to make the vote seem as if it is 'just another of many routine duties, what anyone who found himself adrift in a lifeboat would be asked to do' (229). All except two of the women vote to murder Hardie, and all four men vote to save him. Grace abstains from the vote. The use of a democratic vote as a decision-making mechanism can be contrasted with Hardie's earlier use of the lottery. Interestingly, both systems, when used fairly or correctly, are accepted means of making decisions. However, just as Hardie contrived the lottery, it could be argued that Grant contrives the vote, due to her subtle and prolonged criticism of Hardie and support (perhaps even manipulation) of the women. Grace comments that the women 'were weak,' adrift and easily steered in accordance with the will of the most powerful, not unlike the vulnerable stages immediately following the wreck' (223). The fact that the vote is so strongly divided along gender lines also indicates a broader conflict between the genders, and not necessarily a fair representation of Hardie's ability to continue to lead them.

Although the vote can be considered unfair, the group's decision is final, and Hardie is sentenced to die. Because Grace abstained from the vote, Grant calls on her to assist Hannah, Grant's main deputy, to physically throw Hardie out of the boat. Grace realises that this is Grant's 'way of implicating [her], of making [her] vote with [her] actions whether or not [she] would vote with [her] words' (232-233). Despite this realisation, Grace strangles Hardie, and they throw 'the only person among [them] who [knows] anything about boats and currents into the boiling sea' (237). It is at this point that the narrative leaves the boat and finds Grace in prison. She is writing this account for her defence as she awaits her trial for the murder of Mr Hardie, along with Hannah and Mrs Grant.

The fact that Rogan has chosen to frame her novel as an account written by a survivor as a legal document is not without precedent. Shipwreck literature owes much to true accounts recorded for specific legal requirements. For example, the Merchant Shipping Act of 1854 required statements to be made whenever a loss of ship, life, or goods occurred (Simpson 5). However, unlike the case in *The Lifeboat*, the purpose of mandatory statements was not for criminal prosecution, but for adding to a body of knowledge to increase safety at sea. It was only later that these documents became part of a defence strategy in a legal case, and the specific kind of defence that Grace's lawyers are building is that the murder committed in the lifeboat was justified because it was necessary to her survival. This kind of justification is called 'the defence of necessity,' what Simpson explains as the attempt to reconcile 'the instinct

for survival with a moral code that respects the sanctity of human life' (10). Such a defence was first made famous by a real-life instance of survival cannibalism in a lifeboat: *Regina v. Dudley and Stephens*.

Following the wreck of their yacht *Mignonette* on 3 July 1884, four crew members found themselves in a 4-metre lifeboat, over 1000km from the nearest land between St Helena and the West coast of Africa. The men were Tom Dudley (the captain), Edwin Stephens, Edmund Brookes, and Richard Parker (the cabin boy, an orphan of 17). They had with them minimal supplies, the yacht having sunk less than 5 minutes after being struck by a rogue wave. Two weeks into their ordeal, Richard Parker became violently ill and confessed to Brooks that he had secretly been drinking seawater. Simpson writes that 'given the beliefs of the time as sailors, they must have all thought that Richard Parker was doomed. Indeed… Richard had been explicitly warned that drinking seawater would kill him' (60).

Although never explicitly stated by the survivors in their statements[31], this seems to have been a contributing factor in the captain's decision that Parker should be sacrificed to save the rest.[32] Not only could drinking seawater have indicated to the other men that Parker wanted to die (it was seen as an act of suicide), but his lack of dependents made him the obvious choice. All of the other men had wives and children, and because 'family destitution that was so often the result of shipwreck was a constant theme in popular literature… the possession of dependents therefore constituted a highly rational ground for preference' (Simpson 62-63). What happened next is still contested (as no clear order of events or understanding was ever agreed upon by the three men), but by all accounts, Parker was to be killed before he died naturally of starvation, so that the remaining survivors could drink his blood. In their ailing state, this was the most valuable resource to harvest from a body. Captain Dudley took on this responsibility. While Stephens held Parker's legs, Dudley stabbed him in the neck, drained his blood, and butchered his body.

Although all the men ate the body (and, by all accounts, only survived because they did), the extent to which Edwin Stephens and Edmund Brookes participated and/or agreed to these actions were closely examined, because after being rescued and returned to England, the three men were immediately arrested. Brookes, who ate most of the body with Dudley, but did not, as Stephens did, physically participate in the murder, turned state witness, and Dudley and

31 At the time, these statements were given as part of standard procedure for collecting information about the wreck and not specifically as 'confessions'; they were later used as confessions in the trial against the men.

32 Although Dudley mentioned drawing lots, it was never confirmed whether he did so or not, or whether the lot was contrived to select Parker.

Stephens were convicted of murder and sentenced to death. This is why the case of the *Mignonette* is so renowned. Although certainly not the first case of survival cannibalism, it was the first time a body of authority on land had exercised control and ascribed an official moral value status to survival cannibalism. This was a practice that, if not generally encouraged, was deemed reasonable by the common law of the sea.

Regina vs. Dudley and Stephens dramatised the significant differences between the domains of sea and land. Simpson explains these epistemological and moral differences as forming a 'fundamental barrier of incomprehension' (11), not unlike Grace's description of the court officials as 'absolutely incapable of comprehending [their] circumstances,' and in addition, men who 'failed to comprehend that they could not comprehend' (233). In reality, this barrier was evident in the separation of maritime law that relied on customary understandings, and law practised in courts on land. Historically, it was only after centuries of maritime activity that proper regulations were finally standardised and enforced. For most of the period between the 15th and 18th centuries, maritime regulations were comparatively relaxed, and according to Simpson, it is 'hardly surprising that the high seas were largely beyond the reach of law of any kind' (103). Even in later cases such as that of the *Mignonette*,

> … the conditions of life at sea, the vast distances involved, the absence of modern communications, and the essentially temporary and international character of seaman's work have combined to impede attempts to make landsmen's law rule on sailing ships. (Simpson 107)

This concept, that the law of the land cannot apply to situations aboard ships at sea, parallels how systems that exist aboard a ship fail to manifest in a similar way in lifeboats following a shipwreck. On board the *Empress Alexandra*, the passengers were divided by class; crewmen were bound to a rigid hierarchy of authority; men and women complied with the gender roles their society dictated. None of these systems or arrangements (of which the law is an example) transfer successfully or fully into the lifeboat: where such systems do appear, they are malformed imitations of the original, hastily crafted to create some kind of meaning. It is the fragmentation of these systems that allows for Hardie's authority to be questioned, and for his murder to take place.

For example, when Hardie beats away the swimmers at the start of the novel, Grace questions 'whether it can even be called cruelty when any other action would have meant our

certain death' (15). When reflecting on Hardie's contrivance of the lottery, she reflects that 'a person's choices are only rarely between right and wrong, or good and evil' and that 'people were mostly faced with much murkier options ... there were no clear signposts marking the better path to take' (182). Of whether Hardie was right or wrong to deliberately send three particular men overboard, she simply states that 'right and wrong didn't come into it' (182). Concerning moral value, Grace's experience in the lifeboat means that she shifts from believing there is a universal standard of right and wrong, to believing that each case should be judged by its particular context and consequences; from a landed idea of morality to a maritime one.

Grace occupies a passive role in the lifeboat throughout the novel, and this is mirrored in how passive she becomes during her trial. In a lifeboat, one's exposure to the elements of sea, sun, wind, and rain are mirrored by one's exposure to a crisis of meaning, emphasised by the inability to locate oneself geographically (which can be disconcerting and disorientating) and the inability to know for certain if rescue will arrive. In Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat', the men have a particular mission to keep them focused and motivate them despite a similar exposure to meaninglessness: they must row for the nearby shore and survive the dangerous breakers. In James Hanley's *The Ocean*, the male characters also construct meaning through the physical act of rowing, which keeps both their bodies and minds occupied. The situation in *The Lifeboat* is different. Grace is passive because she is physically weak, a woman, and a passenger. She does not even enter the lifeboat with agency: she is placed there by her husband. These factors contribute to her feeling, both literally and emotionally, 'at sea'.

Passivity and ambivalence also define Grace's experience of her trial. She describes how she and the other defendants are 'allowed to observe the proceedings, but not to speak' (265) and how as the judge speaks, 'the majesty of the law [is] proclaimed, and [they are] cast upon its waters' (273). Her experience in the boat has not created in her a particular resolve or anger, and when she thinks about why she survived, she speaks about suppressing her emotions, rather than expressing them, writing: 'besides, look what happened to those who felt strongly and expressed it: the deacon threw himself overboard; Hardie and Mary Ann[33] are dead; and Mrs Grant and Hannah are in jail' (303-304). Grace's written account is never used by her defence team, which strips the texts itself of agency or purpose. She is pronounced 'not guilty' due in large part to this passivity, and her weakness. Although this works in Grace's favour, there is a definite sense that her powerlessness in the boat is mirrored in her

33 Mary Ann is a particularly hysterical woman who is seated next to Grace; she dies of exposure before they are rescued.

powerlessness under the law, subject to the physical elements of the ocean, and then the judgements of patriarchal society. She can find reprieve from neither, and the fact that she and her fellow passengers were eventually rescued from the lifeboat does not mean that Grace's lot will necessarily improve. Just as she was at sea before, so she is now in the patriarchal world of early 20th-century America.

In *The Lifeboat*, Rogan shows an awareness of various tropes in the open-boat genre and complicates these discussions with her inclusion of gender and legal considerations. The novel presents an alternative to Crane's 'The Open Boat'. *The Lifeboat* shows how forms of leadership might mutate and fail in an open boat, especially when different worldviews (such as those of sailors and landsmen, or men and women) are set in opposition to one another. *The Lifeboat* also shows how one's safety in a boat is not threatened by the elements alone, but also by the social dynamics on board. Lastly, Rogan's inclusion of a legal case in her novel helps illustrate the historical links between the law and open boat narratives, not just in their relevance to the provenance of this genre, but in their ability to highlight the incompatibility of different systems of understanding when it comes to action and consequence in an open boat.

The God of Spring by Arabella Edge

The God of Spring (2005) by Arabella Edge is a historical novel set in nineteenth-century France that re-imagines a significant maritime disaster.[34] On 16 June, 1818, the frigate[35] *Medusa* left France en route to Saint-Louis, Senegal. The captain was a political appointee. The position was a reward for loyalty in exile to the recently re-established monarchy; he had not sailed in the 25 years since the French Revolution. Although the *Medusa* began the journey in convoy (a safety measure), and despite being warned that the route was dangerous, the captain ran the ship aground in shallow waters 50km off the coast of modern-day Mauritania. The captain and aristocratic passengers boarded the boats; those remaining (some 147 people, mostly officers and soldiers[36]) were consigned to a makeshift raft that had been constructed from the decks of the slowly sinking vessel. Although the boats promised to tow the raft to shore, the ropes were cut, and the raft was abandoned. After nearly two weeks of storms, brawls, mercy killings, and cannibalism, the raft was discovered with just 15 survivors on board. The event as a whole was viewed as both a tragedy and a political scandal, owing to the captain's dubious appointment, his incompetence at sea, and his abandonment of the raft.

Three years later, at the 1819 Paris Salon exhibition, the young and upcoming Théodore Géricault showed his now-famous masterpiece for the first time: an over-life-size tableau depicting the raft on one of its final days at sea, the survivors desperately signaling a ship on the horizon. Although its title was simply *Scène de Naufrage* (Shipwreck Scene), the true context of the painting was unmistakable. It was widely discussed, garnering both praise for Géricault's artistic talent and criticism for his choice of subject as it reflected badly on those in power. Today, it is located in the Louvre in Paris, and 'dominates its gallery … a symbol of the indifference of authority to the suffering of its subjects' (Brandt 131).

The painting solidified Géricault's reputation as a contributor to French Romanticism.[37] In addition, his obsession with the shipwreck and his process of researching and planning the painting continues to fascinate art historians. Géricault sought out the survivors who had returned to Paris and interviewed them extensively about their ordeal. In particular, Géricault

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[34] Two of Edge's other novels do the same. *The Company* (2001) concerns the sinking of the *Batavia* in 1629; *Fields of Ice* (2011) follows the failed Franklin expedition to chart the North West Passage.

[35] A large warship; *Medusa* was previously a successful navy ship and was modified slightly for this final voyage to the colonies.

[36] The difference between these two groups of survivors is explained later.

[37] It won a gold medal that year at the Paris Salon; historians generally agree on its subsequent influence on the works of Delacroix, Turner, and Manet, among others.

befriended the ship's surgeon Henri Savigny and the chief engineer Alexandre Corréard, who were in the process of publishing an account of their ordeal on their return to France. Both agreed to pose for Géricault's final painting. Another survivor, the carpenter from the *Medusa* who originally built the raft, was commissioned by Géricault to build a scale model for the studio. The artist obtained – illegally – several corpses and severed limbs from the nearby Beaujon Hospital morgue, studying their decomposition to replicate victims aboard the raft. While painting the tableau, Géricault became a recluse from aristocratic French society, shaving his hair and refusing to admit guests or observers to his studio. Thus, even in modern critiques of the painting, the story of the survivors sits alongside the story of the 'tortured artist'.

Although the raft from the shipwreck of the *Medusa* is not technically a lifeboat, it can be seen as a similar structure in terms of its context and construction. It was a flimsy vessel onto which people were forced following a shipwreck, albeit a ship that was disabled and slowly sinking into a sandbank and not a vessel that suddenly disappeared beneath the waves. Like a lifeboat, the raft exposed its inhabitants to the elements of the sky and sea, perhaps even more so than is typical in open-boat narratives. Due to overloading, most of the raft was initially underwater, up to waist-high in some places (Miles 61). As it began to disintegrate, people's legs became trapped between the timbers and were broken (Miles 107). Without the means to sail, row, or steer the raft, its inhabitants were left to drift: in the two weeks after the wreck, the makeshift vessel meandered over 150km from the *Medusa* (Miles 111). Thus the raft, like other lifeboats, provides an interesting space within which to examine the political and social concerns of the time, made acute in the confined and abject circumstances of the disaster.

This was an opportunity that Géricault saw and chose to interpret in his painting, and which Edge examines in her novel. *The God of Spring* imagines Géricault's process as he crafted the tableau. Several of his sketches and studies still exist; examined in order, these seem to provide a sense of Géricault's changing attitudes towards the event, particularly represented in the choice of which scene to depict. The choices considered were notable scenes in the survivors' narrative: the moment when the captain abandoned the raft, the mutinous battle between the soldiers and the officers, the instances of cannibalism, and the mercy killings, where the strongest fifteen banded together and murdered anyone too weak or injured to survive much longer. Also considered were the two distinct sightings of the *Argus*. The first time it appeared on the horizon, it subsequently disappeared, leaving the survivors hopeless.

The second time was the actual moment of rescue, wherein the *Argus* accidentally[38] came upon the raft many hours later.

Each of these choices can be viewed as a lens through which to interpret the event. The abandonment distinctly political because it highlight the incompetence and cruelty of the captain and the government by whom he was appointed. The moments of mutiny, cannibalism, and murder highlight the physical and mental suffering of those aboard the raft. The desperation of sighting a ship only to fail in signaling it is keenly hopeless, while the moment of rescue is the opposite. Thus the disaster becomes an event that might be read and interpreted in divergent and specific ways, to serve various agendas. In *The God of Spring*, Géricault outlines specific reasons for his final choice: the first (fruitless) sighting of the *Argus*. His reasoning stems from a desire to avoid both a directly political statement, as well as the 'sensational and obscene' instances of cannibalism, which in his opinion, will detract from the painting's intended effect.

This chapter considers the painting and the novel as two separate engagements with the historical event of the shipwreck, each a practice of ekphrasis.[39] Traditionally, ekphrasis was used to describe poems about artworks (paintings, statues etc.), with poetry and painting relationally understood as 'sister arts' (Cheeke 20). There are differences between a painting and a novel about a painting, but the space between them becomes, according to Stephen Cheeke, 'a place of *relation* and therefore a possibility of exchange' (6). What is important is not which work (the painting or the novel) 'comes closest to rendering the *real*' but how each work is linked to the context or movement within which Géricault and Edge are working. All instances of ekphrasis involve the selection, distillation and revision of the elements of a prior representation, and each form of art (painting or novelisation) performs these actions in a specific way according to the strengths of that medium.

These different strengths are based on both affect and audience. Cheeke highlights how ekphrasis is 'affect-orientated', i.e. concerned with capturing specific emotions; in cases of art, these emotions are relayed or represented to a viewer or reader, and as such affect is closely linked to audience. It is, as Cheeke writes, inseparable 'from the notion of a reader, who may

[38] *Argus* had not been sent to look for the raft, but for the half-sunken *Medusa* to reclaim any salvageable property.
[39] The painting is considered a practise in ekphrasis because it is an interpretation of another work; in this case, a true account. The comparative and hierarchical nature of eighteenth-century ekphrasis does not apply here; rather, I have used Stephen Cheeke's understanding that the 'gap' between language and visual art can never and possibly should never be resolved (21). Art and writing about art do not, in this understanding, 'wish to dominate, out-do, or eclipse each other' but exist alongside one another and seek their own particular aesthetic affect (24).

also be in this case a viewer of the artwork' (3).[40] Thus the painting and the novel are examined below in terms of what they intend to capture and relay to their particular audience, and for what purpose. The painter Géricault, working within the movement of Romantic painting, aimed to have a particular effect on his viewers that was closely linked to the politics of 1816 France. The novelist Edge is working within a contemporary modernist narrative mode, and is focused on elaborating the subjective interiority of the painter as he immerses himself in the story of the shipwreck. By examining these works in parallel it is argued that the open-boat is central to each creator's interrogation of the themes their work is focused on representing. This begins with the political context of the historical event, outlined below.

Only thirty years before the *Medusa* set sail, in 1789, the National Assembly (the citizens' council established by the Revolutionaries) abolished the French monarchy. Four years later, King Louis XVI was sentenced to death by guillotine, one of nearly 3000 nobles to be executed in Paris. During this time and in the period leading up to the Revolution, many royalist aristocrats escaped into exile. They were known derisively as '*émigrés*' by the Revolutionists: cowards who plotted in opposition to the Revolutionary government from foreign shores. One of these *émigrés* was the late King's brother, a man who, following the death of Louis XVII (the King's son) in prison, was technically the rightful heir to the abolished monarchy (Miles 9).

In the years following the Revolution, a young Napoleon Bonaparte rose through the ranks of the French armed forces. He was a general by age 24, and by 30, he had orchestrated a coup that overthrew the Revolutionary government. In 1804, Napoleon declared himself Emperor of France, at just 35 years old (Grant 214). Although this was a position of absolute power, Napoleon's rule differed from the concept of 'divine right' that empowered the monarchy, or *ancien régime* (Roberts 30). Napoleon's status as a war hero and military genius had a profound effect on the troops he commanded.[41] When the royal house of Bourbon was restored to power following Napoleon's defeat at the Battle of Waterloo (1815), the French army they inherited from the Emperor was disaffected and disillusioned. It was this restoration that saw the return of *émigrés* like King Louis XVIII. He filled his government with *émigrés*, and gave top military positions in the army and navy to loyal *émigrés* (Miles 21). Hugues

[40] Cheeke highlights how this links to the root meaning of the word 'aesthetics' in Greek: 'an act of perception, a sensory response, literally a "breathing or taking in" (aesthesis)' (3).

[41] When Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, he was imprisoned on the island of Elba. He escaped, and French troops were sent to arrest him. When they arrived, he convinced the troops to defect to his side. This happened twice.

Duroy de Chaumereys, an *émigré*, was given the captaincy of the *Medusa* in 1816, having barely sailed in the 29 years since he fled the country (Miles 23).

The scandal of the *Medusa*'s wreck was twofold. Firstly, it was seen as a sign that this restored monarchy was no better than the *ancien régime*. Nepotism had raised Chaumereys to a post for which he was neither qualified nor deserving (Miles 23). In his arrogance, he ignored warnings from his crew, whom he believed to be inferior due to their Republican leanings. As Jonathan Miles writes, 'Chaumareys appears to have been too high-handed to take the opportunity to learn' (Miles 26). In the ultimate act of self-service, he placed the rich and powerful in the boats and left the most vulnerable (and politically disempowered) passengers to flounder on the raft (Miles 57). Belief in one's own privilege, and the pursuit of maintaining that privilege at a direct cost to those beneath one: these were the very ideals and attitudes that had angered and emboldened the Revolution.

Secondly, Chaumereys' incompetence was seen as a scandal in terms of maritime law. He contravened several codes of conduct, including losing sight of his convoy (ships travelled within signaling distance to share navigational observations and for emergencies), failing to take proper hourly soundings (depth measurements) in notoriously shallow waters, and not being the last to leave the ship (Miles 149). Seventeen men who had been assigned to the raft refused to board it, believing it to be certain death.[42] Their decision to remain on the half-sunk wreck of the *Medusa* made Chaumereys guilty of abandoning his ship too soon. This last action was not simply a convention meant to emphasise the captain's responsibility to all on board: in ninteenth-century France, it was a capital offence (Miles 149). Yet, unsurprisingly, Chaumereys did not face execution from his government once he returned to Paris.

Thus the wreck had enormous political implications. Told well, and to the right people, the story could have a far-reaching and damaging effect on the new monarchy. Two survivors, Savigny (the ship's doctor) and Corréard (who was going to be the chief engineer once the ship reached Senegal), on their return to France, began immediate work on a political pamphlet with this very purpose in mind. In the preface to their book, they expressed how various parties had attempted 'to make it a crime in [them], that [they] have dared to say, that officers of the marine had abandoned [them],' when no such crime had been identified in the actions of those who caused 'the destruction of a hundred and fifty wretches, left to a most cruel fate' (Savigny np). They directly implicated the Bourbon monarchy and expressed real fear that, like the monarchy

[42] Three of them were rescued, 54 days after the shipwreck.

of Louis XVI thirty years prior, 'the resources and the dignities of the State are still the exclusive patrimony of a privileged class' (Savigny np).

This was a political context that Géricault captured in the final painting, which is historically viewed as a criticism of the Bourbon Restoration. Miles highlights, in particular, the inclusion of a tri-coloured uniform trailing off the raft's right side, which 'acts with its echo of the revolutionary tricolor like a requiem for republican French values' (174). He also suggests that the placement of the survivor Corréard is politically significant. In the work, Corréard looks back at his friend Savigny, his arm thrust outwards, gesturing at the speck of the *Argus* on the horizon. According to Miles, he is identifying the passing ship as 'nothing but a part of the same state machinery that is responsible for our present plight,' a gesture that is 'alarmist and accusatory' from a man who is not a victim, but a 'polemicist' (177). Even though the scene does not actually depict representative figures such as Captain Chaumereys, the painting, wrote the historian Jules Michelet, depicted 'France herself, our whole society … loaded onto the *Medusa*' (in Miles 242-243). This political focus was not lost on the organisers of the 1819 Paris Salon, who attempted to avoid a scandal by renaming the painting '*Scène de Naufrage* (Shipwreck Scene)'.

Another, broader political statement is made by Géricault through the inclusion of three black figures. The most prominent of these men is the one who, hoisted by his fellow survivors, is desperately signaling the *Argus* with a piece of red cloth. This choice by Géricault was historically accurate: there was at least one black survivor when the raft was discovered by the *Argus*: a soldier named Jean-Charles (Miles 112). However, the inclusion of not one, but three black figures in the final work has been read as deliberately political. Contextually, the slave trade had been abolished in England in 1807, but Napoleon and the Bourbon Restoration had delayed its abolition in France and the French colonies. There was growing discontent with this postponement. The narrative published by Savigny and Corréard that detailed their survival on the raft made several criticisms of the continuance of slavery in the Senegalese colony to which the *Medusa* was travelling before it wrecked. Miles writes that their pamphlet made 'a trailblazing contribution to the burgeoning abolitionist critique of the French government's continued and devious complicity with the trade' (Miles, 214). The black survivors in the painting thus 'present the larger drama of a people passing from despair and victimization to hope for a brighter future,' and by including them, Géricault becomes 'not only a witness to the malfunctioning French administration, but also an advocate for a fundamental shift in human rights' (180). The painting was later entered into the 1819 Paris Salon, an exhibition

that King Louis XVIII attended every year. This was the audience to whom the historical figure of Géricault could make a powerful, undoubtedly political, statement that captured growing dissatisfaction with the specific circumstances that lead to the disaster of the *Medusa*, as well as the broader issues of slavery, the colonies, and racial inequality. This he achieves through the deliberate selection and even modification of specific aspects of the historical event (such as including *additional* black figures despite evidence of only one); thus the painting is an ekphrastic intervention in history to serve a specific purpose.

Historically, Géricault did produce a study (rough sketch or plan) of a scene that focused more directly on the political aspect of the shipwreck disaster – the abandonment of the raft by Captain Chaumereys. In art criticism, studies can be viewed as part of a cumulative process that results in a final work; the study for the abandonment is part of Géricault's process, and the political force of the study is still incorporated into the final work, though in different ways (as detailed above: the uniform, the survivors, the black men). However, in the novel *The God of Spring*, these studies are reconfigured as choices that the protagonist Géricault must consider and reject in order to establish his character, move the plot forward, and engender character growth. Each study, beginning with the overtly political abandonment, must be considered and then rejected by the character of Géricault as he works towards creating '[a]n emblem of universal suffering, of longing' (Edge 269).

In the novel, Edge establishes the protagonist's character by making the reader aware of the strong influence of politics on commissioned art in early nineteenth-century France. Early in the novel, Géricault visits Horace Vernet[43], his contemporary and neighbour, whose career is based on supporting (and favourably representing) those in power. Vernet is in the process of painting '*Restoration France, Protectress of the Arts*', and Géricault snidely remarks that 'six years ago [...] it was *Our Emperor Napoleon, Protector of the Arts*' (28). He comments that 'Horace knew his history […]. But history as nothing more than a series of political statements imagined in paintings and tableaux vivants [static scenes]' (28). Géricault himself is exempt from reliance on commissions. Already made wealthy by an inheritance from his mother, he is free to paint what he likes. Commissioned works like Vernet's *Restoration France* are merely propaganda and are considered lacking in what Géricault determines to be 'true value'. Shortly after this observation, a colonel, formerly of Napoleon's army, eagerly regales Géricault with the story of the wreck of the *Medusa* and outlines the political corruption

[43] Vernet is based on the historical figure of the same name, son of Carle Vernet, who lived and worked in Paris and was a close friend of Géricault's (Miles 16).

it highlights. Thus the disaster presents an opportunity to paint a subject that criticizes the government and will set Géricault apart from his contemporaries. This helps establish the character of Géricault for the reader, revealing his ambition to rise above his peers and his yearning for some deeper, more profound engagement as a painter.

Later in the novel, when Géricault befriends the two survivors from the wreck (Alexandre Corréard and Henri Savigny) who are using their book about the ordeal to engage in a vehement anti-state campaign, he realizes that he must also avoid the anti-state propaganda to which Savigny and Corréard adhere. After completing the sketch of the abandonment, Géricault sees the captain as a 'moustachioed villain'; the entire scene, like Vernet's commissions, 'weighted with a theatricality and melodrama more fitting to a lithograph bought for a couple of sous in any café in town' (155). When Savigny and Corréard argue with Géricault over his choice, he tells them that to paint the abandonment 'would be nothing short of the cheapest propaganda illustrating some polemic, a political manifesto' (186). He expounds that the abandonment scene is 'contemporary and ensnared in the moment of the times,' and that, unlike Vernet's works that show a willingness to transfer allegiance based on political changes, his painting must '[break] free from the anchors of time' (307). Géricault thus moves on from a political choice and considers other options for his final tableau.

In her novel, Edge selects and revises the historical facts – that the real artist produced various sketches – for her particular purpose. Her reason for doing so, I suggest, is to show how the protagonist defies the expectations of those around him to create a work that is unique and true to his deep convictions about art and its fundamental purpose in society. Though historians can *suggest* these ideas about the historical figure Géricault through an analysis of his work, it is a particular prerogative of the novel form that Edge is able to imagine the interiority of the artist at which historical analysis can only guess.

This is likewise the case with Edge's ability to imagine the connections between Géricault's studies of mutiny or cannibalism. Historians and art scholars have interpreted how these studies have contributed to the final artwork, and Edge has used the studies as turning points in her character's development, where Géricault must make certain choices to bring him closer to his goal.

Conditions on the actual raft from the *Medusa* were punishing from the very beginning of the survivors' journey. As mentioned before, the raft was dangerously overloaded, and most of it was almost immediately underwater. Everyone was forced to stand to avoid being submerged, and no one except those in the centre of the raft could keep dry at all, as the water

was waist-high in some places. No one was able to rest. Because there were no gunwales (sides) on the raft, waves constantly swept over the structure, sometimes so violently that several survivors were swept overboard. Owing to Captain Chaumerey's incompetence, the raft had few supplies. There were only a few casks of water and wine, and by way of food, some raw flour; several of these casks were also lost overboard either during the rushed evacuation of the *Medusa*, or due to the chaos following their abandonment. These deadly conditions created a sense of panic that, owing to the size of the group, was impossible to allay or control.

Just days into their ordeal, petrified, exhausted, and dehydrated, some of the soldiers stole a cask of wine. That night, in their drunken terror, 'they became hell-bent on slaughtering everybody and smashing the raft in an orgy of destruction' (Miles 99). The ship's officers defended themselves against an all-out riot.[44] Many people were crushed, struck down, or thrown overboard in the tumult. Almost half of the survivors died during the night. In the following days, heat and hunger set in. Intensified by exhaustion and constant exposure, these conditions drove the remaining survivors to cannibalism. Those who remained after the mutiny cut strips of flesh from the dead and hung them about the raft's makeshift rigging to dry. That night, another riot broke out, again instigated by the soldiers on board; in the morning, only thirty remained. When two of the surviving soldiers were caught secretly drinking the last of the wine, those ship's officers who had established themselves as leaders (Savigny and Corréard among them) sentenced these soldiers to death. Soon after, when the final rations were tallied up and found drastically wanting, the leaders decided to murder and jettison those who, in their opinion[45], would not survive much longer. The strongest fifteen banded together and went about the raft, stabbing the weakest and throwing them overboard. Arguably, these actions ensured their survival.

The conditions to which these human beings were reduced can be described as abject. Julia Kristeva writes that, although abjection involves physical suffering, it extends beyond the body and encompasses a more extensive breakdown: 'It is not a lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect borders, positions, rules…' (4). She describes abjection as the experience of being 'at the border of [one's] condition as a living being' and death being the moment when the 'entire body falls beyond the limit' (3). In the particular situation in an open boat (or raft, in this case),

[44] The officers were more heavily armed than the soldiers, who had been forced to abandon their weapons when leaving the *Medusa*.

[45] It should be noted that Savigny was a medical doctor and so theoretically had the requisite knowledge to inform these decisions.

cannibalism lies at the heart of abjection, those actions which 'disturb identity' to the farthest degree. Corpses are a particular catalyst for abjection. Kristeva writes that 'refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live;' yet, in survival situations, one is often not able to separate oneself from these elements (3). In the most dire circumstances, such as drinking urine or eating human flesh, these elements must in fact be consumed in order to live, completely inverting 'system [and] order'. Another example used by Kristeva to outline abjection is the consumption of food or drink that disgusts us, that makes us physically gag. This reflex is a way of facing or dealing with that abjection: if facing the abject is akin to death, then 'I give birth to myself amid the violence of sobs, of vomit' (3). To gag, or to vomit, is to defend ourselves from confronting the abject, but in a harrowing survival experience, we must be exposed directly to this horror in order to survive. These experiences are as psychologically traumatizing as they are physically perilous.

Because the historical figure of Géricault was painting during the French Romantic period, it is also important to consider how the Romantics viewed suffering as thematically integral to the movement. Thompson describes how, to a less harrowing degree than that experienced by open-boat survivors, Romantic travellers characterised suffering as a means by which to access truth about the underlying nature of the world or ourselves. Specifically, it is through surviving or enduring suffering that the traveller can 'reveal his true self or alternatively, to train and transform that self' (24). On the relationship between the 'true' or 'authentic' and suffering, Thompson writes that 'discomforts and dangers … are not so much authentic in themselves, as they are the *markers* of an authenticity … to which the Romantic traveller wishes to lay claim' (25). This determination in the face of such suffering was often linked to the religious idea of the sinner finding God, where the 'misadventurer [must] plumb the depths of despair and horror before he admits God into his life' (79). However, there is a difference between travellers (who have a sense of agency or choice in their travels) and the victims of shipwrecks like the *Medusa*. Particularly in cases where the abject suffering of survivors was intensified, such as was the case on the raft, it is not only the ship and the human body that are 'torn apart,' but 'even identity, and those psychic structures by which we maintain our sense of who we are,' including 'any complacent understanding that the world is ordered Providentially' (94). For the Romantics, abjection (and especially suffering at sea) was adopted equally as a didactic tool for religion and a means to prove 'that there was no guiding force orchestrating events, and no divine plan for either the individual or the world' (106).

It would seem that, based on his choice to depict the first failed attempt to signal the *Argus*, the historical figure of Géricault falls into the latter category of those Romantics that chose to depict suffering in their work, thus denying the power of Providential rescue. The men are not being rescued in *The Raft of the Medusa*: the *Argus* is in fact so small a speck in the painting that one cannot discern whether it is coming towards the survivors or heading away from them. Here, Providence as well as the State have abandoned the men, indifferent to if not the direct cause of their suffering. By selecting this particular moment of anguish, Géricault captures an acute sense of desperation and psychological suffering.

However, though the survivors are utterly distressed (their expressions pained, their gestures full of angst), the final painting does not overtly depict abjection, which is essentially physical in its manifestation. This is a specific revision made by Géricault. As Crary writes, 'we see no starving, emaciated bodies' (14): this despite a seeming obsession with death and decay during the research for the painting on the part of Géricault. He produced a detailed study depicting cannibalism on board the raft, where at least one figure hunches over a corpse, raising a limb to his mouth. Géricault also sought physical contact with death to inform his final tableau, as mentioned before. He rented a studio near the Beaujon Hospital in Paris, visiting and sketching terminally ill patients there. He also obtained amputated limbs from the morgue and kept them in his studio to note the changes in pallor as they decayed. He made extensive studies of these parts, which included the severed heads of torture victims.

The nature of this extensive research suggests that Géricault seriously considered the cannibalism episode for his final tableau, but his decision to revise the historical facts of the case (by placing more bodies on the raft than were actually present at the sighting of the *Argus*, and painting healthy-looking men, for example), does not detract from the effect of the work. Critics agree that the painting's 'verisimilitude is based on its more profound embeddedness in new networks of the real'; i.e., the painting does not have to literally show cannibalism or starvation in order to represent the abjection on the raft (Crary 14). Although the painting does not depict starving men consuming human flesh, the raft is still populated with the dead and the dying, including a figure draped off the edge of the raft in the bottom right-hand corner. The same figure appeared in Géricault's study for cannibalism, and implicitly suggests the gruesome act by reminding the viewer of the dire situation aboard the raft (Miles 181). Even though Géricault arranged beautiful, healthy models in his studio, the pallor of the dead figures in the painting is eerily accurate. Thus the artist finds a balance between 'realism in all its awful excess' and the creation of 'a potent image' that is thought-provoking instead of gruesome,

shocking the viewer but drawing them in (Miles 174). As a painter, Géricault 'dared to depart from the literal truth in his expression of a more profound meaning' — the suffering of not just these men, but all men (Miles 181). It is the combination of research and careful selection that makes the final tableau so representative of both physical and psychological suffering, despite the lack of realism in terms of the survivors' emaciated bodies, and the absence in the painting of strips of flesh that hung about the rigging of the actual raft.

In the novel, Edge uses cannibalism and mercy killings much as she does the political context of the shipwreck: to present her protagonist with a problem that he must encounter and overcome on his journey to completing the painting. This problem comes in the form of Géricault's initial obsession to unearth the horrific details of the deaths on the raft from the survivors Savigny and Corréard, whom he has invited to stay with him in Paris. Although they are recovering, Géricault longs to 'reel his guests out of the light and cast them back into the deep, blue sea' (131). He believes the true and accurate account from Savigny and Corréard will enable him 'to paint as if he too were a witness, a shipwreck survivor'; that he can understand their ordeal, and that that understanding will enable him 'to capture the raw nerve of the experience' (166). He tries to picture himself in a similar situation, and how he might succumb to the same temptations:

> He tried to imagine it. You find yourself lost at sea, or marooned on a desert isle or in some inhospitable terrain inhabited by hostile tribes. … As each day passes, the links loosen to the person you once were … Your personality … becomes as ragged and shredded as your clothes. … All you know is a burning corrosive desire to survive. … Nothing to do with humanity, but a primitive and pagan craving. (188)

This idea – that he might understand the situation aboard the raft by imagining it – is the erroneous thinking that the protagonist must overcome. The sudden realization comes after Géricault pushes Savigny on the subject of the mercy killings. When he brings Savigny to tears, forcing him to relive 'a decision that would have broken many a man,' Géricault is finally shamed (195). He realises that, having 'shared no part in their suffering,' he cannot 'even begin to apprehend the true nature of their experience,' and that, 'unlike Savigny and Corréard, he would not have survived' (195).

Edge characterises Géricault's decision to reject the scenes of cannibalism and murder for his final tableau as his coming to terms with the inability, as a mere spectator, to understand

or represent these moments. Before, his understanding of cannibalism has been framed by cultural assessments of the practice: as indicative of the social and religious 'other' ('primitive' and 'pagan'). After his humiliating experience with Savigny, he declares himself as 'an artist, not a judge' (218). Thus the process of selecting the final scene is less about technical composition and more about the artist's own interior process. The ekphrastic choice to paint healthy models as opposed to emaciated corpses is not a product of French Romanticism, but Géricault's nuanced understanding that he cannot depict the truth of the raft because understanding that 'unthinkable' trauma is not possible for someone who was not there.

Edge's perspective as a twenty-first-century modernist writer is evident in how she presents the effect of the raft experience on the survivors. Géricault realises that the men, despite having being rescued, are in many ways 'inconsolable' after their ordeal; this representation is reminiscent of post-traumatic stress as it is understood from a contemporary perspective (263). The novel complicates the idea that narrative, as an ordering structure, can contain suffering or assist one in making meaning following a traumatic experience such as one in a lifeboat or on a raft: these men have told their story, but it has not made their ordeal any easier to process or make meaning from. This understanding is mirrored in the structure of the narrative, which oscillates between Géricault's story as he researches the painting and the narrative of the survivors on the raft. Just as memories from their experience can break the surface of everyday life in an unexpected and destabilising way, so the narrative suddenly switches from the comforts of Géricault's Paris home to the raft of the *Medusa*. Thus the structure of the novel could be said to echo the dissonance of the survivor's experience, both on board the raft and afterwards.

Another contemporary perspective evident in the novel is that suffering is inherently subjective and inaccessible, which is a question each of the chosen authors in this study (examined so far) has had to address. Stephen Crane, for example, chooses the form of the short story to convey his real-life experience in an open boat because fiction is more apposite to his purpose. Edge, for her part, not only uses fiction, but specifically selects the artist, and not a survivor, as her protagonist. Géricault is himself a 'reader' or interpreter of the historical event he has chosen for his painting. Likewise, the reader is a spectator or interpreter of any given narrative or historical event. By imagining the journey of the artist, Edge provides a template for our own engagement with historical narrative, and provides a protagonist to whom a reader (who herself has never experienced two weeks on a raft) can relate.

As a process, ekphrasis is not concerned with truth; as Cheeke writes, a contemporary understanding of ekphrasis should disregard 'which medium comes closest to representing the *real*' (5). Rather, ekphrasis consists in selecting and adjusting elements of a work (whether a literary account of an historical event, or another artwork) for the purpose of affecting an audience in a particular way. Art historians have analysed Géricault's intentions and the effect that his painting had on nineteenth-century French Romanticism and continues to have today. Edge presents something different in her novel, which is more focused on the interiority of the artist character and his journey to completing the painting. The form itself is particularly suited to this task. Cheeke writes that 'language is more fundamental and intrinsic – more constitutive of interiority – than the world of appearance' (7), and thus the novel, over and above a historical account, is more suited to imagining Géricault's state of mind as he went about completing the painting. In addition, the novel provides the reader with an exemplar of reading itself, and the process of making sense or meaning of a harrowing story to which one ultimately cannot relate. One may stand at the foot of the painting and see the canvas stretched above one, the figures straining for the tiny speck on the horizon, but understanding of this suffering is unattainable, and both the painting and the novel act as constructed lenses through which the contemporary viewer/reader may approach the abjection on the raft.

Life of Pi by Yann Martel

Life of Pi (2001) is the third novel by Canadian author Yann Martel. It follows Piscine Patel – known as 'Pi' – describing how he survives 227 days in an open boat in the Pacific Ocean. Martel presents two versions of Pi's narrative: one in which Pi begins the journey with a collection of zoo animals that attack and eat each other, and one in which these characters are human beings who engage in cannibalism in order to survive. As a result of his trauma, Pi replaces the humans with their animal analogues, and thus the novel engages with the use of narrative to make meaning or sense of the trauma experienced in an open boat at sea.

There are several elements of the text that make reference to the historical and fictional aspects of the open-boat genre, both in terms of structure and theme. Martel makes use of a 'found text' framing device, in which a fictitious author interviews Pi many years after his ordeal. There are also sections of the novel that can be considered examples of magical realism, a genre that is often engaged when dealing with trauma. In addition to a strong thematic focus on religion and the didactic power of Pi's story, Pi himself performs a particular range of actions and experiences a particular range of scenarios that cause the novel to overlap with and reference many other open-boat narratives.

The novel makes use of a framing device in which a fictional author seeks out the lone survivor of a shipwreck who is now residing in Toronto. The survivor is Piscine Patel, who recounts his ordeal in the first person for much of the novel, with occasional interruptions by the fictional author. In the account, Pi is a teenager travelling from India to Canada aboard the cargo ship *Tsimtsum*, in the 1970s. Along with his family, the ship is also transporting an array of zoo animals that Pi's father, a former zookeeper, is selling in order to finance their immigration to North America. As the ship begins to mysteriously sink, Pi struggles to find his way to a lifeboat, realising as he does so that several animals have been let loose in the chaos. Everyone else is lost at sea, but Pi boards a lifeboat with a wounded zebra, a hyena, an orang-utan and a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker.[46] The hyena eats the zebra and the ape, the tiger eats the hyena, and Pi survives the majority of his 227 days at sea by 'taming' the big cat with a whistle and his zoo-keeping knowledge. There is also an episode where their lifeboat

[46] This name is deliberately intertextual (Martel said as much in an interview with Cannongate Books). Richard Parker was the name of both the cabin boy in the true case of the *Mignonette* (1884) and the character in Edgar Allen Poe's novel *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym of Nantucket* (1838). Somewhat bizarrely, the fictional case (in which Parker draws the short straw at sea and is cannibalized) preceded the true case.

intercepts another lifeboat and Richard Parker kills its cunning inhabitant. Shortly before making landfall, Pi discovers a mysterious floating island populated by meerkats.

When the boat finally reaches land and Pi is finally rescued (Richard Parker having disappeared unceremoniously into the jungle), a delegation from the shipping company is sent to collect a statement. Seeing their dissatisfaction with the first story, Pi tells them 'another story': one where instead of a zebra, there is a wounded sailor; instead of a hyena, a French cook; instead of a docile orang-utan, Pi's own soft-spoken mother. The role of the tiger is played by Pi himself, who eventually kills the cook after the man has murdered and eaten both the sailor and Pi's mother. The company men confer over the similarities between the stories and tell Pi that although the latter is probably true, 'the story with the animals is the better story' (317).

Life of Pi shows an awareness of the archive of maritime literature from which it draws. The fictional author's note purports that the story that follows is a found text, a combination of Pi's own diary, the interview with Pi, and tapes of the deposition from the Japanese shipping company. This is typical of many maritime stories, as the genre began in true accounts which developed over time into fictional narratives. There are also many cases of fictional accounts professing to be true. A famous example is *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), whose first edition claimed that the work was 'written by Himself', not Daniel Defoe. Another example is Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter*. Although not a maritime work, the novel includes a forward by a fictional author, who claims to have 'found the record of [...] this singular woman, for most of which the reader is referred to the story entitled *The Scarlet Letter*' (34). Both Hawthorne and Martel's author personas are versions of themselves. In *Life of Pi* this faux-realism pays tribute to the historical provenance of these kinds of texts.

An important source for genuine found texts is legal documentation, as discussed in the chapter on Rogan's *The Lifeboat*. *Life of Pi* 're-produces' the transcript of a recorded deposition between Pi and the two men from the company that owned the *Tsimtsum*. Depositions and other legal documents are commonplace in the maritime literature genre. Because they often included loss of life or property, there was a legal obligation to record shipwreck narratives. The transcript of Pi's deposition is given at the end of *Life of Pi*, and thus the novel is bookended by two indicators of apparent authenticity that have historical parallels in this genre.

Just as Martel creates a fiction (in the form of the author persona) to tell the story of Pi, so Pi creates a fiction to tell his own story. Narrative construction is the method that Pi uses to make sense of his trauma both immediately after the wreck and years later as an adult. In the

story involving the animals, Pi creates animal personas for each person on the lifeboat. Later in life, he comes to understand what has happened to him in religious terms, and here religion can be considered another kind of 'story' with which people make sense of the world. Religion and Pi's relationship with God are referenced throughout the novel. In the author's note, the fictional author says that he first decided to seek out Pi after an old man told him that Pi's story 'will make you believe in God' (xii). When he meets Pi, he notices that Pi's 'house is a temple,' a palimpsest of Muslim, Christian, and Hindu iconography. Pi is deeply religious (but uniquely monistic – believing in all religions), following his ordeal, explained in the penultimate chapter when he says to the men from the cargo company:

> In both stories the ship sinks, my entire family dies, and I suffer. … So tell me, since it makes no factual difference to you and you can't prove the question either way, which story do you prefer? … And so it goes with God. (317)

The use of a shipwreck survivor story as a means with which to demonstrate God's existence has a long tradition in shipwreck narratives. Blackmore[47] outlines how early Iberian poems about shipwrecks describe 'divine intervention and miraculous deliverance', where the suffering of men and the suffering of Christ are placed in parallel, part of the overarching 'allegorical narrative of Christian devotion' (2-3). Pi's statement – that no matter which story is true, he suffers – is why he is thrice devoted. It does not matter which religion or 'story' is true, there is something immanent and inevitable about God, and likewise, about suffering. This is an uncoupling of 'truth' and 'narrative': there is no *necessarily* true answer as to which religion is 'correct' as such truth is inaccessible or unknowable. Likewise, the company men who interview Pi can never really know the truth of what happened in the lifeboat: they must simply pick the better story, and accept that a definitive answer is impossible to obtain. Pi's act of telling a story is an agential one, as the trauma of the lifeboat has destabilized his sense of power or control. His new story, and his instruction to the company men to select one, is what Blackmore describes as 'an attempt on the part of the shipwreck [author] to recuperate or repair

[47] It should be noted that in his book *Manifest Perdition*, Blackmore attempts to show how although this was how the empire (in particular, the Portuguese empire) *desired* shipwreck stories to be read, in reality, they provide 'a type of counter-historiography that troubles the hegemonic vision of empire evident in the accounts of the canonical actors of colonialism' (xxi). Because a shipwreck is a failure of empire, the narrative of that failure becomes 'a discursive moment that counters or disrupts the official discourse of imperialism' (25).

loss through the agency of narrative' (29). Thus Pi participates in a long history of controlling the only aspect of his experience that he is able to control: his story.

Apart from the narrative frames that bookend the novel, the majority of *Life of Pi* follows Pi's attempts to survive in the lifeboat, and in doing so, he also participates in a long history of survival techniques engaged in by fellow lifeboat castaways throughout history. These common experiences and responses are what Thompson calls tropes, which together form a 'master narrative ... a set of conventions and associations' that recur in many lifeboat narratives (66). Thus, much of what Pi does and experiences in his lifeboat recalls similar actions and experiences in other boats.

He searches for ships (118), as do most shipwreck survivors.[48] Pi also examines, counts, and lists the supplies he has in the lifeboat, calculating how long certain supplies will last if rationed (146). This mechanism of survival, by way of organisation, is typical, especially in lifeboats that contain sailors, as order and routine form important aspects of life at sea in general. When supplies run out, Pi contemplates drinking his own urine (172) and eating both his own and the tiger's faeces (214), a dilemma faced by many a previous castaway. He makes use of solar stills and a sea anchor; he builds a raft from which to fish that is towed behind the lifeboat (148). Like other castaways, Pi experiences sunburn, cracked and dry lips, as well as boils caused by constant exposure to salt water (192). There are storms that he must weather (227) and periods of complete stillness that drive him to near madness (215). Apart from those from the *Tsimtsum*, Pi also encounters the recurring cast of animals typical to these stories: sharks, turtles, flying fish, whales, and various sea birds. Pi launches a message in a bottle, referencing a well-documented practice by castaways throughout history. *Life of Pi* becomes an amalgam of almost every possible experience in an open-boat, and Pi a version of any survivor.

In his book on James Hanley, Edward Stokes writes that the scant supplies in the boat in *The Ocean* allow that it 'might be almost any time since boats were invented' (120). This is true of many lifeboat narratives, as the homogeneity of the setting on the open ocean erases specific identifiers of time and place. Pi's situation is no different, and thus the novel's participation in Thompson's 'master narrative' erases any culturally specific factors of the story: the fact that Pi is Indian, for example, or that his family is trying to emigrate to Canada. On the one hand, Martel could be said to have missed an opportunity to explore themes of

[48] Of the texts that I have discussed, the only exception are the men in Crane's 'The Open Boat', who are rescuing themselves by rowing towards the Florida coast.

colonialism and the relationship that India had to other maritime powers, especially given that the novel spends almost 100 pages detailing Pi's life in India and his experiences there before the ship sinks. In his article on the film adaptation of *Life of Pi*, directed by Ang Lee and released in 2012, Jason Coe highlights how Lee prioritises these preoccupations that exist in latent form in the novel. Pi's story can be viewed as an example of successful emigration through hard work and determination: a story 'about someone who makes it' (28). He writes that Lee's entire oeuvre, *Pi* included, 'consistently speaks to the difficulties of hybrid identities and cross-generational conflicts endemic to diaspora' and that *Pi* presented the best opportunity for exploring such issues (28). An example is the addition of a scene not found in the novel, where Pi's mother is berated for requesting a vegetarian meal option on board the *Tsimtsum*. As a family, they can only eat plain rice, and when another sailor suggests they flavour the rice with meat gravy to help sustain them, they adamantly refuse. Coe explains how this 'foreshadows the impending moral concessions Pi must make in order to survive his journey to the New World' (28). One such moral concession is Pi's killing and eating fish even though he is a strict vegetarian, something he openly struggles with (183). More profoundly, he is forced by circumstance to participate in survival cannibalism, a moral concession that contravenes not just vegetarianism, but broader social conventions. Lee utilises these difficulties on the lifeboat as a metaphor for how all migrants are forced to compromise their values and minimize the importance of their culture in order to fully assimilate. Thus the lifeboat becomes a focalised setting in which an author or director can investigate broader political and social issues, such as the struggles of migrant families.

On the other hand, by understating the importance of Pi's cultural background, perhaps Martel is making a comment about how trauma erases history and specificity, and that part of the struggle of surviving at sea is surviving the monotony of the seascape and the extensive repetition experienced in an open boat. It does not matter where Pi comes from or where he was going: the ocean negates your cultural context just as it swallows your physical context, and that is part of what makes it difficult to survive. Pi cannot be *Indian* in the boat; in some sense, he has to repress a cultural identity in order to prioritise his own physical survival. Perhaps culture, like social behaviour, is a thin veneer that is stripped away by emergency situations, and the physical trauma prioritises one *as a body*, and not as a person with a particular culture or background.[49]

[49] Culture and survival do interact in interesting ways in open boats and other survival situations. For example, some survivors have historically refused to participate in cannibalism because it is un-Christian; in other instances

The most violent way in which the novel investigates trauma and survival is through cannibalism. While *The Lifeboat* engages the concept of cannibalism (i.e., killing individuals in order for the group to survive), it does so only tangentially. *Life of Pi* deals directly with cannibalism, as the story where the animals eat one another is later revealed to be a version of the story in which the human characters killed and ate one another. Various attempts have been made to define and taxonomize cannibalistic practices, but these generally fall into cases of, as Avramescu divides them, 'extreme hunger, extinct customs … and the manifestations of a profoundly deranged mind' (2). In other words, survival cannibalism, ritual cannibalism, and pathological cannibalism.[50] Survival cannibalism can also be divided based on the way in which the cannibalised person died: either of natural causes (starvation, injury) or because they were killed. The latter can be further subdivided into cases where the person volunteered, submitted to a lottery, or was outright murdered. Within these loose categories are overlaps and grey areas, such as contrived (unfair) lotteries, people who are judged to have 'committed suicide' by drinking seawater[51], or cases where dead bodies are used as bait to catch fish instead of simply being consumed.

Avramescu writes that the cannibal (or anthropophagus), as a theoretical figure, '[is] an unyielding creature who [brings] to light the law of a harsh and profound nature … [and] casts light on the origins of the modern state and the boundaries of modern civilization' (3). Historically, cannibalism has been associated with that which is *other* from society, whether in the hypothetical Hobbesian state of nature, or the real communities of gypsies, Native Americans, and inhabitants of the South Sea islands – some of whom did practice cannibalism, and some of whom did not (9). These are communities that have been considered 'other' to modern (i.e. Euro-American) society, not just geographically but philosophically. When Pi tells his story for the first time, using animals as placeholders, the attacks are normalised because these behaviours are typical of the animal kingdom. However, when he tells the story involving his human companions, cannibalism becomes the indicator of just how far outside the 'boundaries of modern civilization' his lifeboat has travelled.

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the reverse is true. When the Uruguayan rugby team crashed in the Andes mountains in 1972, they ate the dead bodies of their teammates *because* of their culture: as strict Catholics, they believed that not doing everything they could to survive would constitute suicide, a much worse sin than anthropophagy in that religion.

50 Simpson also lists, including others, cases of curative cannibalism (such as drinking blood or eating mummified corpses for their supposed health benefits) and auto-cannibalism ('eating oneself, mild practices like biting one's fingernails excluded') (113).

51 Because it was considered extremely dangerous for a long time, succumbing to this temptation was often considered an indication that the person, though desperately thirsty, had given up and wanted to die.

To compare the animal attacks to the instances of cannibalism, it is important to know which animal represents which character. The Taiwanese sailor, who does not speak any English, is represented by a zebra that has broken its leg while jumping into the lifeboat during the storm that sank the *Tsimtsum*. The hyena is a French man who worked as a cook aboard the ship. The orang-utan, named Orange Juice, is Pi's mother Gita, and Richard Parker, the tiger, is Pi himself.

The first incident occurs when the hyena severs the zebra's broken leg and eats it. In reality, the cook suggests that amputating the sailor's broken leg is the only way to save him, but when Pi's mother tries to throw the limb overboard, the cook stops her, saying 'Don't be an idiot. We'll use it as bait. That was the whole point' (305). When the sailor dies of his wound, 'the cook promptly butcher[s] him,' even[52] his genitals, hands, and face (307). Although he claims he plans to use the body as fishing bait, the cook is caught eating the flesh. Pi's narration is not overly detailed in the section, but when describing the same incident in the story with the animals, the visual becomes obscene:

> There was no order to what [the hyena] was doing. … with the zebra's haunches being higher than its belly – and blood being slippery – the hyena started to slide into its victim. It plunged head and shoulders into the zebra's guts … The zebra was being eaten alive[53] from the inside. (125)

There are two reasons why the sailor is the weakest of all the survivors in the boat. The first is physical: his injury means that he is weaker that the others, and has to expend more mental energy on coping with the pain of a badly broken leg in addition to the physical damage that exposure in an open boat causes. His physical weakness makes him an obvious target for the cook. This is reminiscent of Captain Dudley's decision that Richard Parker, the sickly[54] cabin boy, be selected as the victim in their dinghy following the sinking of the *Mignonette*. Parker was close to death in any case; this was part of Dudley's defence and why he deemed it

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[52] There are many cases (for example, that of the *Euxine* in 1873) in which hands, feet, heads, and other identifying parts of a body are jettisoned first, out of respect for the victim and to assist in the process of seeing the body as less a person and more a carcass to be carved (Simpson 181).

[53] While the Taiwanese sailor is alive when his leg is amputated, he is not alive when the cook butchers him. The zebra's staying alive while the hyena eats him is then perhaps an effort to show how shocking and disgusting Pi found the real act of cannibalism.

[54] Richard Parker had, by all accounts, drunk a large quantity of seawater to stave off his thirst. This was generally considered suicidal at the time (1884).

unnecessary to draw lots to select a person to cannibalise. This practice of targeting the weak has been noted previously in *The Lifeboat* (the weakest men are thrown overboard in a contrived lot) and in *The God of Spring* (those wounded or dying on the raft are thrown overboard or eaten).

The second reason the sailor is considered weak or vulnerable is the fact that he does not speak English. This is a social disadvantage, as opposed to a physical one, because he is unable to communicate, and perhaps unable to appear as equally human or worthy of empathy. Martel has said in interviews that this is part of the reason why he chose a zebra to represent the sailor, commenting that each animal represents 'a human trait [he] wanted to embody,' the zebra's trait being 'exoticism' ('How I Wrote…'). The sailor's otherness becomes a vulnerability in the boat, and allows him to be more easily victimised by the cook. The practice of victimising the socially vulnerable also has historical parallels. When the coal ship *Euxine* caught on fire in 1873, the crew made their way to the boats. After a series of terrible storms, only one boat remained, with just five crewmembers, one of whom was a 20-year-old Italian man named Francis Shufus. The man spoke no English, and (perhaps consequently) was 'not a popular member of the crew' (Simpson 180). He was decapitated and eaten by the other men just five hours before they were rescued (181). Although the surviving crewmembers claimed that two lots were cast and that both these lots fell on Shufus, later evidence arose that strongly suggested that 'an attempt had been made to persuade Francis Shufus to kill himself' (181). In addition, following an investigation, one of the men admitted that Shufus 'jumped overboard and attempted to drown himself but was seized by his shipmates, and dragged into the boat, his throat mercilessly cut' (181). It was made easier to murder and eat the Italian because he was already 'othered'; the same can be said for the Taiwanese sailor in *Life of Pi*.

It is important to note the difference between the animal and human stories and what is lost when converting the one to the other. The scene where the zebra is eaten by the hyena is absurd and abhorrent, and its level of detail compared to the description of what the human cook does to the human sailor might indicate the freedom of expression Pi gains by using animals instead of humans to re-live his trauma in narrative form. However, this is complicated by the dual descriptions of the incident where the cook murders Pi's mother. In the animal story, the orang-utan is defending itself from an attack by the hyena, and although Pi acknowledges her defence as a 'display of ferocity, of savage courage' that '[brings] a glow to [his] heart,' he feels 'dumb with pain and horror' when, despite her best efforts, Orange Juice

is killed (130-131). Later, when Pi tells the story of his mother, she attacks the cook not because he is planning to kill and eat her, but because she is defending her son:

> We were starving. I was weak. I couldn't hold on to a turtle. Because of me we lost it. He hit me. Mother hit him. He hit her back. (309)

Because the idea of a mother defending her child does not map onto the animal story (Pi is not Orange Juice's offspring, nor is Richard Parker), this element of maternal love is lost in Pi's re-imagining of his trauma. While the story of the animals has allowed Pi to distance himself from the truly horrific aspects of his trauma, it has likewise dulled the specific and intense human relationship between mother and son, and Gita's sacrifice is reduced to one beast trying to avoid being killed by another. Thus, when Pi tells himself the story of the animals, he protects himself from both the horror of the act of cannibalism and murder, and at the same time, from the terrible guilt of his mother having sacrificed herself for him, or his losing the turtle as a contributing factor to her death.

Gita's death is also difficult to classify in terms of the tentative taxonomy of cannibalism mentioned earlier, because it is a case of self-sacrifice, murder, and cannibalism, and is also imbued with a sense of ritual in its description. The murder of Gita is described by Pi as follows:

> She shrieked and fell. He moved over her. The knife appeared. He raised it in the air. It came down. Next it was up—it was red. It went up and down repeatedly. … He hurled something my way. … I held my mother's head in my hands. … He appeared when he threw my mother's body overboard. His mouth was red. (309-310)

This is a murder and an act of cannibalism, but differs from the eating of the sailor because the cook does not murder Gita with the intention of eating her: he attacks her because she attacks him. The cannibalism is certainly influenced by the cook's extreme hunger, but his eating only part of her (as is suggested by his red mouth and his throwing most of her body overboard) make this act seem more ritualistic than desperate, blurring the lines between survival, ritual,

and mania.[55] The act of decapitating Gita and throwing her head to Pi also invokes the idea of ritual, specifically rituals associated with war. Throughout history, tribal warfare has included collecting the heads of one's enemies and presenting them as symbols of victory. By throwing the head to Pi, the cook declares a kind of victory over the lifeboat[56] (Pi has escaped to the raft at this point), and this differs from the somewhat typical instances of survival cannibalism where avoiding starvation is the primary motivation.

In the story with the animals, the decapitation holds no ritual symbolism, as it is simply the result of the hyena attacking Orange Juice at the throat. However, Pi's description of Orange Juice's body blurs the lines between murder and ritual, as he describes her as 'a simian Christ on the Cross' (132). Christ's crucifixion is at once a murder, an execution, and a sacrifice. Christ's body is also associated with ritual cannibalism, as subversive arguments against Christianity include the conflation of transubstantiation (when the elements of Holy Communion literally become the body and blood of Christ) and cannibalism (Avramescu 152). By comparing Orange Juice to Jesus, Pi conjures the murky nature of death and sacrifice, and the body as a source of absolution and horror.

Lastly, Pi's murder of the cook is also configured in complex terms, as it is not an example of outright survival cannibalism. In the story with the animals, Richard Parker attacks the hyena because it is another predator. Again, Pi's reduction of the human story to an animal one fails to take into account the social dynamics at play, as Pi's murder of the cook is both an act of survival (because the cook may murder him) and an act of revenge. Richard Parker can have no sense of revenge or justice: he attacks because it is his territorial nature. When Pi kills the cook in the human story, it is described as follows:

> I stabbed him in the stomach. … I pulled the knife out and stabbed again. Blood was pouring out. … A knife has a horrible dynamic power; once in motion, it's hard to stop. I stabbed him repeatedly. His blood soothed my chapped hands. His heart was a struggle—all those tubes that connected it. I managed to get it out. It tasted delicious, far better than turtle. I ate his liver. I cut off great pieces of his flesh. (310-311)

[55] I am deliberately conflating ritual cannibalism and pathological cannibalism, as both involve the consumption of human flesh for non-essential purposes. The cook seems to be eating ritualistically, as he only consumes part of Gita. He also seems to be acting pathologically, as the experience in the lifeboat has damaged his mind to the point of derangement. Thus it is a crazed inversion of a ritual practice, and not a ritual performed as part of a particular cultural identity.

[56] This might be seen as a parallel to Hardie's murder in *The Lifeboat*, which exists as a kind of victory for Mrs Grant.

The murder is an act of revenge, and it brings psychological pleasure to Pi as well as the simple physical pleasure of sustaining his body. The blood soothes his hands, but also his mind; the heart sustains his body, but also tastes 'delicious'. All sense of horror and revulsion is gone, overtaken by Pi's emotional desire to avenge his mother, not just by killing the cook, but by angrily consuming him. His lack of empathy is almost psychopathic. The ways in which the categories of cannibalism (survival, ritual, and pathological) blur and overlap in the murders on the lifeboat in *Life of Pi* are perhaps indicative of how, when pushed to absolute extremes, the ability to clearly define behaviour becomes more and more difficult. Abjection leads to dissolution of conventional boundaries in terms of which we define conventional motivations and behaviours.

Following his description of the cook's murder in the deposition, Pi summarises the rest of his experience with notable brevity: 'Solitude began. I turned to God. I survived' (311). However, in the story with the animals, following the death of the hyena, the bulk of the novel describes how Pi manages to survive over eight months in a lifeboat that also contains an adult Bengal tiger.

Vital to this survival is the idea of control and routine, both of which Pi uses to train Richard Parker. These actions can also be said to provide a sense of meaning to Pi in the midst of his traumatic situation. He lays careful plans to survive, and these plans become 'like a mantra', bringing him 'a small level of comfort' (159). He uses the plans to allay his panic and dominate his fear, because in them, 'survival [is] at hand' (164). The very discipline of surviving is what saves Pi, rather than the unstructured hope of rescue:

> I had to stop hoping so much that a ship would rescue me. … Survival had to start with me. In my experience, a castaway's worst mistake is to hope too much and do too little. Survival starts by paying attention to what is close at hand and immediate. To look out with idle hope is tantamount to dreaming one's life away. There was much I had to do. (168-169)

By shrinking his field of vision to the boat, and realising that it is the only realm over which he can have any sense of control, Pi barricades himself against despair and hopelessness – he builds the same walls that, in Hanley's novel, Curtain builds to 'shut out the ocean' (20). Thus his everyday acts of survival become great victories in the face of meaninglessness. When he catches a fish, it becomes a retaliation 'against the sea, against the wind, against the sinking of

ships, against all circumstances that were working against me' (185). Though Pi has a survival manual, he finds it incomprehensible due to the document's many assumptions about a reader's basic knowledge of seafaring (193). However, when Pi writes his own 'manual' for how to tame a tiger at sea, the document he produces resembles the survival manual very closely in form and tone. The list of instructions is numbered; they are written in the second-person and the active voice: 'Under no circumstances should you step into your animal's territory. Contain your aggression to staring into its eyes and hurling toots and taunts' (203). The resemblance to the survival manual might suggest that what is important in Pi's manual is not the content of the document (instructions for taming a tiger at sea) but the document itself: a set of instructions to follow that will yield small but important results. It is as much the act of following instructions as it is the result of following them that is important. The manual gives Pi purpose and occupation, making the act of following it, in Pi's words, 'not an act of insanity or a covert suicide attempt, but a simple necessity' (207).

Because Richard Parker represents Pi in the animal story, the taming of the tiger can be seen as Pi's attempt to 'tame' or control himself. The wild parts of Pi have been irrevocably exposed during the incident with the cook: Pi says during his deposition that '[the cook] was such an evil man' but that 'worse still – he met evil in me – selfishness, anger, ruthlessness' (311). Perhaps it is these parts of himself that Pi must contain/tame in order to, through a process of survival, regain his humanity and prepare to re-join society by the end of his ordeal. This is supported by the way in which Richard Parker disappears at the end of Pi's narrative, unceremoniously, when they reach the shore in a rural part of Mexico:

> At the edge of the jungle, he stopped. I was certain he would turn my way. He would look at me. He would flatten his ears. He would growl. In some such way, he would conclude our relationship. He did nothing of the sort. Then Richard Parker, companion of my torment, awful, fierce thing that kept me alive, moved forward and disappeared forever from my life. (284-285)

Although Pi's violent nature – the nature that enabled him to kill and cannibalise the cook – is an 'awful, fierce thing,' it keeps Pi alive in a cruel but necessary way. Now that Pi has been rescued, he no longer requires such harsh measures to survive, and so Richard Parker disappears. Pi's misery over Parker's nonchalance indicates that he needs to once again repress or lose his violent self in order to survive amongst people again. Richard Parker was never

really tamed, and never really could be tamed. In the same way, Pi's deranged and violent self was useful in the boat, but must be repressed once he is in the midst of society. Richard Parker cannot be tamed; he can only disappear into the jungle without a trace.

By the end of *Life of Pi*, most of the experiences in the animal story are shown to have parallels in the story with the humans. However, there is one exception: the floating island that Pi discovers before reaching actual land. The island is fantastical in several ways. It is a free-floating mass unconnected to the ocean floor, made entirely of thick bands of algae from which huge trees have grown. On it, Pi finds freshwater ponds (the seawater having been filtered by the plants) and in these ponds, freshly dead fish from the sea. The island's inhabitants are hundreds of thousands of meerkats that Richard Parker eats in 'a blazing trail of murder and mayhem,' but quite easily, as the small animals have known no predators and do not run away from him (269). Most strangely, Pi discovers that, at night, 'by some chemical process unknown,' the algae becomes highly acidic and dissolves anything still on the ground (282). His suspicions are confirmed when he finds the only remaining bones of a previous victim that the island has 'devoured' – a full set of human teeth (281). This discovery prompts Pi to gather as many supplies as possible and leave the island for good.

The inclusion of the island does not cohere with the conceit of the novel: that the story of the animals is another version of the story with the humans. There is no obvious parallel for the island in the human story; no obvious metaphor that Martel is creating. Even the company men say so (in Japanese, to each other) when they hear it from Pi:

> 'What about the island? Who are the meerkats?'
>
> 'I don't know.'
>
> 'And those teeth? Whose teeth were those in the tree?'
>
> 'I don't know. I'm not inside the boy's head.' (312)[57]

However, there is a possible way to understand the island through the lens of magical realism and the relationship that that genre has to trauma. Magical realism was first identified in visual art, but has since been recognized in works of fiction, specifically narratives that display the 'mingling and juxtaposition of the realistic and the fantastic or bizarre,' combining 'the horrific

[57] Martel, in an interview where he answers questions from readers, said that he included the island because he 'wanted to push the reader till he/she was forced to make some leap of faith' ('May Richard Parker…'). I will set aside authorial intention for the purposes of this discussion.

and the inexplicable' (Cuddon 488). In these works[58], there is an attempt to represent the horror of trauma in that which cannot be explained: the 'inexplicable' or 'bizarre'.[59] Magical realism has also been linked to fables, which traditionally teach that (as Bettelheim writes) 'a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable' (8). Thus fables are able to 'make physical what is otherwise ephemeral or ineffable' in an attempt to understand 'those things that we struggle the most to talk about: loss, love, transition,' in other words, various kinds of trauma (Haggard). The story with the animals is fabular in nature, and allows Pi to discuss or makes sense of his trauma through representation and metaphor; the island, on the other hand, might stand for the way in which Pi's trauma is nonsensical or destabilising, and difficult to make sense of even when translated into a fable. Just as trauma itself might be nonsensical and aggressive, the island is mysterious and corrosive, eating away at its victims.

Finally, *Life of Pi* is bookended by frames that separate the reader from Pi's narrative: it is a story being told to a fictional author, who has also collected documentation and interview transcripts to corroborate what he has researched. These frames show an awareness of the genre of shipwreck narratives, but they are also restrictive because they include fictional 'readers' or interpreters of the narrative, and this forces the reader of the novel into a particular interpretation of Pi's story. This reading is provided both by the fictional author at the beginning of the novel, and the two Japanese men from the company that owned the *Tsimtsum* who interview Pi at the close.

I have already discussed the didactic nature of Pi's story and how the fictional author is told to read proof of God's existence into it. In addition, in the last chapter of Part I, before Pi begins to tell the story of the lifeboat, the author states emphatically that 'this story has a happy ending' (93). On the one hand, this is a reference to true accounts of shipwreck survivors: the existence of the narrative determines that the narrator of the story survived the wreck; there would be no one to tell the story otherwise. Thus Pi's story will inevitably have a happy ending because he has survived and the author is able to interview him. However, 'this story has a happy ending' is also an evaluative statement that forces the reader to find the typical tropes of

[58] There is a strong relationship between magical realism and the novelists of Central and South America, including Jorge Luis Borges (Argentina), Gabriel García Márquez (Columbia) and Alejo Carpentier (Cuba) (Cuddon 488). Their number includes the Brazilian writer Moacyr Scliar, whose novel *Max and the Cats* (1981) also involves a young man in a lifeboat with a big cat. The fictional author in *Pi* thanks Scliar for 'the spark of life' in the author's note at the beginning of *Life of Pi* (xiv). The similarities between the novels (and Martel's possible plagiarism) is significant but beyond the scope of this chapter.

[59] Here we can draw links to Géricault's struggle to represent the trauma experienced on the raft following the wreck of the *Medusa*.

a ‘happy ending’ in Pi’s narrative, which may not necessarily apply. Pi’s story can be read as incredibly traumatic even though he survives. For example, the author notes that Pi’s house in Toronto is fully stocked with tins of food – enough ‘to last the siege of Leningrad’ (25) – and that Pi himself is painfully shy, having learned to ‘not show off what is most precious to him’ (80). Pi might have reached land, but he is clearly still suffering from the effects of his trauma many years after the fact. The reading provided by the author encourages one to focus on Pi’s determination and survival, rather than the unhappier reality of what that with which he continues to live.

Martel excludes further alternative interpretations of Pi’s story by having the two characters from the Japanese shipping company clumsily ‘read’ Pi’s story and link the two versions together.

> Mr. Chiba: “What a horrible story.”
> [Long silence]
> Mr. Okamoto: “Both the zebra and the Taiwanese sailor broke a leg, did
> you notice that?”
> “No, I didn’t.”
> “And the hyena bit off the zebra’s leg just as the cook cut off the sailor’s.”
> “Ohhh, Okamoto-san, you see a lot.” (311)

In his book *S/Z*, Roland Barthes distinguishes between ‘writerly’ texts and ‘readerly’ ones. In a ‘writerly’ text, the reader is ‘no longer a consumer, but a producer of the text,’ in other words, she participates in the meaning-making process through interpretation (4). A text can only be ‘writerly’ if the author allows space for the reader to insert her own interpretation into the text; otherwise the text is ‘readerly’. With a ‘readerly’ text, the reader is ‘plunged into a kind of idleness’ where she can only ‘accept or reject the text’ and reading is reduced to ‘nothing more than a referendum’ (4). By including Okamoto and Chiba’s interpretation, Martel excludes alternative meaning and *Life of Pi* is reduced to a ‘readerly’ text that tells you how to read it.

Readers and fans of *Life of Pi* have often asked: ‘So – which is the real story?’ Martel’s response is equivocatory: ‘You decide which is the real story’ (‘May Richard Parker…’). The question itself is a misreading of the novel. The real story is the second story, where Pi is on a lifeboat with his mother, an injured sailor, and an evil French cook. There is no ‘decision’ to

be made by the reader because Martel has already created characters who perform an accepted 'reading'. However, a reader's desperation to believe the story about the animals (a desperation that allows her to question which story is true), is perhaps indicative of the power of trauma. The human story is so terrible and unimaginable that, like Okamoto and Chiba, the reader thinks 'the story with the animals is the better story' (317).

Conclusion

There is a fundamental difference between voyage narratives more generally and open-boat narratives. Josiah Blackmore writes that, under the Imperial project of expansion, the un-sunk ship represented 'the victory of form over formlessness' (2). In other words, there is some sense in which a sea voyage and its purpose reflect a sense of man's control – victory over the ocean. In his article, 'Being at Sea: Ontologising the Sea Narrative,' Dawid de Villers writes that sea voyages, although concerned with the ocean, are 'grounded' in two senses. First, they are directly related to ground or physical land even if they involve traversing the sea, as they begin and end in ports or on shores. In other words, voyages are connected to land because they connect people to land at departure and arrival. Secondly, they are 'grounded' in terms of motivation and purpose: a voyage inherently projects forwards and purposeful movement towards *some place* (38). In this sense, voyages are like conventional narratives: they have beginnings, middles, and most importantly, *ends* – when the ship purposely meets land.

Shipwreck is the interruption and fracture of the voyage, where the end is not land but death, or if not death, perhaps a lifeboat or raft. Survivors in lifeboats are no longer 'grounded' in multiple senses. Both literally and metaphorically, they are *at sea*. Their journey, which began with and was dependent on the now-sunk ship, is no longer directed towards land in a purposeful way. In fact, they are no longer 'on a journey' but directionless, interrupted, drifting. The uncertainty of rescue, by others or by reaching land, means that their ordeal is without end or direction, out of the survivors' control to varying degrees. The same could be said of their story, whose end is likewise uncertain and uncontrollable.

When it comes to capturing this disorientating experience in a novel or short story, conventional narrative modes result in a certain paradox, as one attempts to use narrative and plot (organizing structures) to capture or relate experiences that are fundamentally disorganizing. A modernist mode, however, bypasses this issue.[60] Almost all narratives since the advent of modernism forgo linearity. Especially since World War I, literature consists in new disruptive temporalities, in slippages and failures of conclusion. In these narrative modes, the human condition itself is considered adrift, and literature that aims to allegorize that condition become a desperate attempt to make meaning from the wreck. Joan Didion captures the tension between a crisis of meaning and narrative when she writes the following:

[60] I consider all the writers in this study to be modern writers, whether they were published during what is conventionally considered to be the modernist period (from about 1880-1945) or as contemporary modernists.

> We tell ourselves stories in order to live. ... We look for the sermon in the suicide, for the social or moral lesson in the murder of five. We interpret what we see, select the most workable of the multiple choices. We live entirely, especially if we are writers, by the imposition of a narrative line upon disparate images, by the 'ideas' with which we have learned to freeze the shifting phantasmagoria which is our actual experience (11).

As we attempt to use narrative to order the world, the world proves itself beyond our attempts to structure it. We are perpetually caught in the failure of narrative, in its uncertainty and limits. This is the alienation that pervades all modern narratives; 'the modern condition' is thus expressed in the metaphor of the open boat, where narrators find themselves in existential and epistemological 'open boats,' heading nowhere and surrounded by 'the shifting phantasmagoria' of the wide open ocean.

Open boats are a particularly interesting physical space in which to explore the modern preoccupation with alienation, as the individuals (products of an atomized and divided world) are unceremoniously squeezed into close and uncomfortable proximity. Bringing together people from diverse locales and backgrounds and placing them closely together brings about a new range of narrative possibilities, where difference literally rubs shoulders. This 'ethics of proximity' is key to how open-boat narratives function, as the danger of the situation and the limit to which the survivors are pushed brings social, political, and existential concerns to the fore. Two people who may disagree on some facet of leadership or religion may never come to dispute on land, but in an open boat, these conflicts surface more often and with more intensity, allowing authors to explore a range of narrative possibilities that may be unavailable elsewhere.

Despite the range of alternatives for which this proximity allows, open-boat narratives are always concerned with a double crisis: a crisis of physical survival and sustaining one's body, and a crisis of meaning and the exploration of how that meaning can or cannot be made. These basic elements are what make open-boat narratives so intertextual. The topoi of the genre recur, not just in waves and whales and ship sightings, but in the ways in which survivors attempt to render coherent their experience and not lapse into hopelessness (or worse, madness). This begins with the telling of the story itself, which, as Blackmore writes, is 'an attempt on the part of the shipwreck authors to recuperate or repair loss through the agency of narrative' (29). What is lost is not just the physical ship, possibly fellow survivors, but a sense

of control, over both the natural world (the sea over which the ship was 'victorious') and one's own story, that which one must tell, as Didion writes, 'in order to live'.

There are also more specific ways in which these survivors attempt to make meaning and evade the existential threat in the boat. The first of these is community. Having been separated from their community on land, and the smaller version of that community replicated on the ship, survivors try to find meaning in the fractured community of the boat. This community either supports the survivor through the crisis of meaning, or it does not. The success of this bond is most obvious in Stephen Crane's 'The Open Boat', where the correspondent is existentially sustained by the 'subtle brotherhood of men' (Crane 73). The brotherhood also contributes to their physical survival, as it encourages and prolongs their rowing efforts towards the coast of Florida. It is only once the community in the boat is disintegrated and the men are cast into the breakers that this sustaining force fails and the oiler drowns. In James Hanley's *The Ocean*, the failure of community is made obvious when Curtain fails, despite his best efforts, to maintain hope in their little boat. The men all but turn against him, retreating into their individual crises, leading them to conspire to steal the remaining water and break Curtain's fragile hold on their physical and existential survival.

Charlotte Rogan introduces an alternative community in *The Lifeboat*, one based on a kind of sisterhood and empathy, that comes into direct conflict with and is able to overpower a patriarchal idea of community because of the dire circumstances in the boat. The raft in *The God of Spring* is also a failure of community: as a whole, the group on the raft has been betrayed by those with more political power than them, reflecting the failure of a fractured political community on land. This initial betrayal makes it impossible for their own group of survivors to cohere, and the influential power dynamics of Restoration France inevitably and tragically recur on the raft, with a small group of powerful men slaughtering those beneath them. *Life of Pi* is likewise a failure of a diverse community to cohere, as the cook attacks and eats the others. The story traces the effects of the tragic isolation that follows that failure.

A line may be traced from Crane's short story and the brotherhood established there, through the subsequent texts whose survivors, in their turn, fail to establish that coherence. In some sense, this study traces the trajectory of disillusionment, from the material modernism of James Hanley to our contemporary understanding of alienation and trauma in the twenty-first-century. Evidently there is a pattern of loss around community in each text that follows 'The Open Boat'.

The second way in which the stories overlap is with regard to characters searching for transcendent meaning, often characterized in religious terms. All the selected texts reference religion to some degree. Survivors in the lifeboats are tempted to read their suffering and their salvation through a religious lens, mapping Christian iconography and lessons onto their ordeals. In 'The Open Boat', the correspondent sees a halo around the head of the man who pulls them from the breakers – a transference of an understanding of a saviour as holy. In *The Ocean*, the impulse to read the ordeal as a 'lesson' is embodied in the figure of the priest, Father Michaels. He imagines Christ walking the rough seas around them; remembers Jonah when looking at the whale. As he deteriorates, his tendency becomes more pronounced, such that when a fisherman appears to save them at the novel's close, all he can see is 'the figure of Christ'.

The Lifeboat also has a religious figure on board, the unnamed deacon. His failure to sustain their hope shows the limit of conventional religion to apply to their scenario. However, it is Grace's views of Mr Hardie that presents us with the most potently religious search for meaning. At the beginning, Hardie is seen as god-like in his ability to provide for them. The erosion of Hardie's authority mirrors the erosion of religion's relevance in a context where women are fighting the patriarchy, so often connected to and influenced by patriarchal structures in organized religion. This is captured in Grace's observation that Hardie later becomes 'god in his human form, and we all know what happens to Gods like that'.

In *The God of Spring*, the failure of transcendent meaning is not figured in religious terms so much as political terms: it is the broader and higher ideals of Revolutionary France that the survivors on the raft yearn for. 'Yearning' is a particularly useful way to conceptualize the search for transcendent meaning, a yearning for something that transcends the brute facticity of a survival situation. On the raft, the ideals of freedom, equality, and brotherhood have been undercut by the selfishness of their superiors in the boats. As a Romantic, Géricault aims to exceed or transcend contemporary expectations with regards to his work. His transcendent ideal is to fulfil his idea about the purpose of art in his society: work that goes beyond, breaks free of time, and captures something eternal and true about suffering and ourselves. In *Life of Pi*, Pi's omnism (belief in all religions) is an obvious search for transcendent meaning in the face of his traumatic experience in the boat. However, the ritual of religious practice is revealed to be a mechanism by which he may minimise his anxiety following the experience. Praying becomes a litany, and it is the repetition of that action, rather than the spirituality of that practice, that sustains him. Pi's house is later furnished with multiple

shrines and icons, a clutter that is mirrored in his obsessive hoarding of food, even though many years have passed since his ordeal.

This impulse, to search for transcendent meaning during an ordeal in a lifeboat, speaks to the pervasive links between the broad or literal concept of salvation, and salvation as figured in religious texts. It is almost impossible to narrate an episode of salvation without referencing the traditions of Western religious thought, without invoking Christ and the cross. The selected texts are not Christian in persuasion, but they (save *The God of Spring*) inevitably reference the archive of Christian imagery that has always been associated with these concepts. The didactic character of Christian or religious writing is also relevant here, as the purpose of a parable is to elicit a higher meaning in the quotidian (the sower, the light under a bushel, the good Samaritan). Our first introduction to hermeneutics is almost always religious in nature; in an open boat, this predisposition to read higher meaning into our experience is intensified through exposure to physical and existential threat.

The third way in which people in lifeboats search for meaning is in the elements that surround them, that is, in nature. The idea of the sublime is central to this facet of open-boat narratives. Historically characterized as that to which we respond with religious or spiritual awe, this aesthetic concept encompasses not only 'vastness and immensity,' but 'the infinite, solitude, emptiness, darkness and terror' (Cuddon 875). These are concepts that, because of its vastness and danger, the ocean is able to metaphorically sustain. It is why over the centuries, writes Blumenberg, people have consistently sought to 'grasp the movement of their existence... through a metaphoric of the perilous sea voyage' (7). In open boats, this impulse to see the ocean's assault on the boat as meaningful or malevolent in some way is so acute because the opposite would be more terrifying: that the ocean is not personified or angry, that Providence is not punishing them, but that the waves are just that: waves. This is what engenders the crisis of meaning in the dinghy in 'The Open Boat': that nature is, as Crane writes, 'indifferent, flatly indifferent'.

In *The Ocean*, the whale may represent the surfacing of the sublime from a deep recess of unconscious unknowability; it is, for Benton, the overwhelming destructive force of the submarine that obliterated their ship. Even after Curtain correctly identifies it as a whale, the men cannot agree on what it *means*, and thus the sublime evades description and ultimately sense. In *The Lifeboat*, the question of why they are in the boat and why this is happening to them is illustrated in the mystery surrounding the sinking of the *Empress Alexandra*, which, like the meaning of the whale in *The Ocean*, is impossible to discover. Their waves are likewise

indifferent, random, and relentless. The sublime in *The God of Spring* is perhaps best represented in the terror and suffering to which the survivors were exposed, and which Géricault cannot begin to comprehend. In *Life of Pi*, the mysterious island is likewise a manifestation of that unknowable and terrifying aspect of nature that survivors must confront at the nadir of their experience.

Though these stories relate instances of failure when it comes to finding meaning in nature, there are moments of hope and especially of love that emerge. It is the intense brotherly love for Billie, the oiler, that makes the end of 'The Open Boat' so distinctly tragic. It is Curtain's love for the German airman that extends beyond his own survival to what we would classify as an enemy. As he drags the man aboard, he rescues himself, and pulls as though he is pulling 'a boat towards the land'. In *The Lifeboat*, it is Mrs Grant's love of her fellow woman that destabalises the established pattern of authority in the boat: a love that does not diminish a woman by protecting and indulging her, but treats her as equal and therefore powerful. Géricault's love for the survivors he meets is what eventually shames him into a fierce understanding of his inability to fully know their pain; a love for his ideals as an artist prompts his transformative involvement in the project of the tableau. Though we only learn of it at the end of the novel, Gita's love of her son Pi leads to her sacrifice. Pi's love for Richard Parker, which is revealed to be a love for the dark and violent parts of himself, is what enables his survival despite the trauma he experiences. It is this love that occasions his grief and mourning at the end of his ordeal, when the tiger leaves him 'so unceremoniously'. It is worth paying attention to the ways in which, despite the crisis of meaning, survivors in open boats find connection – to observe with whom they connect when faced with death and suffering.

The presence of love in these stories indicates their being allegories for the human condition, where the ultimate conclusion of modernist and contemporary modernist narratives is that despite alienation and suffering, we can and must connect. It is the cry of 'only connect!' at the close of *Howard's End*, the call to 'live in fragments no longer' (Forster Chapter 22). The story of the open boat is perhaps ultimately a story about love during the crisis of meaning.

That the open-boat narrative may serve as an allegory for the human condition means that authors will return and are returning to this narrative form. This is despite the fact that our modern world seems removed from the ocean and travel across it. Travel across the globe no longer takes months by sea; trade is, in the modern era, becoming more mechanized and less visible to the everyday (first world) person. This is perhaps why, with the advent of space travel and space exploration, the topoi of the voyage narrative has been transferred to the realm of

science fiction. The journey to the nearest star will theoretically take decades; the continued destruction of the planet means that our escape to new worlds is a more pronounced preoccupation than before. In these cases, the Earth becomes the ship, global warming the shipwreck, and the nearest star our destination.

Despite the fact that many inhabitants of the first world are no longer in touch with the sea, with the advent of the global refugee crisis, more and more people are being forced into open boats. On the 3rd of October 2013, a boat carrying nearly 500 African migrants arrived within eyesight of Lampedusa, an island off the coast of Italy and the closest point of Europe to Libya (Yardley and Povoledo). It was before dawn, and to signal rescue someone set fire to a blanket; the blaze quickly spread to stores of gasoline, and the ensuing chaos capsized the boat. 359 people died. The boat was less than 400m from the shore. Since that date, over 19 000 migrants have died in the crossing to Europe (ANSA).

These experiences are becoming and will continue to be the source for new iterations of the open-boat narrative. In these stories, the ship is the country, and the shipwreck civil war, or famine, or poverty, or genocide. In these stories, 'no one leaves home unless / home is the mouth of a shark. … no one puts their children in a boat / unless the water is safer than the land' (Shire).



Massimo Sestini (2014)

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