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Five Open Boat Narratives

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Abstract

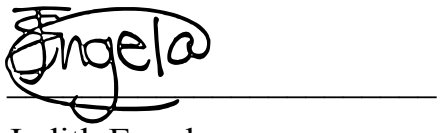
Open-boat narratives relate experiences of suffering in a small lifeboat or on a precarious raft. In these stories, survivors attempt to translate what has happened to them into clear and ordered narrative, but these accounts are not just interesting from a literal, survival point of view. As they suffer, these characters reveal the malleability of moral 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 matters. As such, this mode of storytelling has, from its historical origins in true accounts, endured well into modern times. This study collects and examines five open-boat narratives and analyses the particular concerns raised by each. This is done in an attempt to first, trace a certain trajectory of preoccupations, and second, highlight the abundance of possibilities available to authors writing in this genre. The texts included in this study are Stephen Crane's short story 'The Open Boat' (1898), *The Ocean* by James Hanley (1941), *The Lifeboat* by Charlotte Rogan (2012), *The God of Spring* by Arabella Edge (2006) and *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel (2001).

Keywords

maritime literature, voyage narrative, open-boat narrative, modernism, limit experience, survival narrative, abjection, Stephen Crane, James Hanley, Charlotte Rogan, Arabella Edge, Yann Martel.

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts in the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination in any other university.



Judith Engela

11 May, 2020