

The Seas in *The Bible* and (Early) Modern Literature—*Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick* and *The Life of Pi*

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Abstract—The connotations of religion and literature of *the Bible* have been greatly expressed by the image of water which contains multiple meanings and fickle qualities. There are lots of forms of water, such as the drop, vapor, river and ocean, presented in the British and American literary works. Although different forms of water in different works are endowed with all kinds of implications due to the writers' unique creative backgrounds and purposes, they are based on the implications or symbolic meanings of the water in *the Bible*. This paper, based on the implications of the image of water in *the Bible*, by horizontal contrast and longitudinal comparison, is going to analyze the image of water in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick* and *The Life of Pi* which contain similar psychology, religion concept and social problems with *the Bible*, and the symbolic meanings of image of water in (early) modern British and American literary works under the influence of *the Bible* are going to be explored.

Index Terms—*The Bible*, water, sea, mother, father, birth, punishment, rebirth

I. INTRODUCTION

As a Chinese saying said that the wise love water; the benevolent love mountain. The image of water is so popular in lots of literary works which are from different writers who are from different time and nations. Therefore, learning and analyzing the image of water in literary works has become a systematic study for students and scholars all over the world.

Taking the vision to the ocean literature of western countries, it is inevitably necessary to firstly take *the Bible* into consideration. The connotations of religion and literature of *the Bible* have been greatly expressed by the image of water which contains multiple meanings and fickle qualities. The four rivers located near Eden, the Flood, Red Sea, the rainbow and so on, all of them are the different expressions of water which carry the implications and play different roles in the stories of *the Bible*. There are lots of forms of water, such as the drop, vapor, river and ocean, presented in the British and American literary works (T.S. Eliot, 1991). Although the waters in different works are endowed with all kinds of implications due to their unique creative backgrounds and purposes, it is based on the implication or symbolic meaning of the water in *the Bible*. Therefore, this paper, based on the implication of the image of water in *the Bible*, by horizontal contrast and longitudinal comparison, is going to analyze the image of water in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick* and *The Life of Pi* which contain similar psychology, religion concept and social problem with *the Bible*, and the symbolic meanings of image of water in (early) modern British and American literary works under the influence of *the Bible* are going to be explored. The aim of the study is help non-western readers better understand the culture, literature even society of western countries through the angle of a drop of water.

This paper consists of four parts. The first part is introduction about the topic, the reason why the topic is selected, and the aim of the paper. The second part is the analysis of the image of water in *the Bible*, which is clearly and directly proved by the text in *the Bible*. The third part is the analysis of the image of water in the *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick* and *The Life of Pi*, and this part is the important part for claiming the functions of and roles played by water in *the Bible* even in the (early) modern literature.

II. WATER IN *THE BIBLE*

A. *Water Is the Symbol of Life*

Life as the first and most obvious implication of water in *the Bible* is accepted by most of the scholars. No matter in *the Bible* or in the tradition of western countries, water is always compared to the source of life. From the Bible, Genesis 1:6 And God said, "let there be an expanse between the waters to separate water from water." (The Bible, Gen. 1:6) The quoted line shows that while God creates the world, water is being created. In Genesis 1:9 And God said, "Let the water under the sky be gathered to one place, and let dry ground appear." (1:9) God called the dry ground "land," and the gathered waters he called "seas." (1:10) And God saw that it was good. That is to say, land and ocean is separated while at first they are related and connected closely. Especially in Genesis 1:20 And God said, "let the water teem with living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." (1:20) it is explicit that all

the lives and living creatures can't exist without water. In short, water playing the role of a kind mother who gives birth to a baby is the symbol of life on the earth.

B. *Water Is the Punishment of Sin*

From the Bible, as we all know, the ancestors of human beings--Adam and Eve stole the forbidden fruit and branded the original sin to every human. In order to punish human beings, God brings floodwaters on the earth. It is claimed in Genesis 6:17 "I am going to bring floodwaters on the earth to destroy all life under the heaven, every creature that has the breath of life in it. Everything on earth will perish."(6:17) what's more, in Genesis 7:23 "every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; men and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds of the air were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left and those with him in the ark." (7:23)

Another punishment is in the Exodus 14:28 "the water flowed back and covered the chariots and horsemen--the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed the Israelites into the sea. Not one of them survived." (Exo.14:28) After Moses divides the Red Sea to save the Israelites, the tragedy happens to the entire army of Pharaoh of Egypt. From here, giving punishment to those who are the oppressors is the function of water. As well as the water for testing the loyalty of a virgin being mentioned in *the Bible*, here the water is a punishment for those who are against ethic. In a word, water playing the role of a strict father who punishes an errant child is the punishment of sin.

C. *Water Is the Force of Rebirth*

Rebirth is the most highlight part of the symbols of water in *the Bible*. The major resource of this symbol is from the story which John baptizes Jesus. Before baptism, Jesus has not been called the son of God, and after that ceremony Jesus is the redeemer. When John preaches and is the Baptist along the Jordan, people accept baptism and admit their sins. That is to say, water is not only for washing dirty and sinful things, but also the symbol of pure heart and thought.

On the other hand, it is proved as being the force of rebirth in the Old Testament 9:11 "I establish my covenant with you: Never again will all life be cut off by the waters of a flood; never again will there be a flood to destroy the earth." God brings floodwater to swallow the world, and leaves the kind, loyal creatures on the earth. It means that the aim of God is using water to purify the world, wash the dirt and sin in the air, and give the rebirth to the whole world (David L. Jeffrey, 1990). Therefore, water is the symbol of the force for making the disappearance of sin and bringing a new life.

D. *Summary*

In *the Bible*, water contains multiple meanings and implications in different situations. When the creatures on the earth have to rely on water, it plays the role of a kind mother who gives birth to a baby, and it is called the source of life on the earth. When human beings are branded with original sins which should be washed, water plays the role of a strict father who punishes an errant child, so does the punishment from God. When people recognize their errors and want to be pure, water plays the role of a carrier for taking sins away and bringing rebirth. The three implications of water in *the Bible* can make up a model structure as follow:

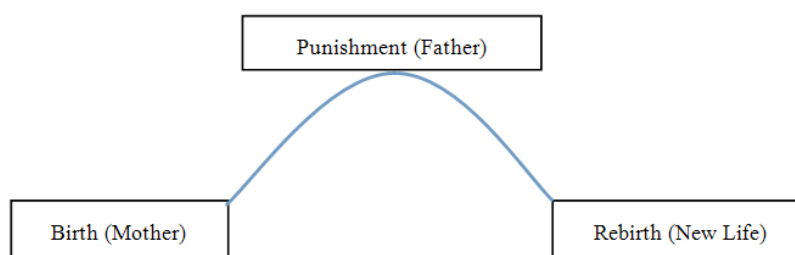


Figure1. Implications of water in *the Bible*

III. WATER IN *ROBINSON CRUSOE*, *MOBY DICK* AND *LIFE OF PI*

The image of water is along with Robinson's whole life. It could be said that the development of the story is pushed by the sea. When Robinson does not listen to his father, and takes his curiosity to begin his sea life, the image of water is like a remote dream attracting him. When he meets danger for the first time on the sea, he begins to recognize the mistakes he has made and shows his hesitation on continuing the journey or not, and the water is the force which makes Robinson die in the old world and have birth in the new world.

"I was most inexpressibly sick in Body, and terrify'd in my Mind: I began now seriously to reflect upon what I had done, and how justly I was overtaken by the Judgment of Heaven for my wicked leaving my Father's House, and abandoning my Duty; all the good Counsel of my Parents, my Father's Tears and my Mother's Entreaties came now fresh into my Mind, and my Conscience, which was not yet come to the Pitch of Hardness to which it has been since, reproach'd me with the Contempt of Advice, and the Breach of my Duty to God and my Father." (Daniel Defoe, 2007, P.9)

After he meets some difficulties which even challenge his life on the sea, Robinson changes his mind about his father

and the past time he spent on the land, as well as recognizing his mistakes and sins. Even when he is hopeless when he is abandoned on the isolated island, he does not forget to confess, just like the Israelis who always make mistakes and ask for forgiveness from God. On Robinson's way of life, he continuously improves his recognition of God, and continuously confesses his sin, so every time he is not swallowed by water and gets survival. All of these are the reflections that Robinson is baptized and gets new life, and water here is the symbol of birth and rebirth.

Besides, water in *Robinson Crusoe* also stands for a tool of punishment of God, as well as a tool of mercy of God. God's punishment is presented in every storm on the sea, which shows that God is always here and cannot be challenged. God's mercy can be found in many details in the book. For example, in 1653, Robinson escaped from the Moor by a small ship. Thanks to the sea, he got a new place and became safe. Water here saved his life, and that is mercy. In 1959, he landed on the island and began his long-time island life. On the island, everything is from nature, so everything which helps Robinson to go on his life is the stand of God's mercy.

In short, the implications of water in *Robinson Crusoe* share commons with that in *the Bible*. Firstly, sea symbolizes a distant dream which attracts Robinson and makes him have a goal. The water gives him the meaning of life, and just like his mother gives him his life. Secondly, he is so confident that he will never fail if he goes to the sea, and water punishes him for his arrogance. Thirdly, thanks to the island, he survives, and that is the mercy of God, as well as the force of rebirth of water. In a word, the implications of water in *Robinson Crusoe* are birth, punishment and rebirth.

A. *Moby Dick*

As one of Herman Melville's maritime novels based on his voyaging, *Moby Dick* presents the life of the Americans who live on seizing whales in the 19th century in distinctive words and sentences. While reading the book carefully, it is easy to find that there are lots of allusions to *the Bible*, especially the image of water in *the Bible* has a perfect presentation in *Moby Dick*.

Firstly, water in *Moby Dick* implies the source of life. In the Bible, water is the embodiment of the source of life and of nature. Meanwhile, water is the force of nature. In *Moby Dick*, the existence of the big white whale is definitely a symbol of nature and a huge mysterious power of life. On the other hand, for those who want to catch the whale in the ship, especially the captain Ahab, the sea is peaceful with danger all the time, which means the sea can bring life and take life away. Therefore, the sea, the whale and the captain are the elements to imply that water is the source of life.

Secondly, water in *Moby Dick* implies the punishment. "Oh! thou clear spirit of clear fire, whom on these seas I as Persian once did worship, till in the sacramental act soburned by thee, that to this hour I bear the scar; I now know thee, thou clear spirit, and I now know that thy right worship is defiance. To neither love nor reverence wilt thou be kind; nor e'en for hate thou canst but kill ... But war is pain, and hate is woe. Come in thy lowest form of love, and I will kneel and kiss thee; but at thy highest, come as mere supernal power; and though thou launchest navies of full-freighted worlds, there's that in here that still remains indifferent. Oh, thou clear spirit, of thy fire thou madest me, and like a true child of fire, I breathe it back to thee." (Melville Herman, 2014, P.302)

From the quoted lines above, on the one hand, Puritan religious ethical order exists between Captain Ahab and Moby Dick, which means that Ahab and all the human beings should be unconditional in submission to the will of God. Moby Dick is the representative of God, but Ahab is not willing to succumb to God and even revenges to it. It is understandable that he suffers the punishment from God, which leads him to the tragic ending. On the other hand, Moby Dick is the representative of the oceans. But Ahab greedily endlessly conquers the ocean, in the process of chasing Moby Dick, he also kills a lot of innocent whales. So he is eventually swallowed by the sea. What's more, there is personal ethical order between Ahab and Moby Dick, which means that Ahab needs to deal with the relation between his rational factor and animal factor, let rational factor control animal factor, making Ahab be a man with ethic sense. Moby Dick is the representative of animal factor. But Ahab's animal factor controls his rational factor, the result is Ahab's madness and destruction (Jay Leyd, 1951).

Thirdly, water in *Moby Dick* implies rebirth. Ishmael is the narrator of the whole story, and the only survivor of the crash. In the story, the captain finally gets punishment due to his disobedience of God after many times warnings, while Ishmael becomes more and more respectful of the whale and nature, to certain extent it is confession, therefore he could get salvation. Instead of being saved by his confession, his heart is cleaned and purified by sea water.

In summary, the implications of water in *Moby Dick* share commons with that in *the Bible*. Firstly, sea symbolizes the source of life, because no matter the whales or the people have to live on the sea. Secondly, due to the arrogance, bitterness, hatred and defiance of the captain who ignores the warnings from God, water plays the role of a strict father to punish his child. Thirdly, God is merciful to those who believe in him and follow him in *the Bible*; Ishmael finally gets redemption, and the sea here is the symbol of rebirth. In a word, the implications of water in *Moby Dick* are birth, punishment and rebirth.

B. *Life of Pi*

Yann Martel's fantastic adventurous novel, *Life of Pi*, was published in 2001 in Canada. The protagonist, Piscine Molitor "Pi" Patel, is an Indian boy from Pondicherry. When he was at an early age, he explored issues of spirituality and practicality. Going through a shipwreck, he survived 227 days. During those days, he was stranded on a lifeboat in the Pacific Ocean with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker. *Life of Pi* could be divided into three parts. The beginning part is mainly about Pi's life in India. The second part of the novel is the main body of the novel. This part is about the

survival of Pi on the sea. The last part is about the investigation of the shipwreck after Pi has been saved. The paper will focus on analyzing the second part to explore the implications of water in the novel.

Firstly, water in *Life of Pi* implies the source of life. When Pi was little, he made a bet with his brother to steal the water in the Christian church on the mountain. As he arrived at the church, he saw Jesus for the first time. A clergy came and asked him, "are you thirsty?" and gave him a cup of water. The water appeared in the novel for the first time. As we know, the holy water in the church is for baptism to purify. Pi was too young to understand religion and belief, and the cup of water was like a light to light up his road for chasing belief. Therefore, just like the attractive sea gives Robinson Crusoe the meaning of life, Pi got birth from the cup of water.

Secondly, water in *Life of Pi* implies the punishment. There was a crush on the sea and finally only Pi and the tiger survived. In the crash, the sea is the monster to death, which swallowed Pi's family. In the 277 days when Pi and the tiger Richard Parker struggled on the sea, the sea self is a symbol of punishment. Because the sea made Pi in track and in difficult situation for Pi believing in many Gods which is like his father said "believe in nothing". From this angle, the implication of the sea is punishment.

Thirdly, water in *Life of Pi* implies the rebirth. Differing from the survival of Robinson Crusoe and Ishmael, Pi's survival includes two aspects. One is the concrete one--his life, the other is the abstract one--his belief. It can be seen at the end of the story, "which story do you believe?" "I believe in God." Other lines in the book show the role the sea plays in the story: "here were many seas. The sea roared like a tiger. The sea whispered in your ear like a friend telling you secrets. The sea clinked like small change in a pocket. The sea thundered like avalanches. The sea hissed like sandpaper working on wood. The sea sounded like someone vomiting. The sea was dead silent. And in between the two, in between the sky and the sea, were all the winds"(Yann Martel, 2002, p. 230). By the last sentence the writer implies that between the sky and the sea, it was all the winds and Pi. He got belief and a new life when he arrived on the land. Therefore, the implication of water is rebirth.

In short, the implications of water in *Life of Pi* share commons with that in *the Bible*. Firstly, the water in the church gives Pi a chance to know Jesus. That is to say, the cup of water is the enlightenment of his belief. The water implies birth. Secondly, the sea swallows his family and makes him in difficult situation, which to some extent is punishment for his hesitation of choosing which god to follow. Thirdly, Pi survived after all with a new birth of life and belief, so the water is the implication of rebirth. In a word, the implications of water in *Life of Pi* are birth, punishment and rebirth.

IV. CONCLUSION

The classic position of *the Bible* is undoubted and irreplaceable. On the one hand, as one of the most important ancient works in western countries, *the Bible* is the creative product of ancient Hebrews and other ethnics with many creation activities, and it contains plentiful cultural value. On the other hand, the traditional belief constituted by the concept in *the Bible* makes up the cores of cultural ideology of the occidentals, as well as restricting their cultural concept and psychic activity. As Frye said in his book *the Great Code* that *the Bible* has the nature of a literary work, but it is not only a literary work. The scholar T. R. Wright said in *Theology and Literature* that instead of using lots of literary methods such as in the Bible for embellishing, the literary techniques change the expositions which were poor and boring into brilliant and convincing, as well as delivering the understanding of life through these methods, such as metaphor, analogy, simile, symbolism...

As an old saying said that the wise find pleasure in water. The connotations of religion and literature of *the Bible* have been greatly expressed by the image of water which contains multiple meanings and fickle qualities. The image of water is so popular in lots of literary works which are from different writers who are from different time and nations. Therefore, the symbolic meanings of image of water in (early) modern British and American literary works under the influence of *the Bible* are explored.

In *the Bible*, water contains multiple meanings and implications in different situations. When the creatures on the earth have to rely on water, it plays the role of a kind mother who gives birth to a baby, and it is called the source of life on the earth. When human beings are branded with original sins which should be washed, water plays the role of a strict father who punishes an errant child, so does the punishment from God. When people recognize their errors and want to be pure, water plays the role of a carrier for taking sins away and bringing rebirth.

In the three novels--*Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick* and *The Life of Pi*, the implications of water share commons with that in *the Bible*. In *Robinson Crusoe*, firstly, sea symbolizes a distant dream which attracts Robinson and makes him have a goal. The water gives him the meaning of life, and just like his mother gives him his life. Secondly, he is so confident that he will never fail if he goes to the sea, and water punishes him for his arrogance. Thirdly, thanks to the island, he survives, and that is the mercy of God, as well as the force of rebirth of water. In *Moby Dick*, firstly, sea symbolizes the source of life, because no matter the whales or the people have to live on the sea. Secondly, due to the arrogance, bitterness, hatred and defiance of the captain who ignores the warnings from God, water plays the role of a strict father to punish his child. Thirdly, God is merciful to those who believe in him and follow him in *the Bible*; Ishmael finally gets redemption, and the sea here is the symbol of rebirth. In *Life of Pi*, firstly, the water in the church gives Pi a chance to know Jesus. That is to say, the cup of water is the enlightenment of his belief. The water implies birth. Secondly, the sea swallows his family and makes him in difficult situation, which to some extent is punishment

for his hesitation of choosing which god to follow. Thirdly, Pi survived after all with a new birth of life and belief, so the water is the implication of rebirth. All in all, the protagonists in the three books are from the one who has no belief to believing in God, from the one who has no dream to having a dream, and from the one who is hopeless to being hopeful. After they know the rule of the universe and know themselves better, they are jumping from birth to rebirth, and from old life to new life. The implications of water in *Robinson Crusoe*, *Moby Dick* and *Life of Pi* are birth, punishment and rebirth. In short, the common implications of water in *the Bible* and the three novels can be presented in the following figure:

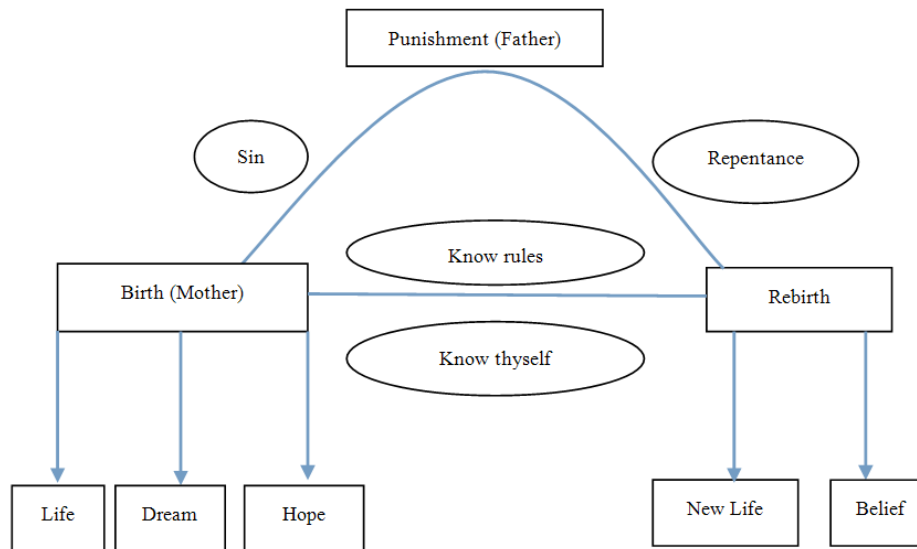


Figure2. The common implications of water

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