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An analysis of nautical influence on Ole Rolvaag's fiction

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AN ANALYSIS
OF NAUTICAL INFLUENCE
ON OLE ROLVAAG'S FICTION

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THESIS APPROVAL SHEET

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM, PURPOSE, AND PROCEDURE

A few years ago the writer of this thesis became aware of a unique, interesting technique used by Ole Rolvaag, formerly an instructor of Norwegian at St. Olaf College, Northfield, Minnesota, and Norwegian-American interpretive author of fiction concerning the Norwegian immigrants on the Great Central Plains. This technique involved nautical imagery, nautical terminology, and nautical reference. This nautical element permeated Rolvaag's fiction and gave to it a sustained and distinctive individuality or style.

Problem

It was the intention of the writer of this paper to scrutinize the translated fiction of Rolvaag to analyze situations in which this nautical descriptive element was used. It was not the intention of the writer to attempt to prove source or origin of technique, but to mention factors in the author's life which were ostensibly contributory to his using nautical reference.

Purpose

This study was begun as an original research in Rolvaag's technique to indicate what the writer of this paper considers a fundamental element of Rolvaag's contribution[1] to American literature. It is not to be assumed that ideas or opinions which might be present in quoted matter are those held by the writer of this thesis. Matter from the fiction is quoted, not for the purpose of expressing ideas or opinions, but is quoted for one purpose only: to indicate the extent and significance of a nautical element in Rolvaag's fiction.

Procedure

The writer studied Rolvaag's novels and compiled statistics of nautical allusions from:

Giants in the Earth, published in translated form in 1927 from _I de Dage_, _In Those Days_, 1924, and _Riket grundlaegges_, _The Kingdom Is Founded_, 1925.

Peder Victorious, published in translated form in 1929 from _Peder Seier_, 1928.

Their Fathers' God, published in translated form in 1931 from _Den Signede Dag_, _The Blessed Day_, 1931.

Pure Gold, published in translated form in 1930 from

To tullinger et billede fra diag, 1920.

The Boat of Longing, published in translated form in 1933 from _Laengselens Baat_, 1921. (Pages 82-243).

Factors determining the divisions of this paper were pertinency of terms and/or frequency of their occurrence. The divisions were determined by an actual count and tabulation of nautical imagery, nautical terminology, and nautical reference. Divisions of four ranks are listed in the Table of Contents of this paper; all divisions are not indicated in the body of the paper.

CHAPTER II

ANALYSIS

The Author

Ole Edvart Rolvaag was born April 22, 1876, in Norway. His home was on the island of Donna, in the district of Helgeland just south of the Arctic Circle. The cove where the island lies is called Rolvaag. According to Lincoln Colcord,[1] this is the geographic location from which Rolvaag took his name when he came to America.[2] The men of Rolvaag's family were fishermen as were all the inhabitants of the nameless little settlement. In summer they fished near home in small boats; but when winter came, they employed larger craft and made their way to the fishing grounds off the Lofoten Islands. Rolvaag went on his first trip to the Lofoten fishing grounds in 1891 when he was fifteen. Until 1896, when he came to America, Rolvaag was a fisherman. During these five years he became a very capable seaman. Just before Rolvaag left Norway to come to America, the master of his ship, whom he spoke of as a sea king, offered to buy and give Rolvaag command of the finest fishing vessel exhibited at the summer fair in the market town of Bjorn. After the boat should have paid for itself, it would have been Rolvaag's.[3] Fortunately, however, for the

world of literature, Rolvaag made the decision to come to America and turned down the offer of the boat.

Rolvaag's early romantic love for the fisherman's life disappeared when he miraculously escaped the storm of the winter of 1893 which devastated the fishing fleet and killed many of his friends and fellow-fishermen.[4] Later, Kristine Dahl, a character in Rolvaag's fiction, was to tell Nils, a young Norwegian immigrant, that her lover Johan "went down in that storm on Veroy Sea in 'ninety-three."[5]

Nikoline Johansen had come from Norway to visit her aunt, Mrs. Tonaas (Sorine, widow of Hans Olsa). Sorine told Beret, widow of Per Hansa, protagonist of Giants in the Earth, that Nikoline had lost her father, her brother, and her sweetheart in the terrible storm on the twenty-fifth of January in '93 on the cod-banks at Varoy, Lofoten. Not a splinter of the boat on which all three were fishing was found.[6]

It would appear from these two examples that an experience from the life of the author was varied to suit two different novels and was projected into his fiction.

Though Rolvaag never appeared to seem immodest, he did realize his capabilities as a fisherman. In a letter to the Reverend O. C. Farseth, written January 7, 1908, he mentions that when he thought of the responsibilities connected with his professorship at St. Olaf College, he "would much

rather sail a fisherman's small craft from Fleinvaer to Vaero on a stormy January night and be responsible alike for boat and crew."[7] He writes that once he knew how to sail; he knew that he could do it well; he "could sail the northern ocean without fear or trembling."[8] He writes in typical nautical vernacular that he had to stop and ask himself now and then, "Is this the right course? Will this take me to the harbor?"[9]

Lincoln Colcord states that Amerika Breve is largely autobiographical;[10] a letter in this book makes two direct references to Rolvaag's former connection with the sea. In the letter Rolvaag relates the details of the late evening and night after he got off the train in Clarkfield--really Elk Point, South Dakota--and tried to find his uncle. Jakob Fredrik Jakobsen Rolvaag, the uncle who had sent Ole Rolvaag the ticket to come to America, hadn't expected him until the next day and wasn't at the station to meet the nephew when he arrived. A kindly Swede at the station told Rolvaag how to get to Peary P. O. Now day and night in America is one thing; day and night in Norway, in the land of the midnight sun, is another; so darkness came on sooner than the newly-arrived immigrant had foreseen, and he took the wrong direction at the first crossroad. After a long time of walking and running, he discovered from the position of the North Star that he was headed in the wrong direction. Like

a typical seaman he knew that the North Star could be relied upon. He writes, "At that moment I would gladly have traded a summer night on the prairie for a stormy night in Lofoten waters."[11]

After much walking, he found himself so tired that he had to sit down by the side of the road. The thought came to him:

> I was lying on the ground in front of our house. I saw the bay clear as a mirror below me, with only an occasional ripple across the waters. And there was our boat tied at the landing, plain as could be. I could even hear the soft lapping of the tiny waves as they reached the side of it.[12]

Of his relationship with the sea Rolvaag writes, "I can predicate the same thing about the sea as the Israelites of old asserted about God: The Sea Was."[13]

He writes that the land had little consequence to him; "it might as well not have been there at all."[14]

He and his people depended on the sea "for sustenance as the farmer on his crops."[15] He relates in his autobiography that he lived upon the sea most of the time and that about it his dreamlife was woven, "for the sea was at one and the same time the most vital reality and the unfathomable mystery."[16]

Boats and Their Management

Comparing.--In Norway, boats were Rolvaag's chief method of transportation. The use of the words "boat,"

"craft," "ship," "bark," and "hulk" has striking effect in his fiction. The twenty-seven figurative uses do not strike a dissonant note in the fiction, even though the objects referred to as boats hardly would occur to a landsman as having any resemblance to a sea-going craft.

The first metaphorical use of boat was indeed a common enough expression. All of the settlers were in the same circumstances when Tonseten and Hans Olsa returned from their first trip to town. This was referred to thus: "They were all in the same boat."[17] As Hans Olsa later lay dying, Beret assumed that Per Hansa was the logical one to go for the minister. When Per Hansa answered her in such a way that she suspected he didn't intend to go, she told him it was awful for a soul to be cast into hell when humans could prevent it. He answered amusedly, "'Well, if Hans Olsa is bound in that direction, there'll be a good many more from here in the same boat.'"[18]

As it made its way westward, Per Hansa's whole caravan must have been a boat, because Rosie, the cow, "had been jogging along . . . swinging and switching her tail, the rudder of the caravan."[19]

Per Hansa actually thought in the nautical vernacular. After he had learned from the Danish widow in Worthington that the inside of a sod hut could be made more attractive at little expense by whitewashing it with lime,

he drove over to the lumberyard to try to trade a load of potatoes and other vegetables to the lumberman for lumber and lime. As he carefully handled the smoothly planed boards, he thought, "A dandy boat this is going to make for the little fellow to rock in!"[20]

Of course, the little fellow was Peder Victorious, who was to be born about Christmas time; and the boat was the cradle in which he was to be rocked.

Per Hansa had sentimental, tender feelings for his oxen. He changed their common names of "Tom" and "Buck" to "Soren" and "Perkel," because "bound on a great voyage of adventure as he was, his boats had to be properly christened."[21] The oxen soon learned to associate their names with the affectionate pettings the children gave them.

Per Hansa's handling of his sleigh is in characteristic nautical style: "The boat that he steered was behaving very badly; it wouldn't answer the helm; it didn't ride the swell like a seaworthy craft; it had no speed or power to lift itself over the rough waves."[22] The oxen came to a standstill and had to be lashed before they would move again. That time they plunged on. "Per Hansa felt as if he were sliding down one huge wave after another; the boat was scudding now with terrific speed! . . . 'Will we ever climb the next wave?' thought Per Hansa."[23]

The oxen raced on with such speed that they overtook

and passed the three teams of horses. As he went by, Per Hansa "glimpsed a black object flying across the bows and disappearing astern."[24]

During the storm Per Hansa had "found himself peering through the murk, knitting his brows and squinting up his right eye--an old habit of his, born of the many times he had looked to see if the mast would hold!"[25]

When Hans Olsa and Sorine, because of Beret's muddled mental state, made the offer to Per Hansa to keep Peder, Per Hansa decided that if his wife couldn't get well with Peder, she would have less chance of getting well without him. He thought the whole unfortunate affair was his fault for bringing Beret out to the prairie. He intimated that he and Hans Olsa were big craft that could be sailed to Lofoten in rough weather and that Beret was one of the small boats. These were fine and good for their own purposes, but they couldn't be sailed to Lofoten; however, neither could the big boats be used for purposes for which the small ones were built. He thought Beret might not have been so constructed as to fit their life at all, but was a finer and better soul than either of them.[26]

During Per Hansa's first summer on the prairie, everything went well. His crops were maturing beautifully, and he "was behaving like a good boat in a heavy sea--as long as the keel pointed the right way, he would go on."[27]

Years later, in Their Fathers' God, Beret spoke of herself as a boat in a different way from the way in which Per Hansa had spoken of her. She broke her hip one night and seemed fully aware that she was not going to recover. At Hans's asking if she wanted him to telegraph her other two children, Ola and Anna Marie, she said he might as well, as they would be coming for the funeral anyway. "As it is they will hardly reach here in time, and perhaps it's just as well. There's small pleasure in watching an old boat sink,"[28] she continued.

When a group of parishoners, who called themselves the Prayer Circle and met every Sunday afternoon to sing, pray, and testify, broke off from St. Luke's and founded a church of their own, St. Luke's Norwegian Evangelical Congregation became a boat that "keeled perilously, with no one to calm the troubled waters."[29]

Because Peder Victorious failed to answer the three important questions which the minister asked him at his confirmation, Beret felt the church begin "to heave like a boat in a heavy sea."[30] She had been eagerly awaiting his answers, as she was concerned over whether he was worthy to take communion.

Peder Victorious had never seen the sea. He was born and reared on the prairie; yet after a flare-up with his father-in-law over Susie's staying so many weeks to care

for the old man with his injured leg, Peder thought over his situation in nautical terminology: "Wasn't he the commander of his own ship and wasn't he himself laying out its course? Couldn't he steer his own ship wherever he chose?"[31]

The fact that others have seen resemblance between prairie schooners and ships and between the prairie and the sea should not discredit a sustained metaphorical picturization of the movement westward by wagon. The Vossings and Sognings did not arrive in the settlement; they "put into port."[32] Of the caravans Rolvaag writes, "How exciting they were, those little ships of the Great Plain!"[33] As the caravans drew nearer, "they came drifting across the prairie like the day; after long waiting, they gradually floated out of the haze, distinct and clear."[34] They didn't stop at the sod houses, but would "come to anchor in front of one of the sod houses."[35] As the caravan finally moved on westward, "the white sails grew smaller and smaller in the glow of the afternoon."[36]

As Robert Nelson was playing his heartless confidence game, he took advantage of Lizzie's ignorance and declared that he and his partner didn't want their company to become a big business through too many stockholders and "run the boat [his fictitious company] ashore on that rocky coast."[37]

Lizzie invested one thousand dollars in The Arizona

Pure Gold Company and told Louis that "as soon as her ship came in, it would be the end of drudgery for them."[38]

In The Boat of Longing an old Stril, who worked in the lumber camp with Nils, a young immigrant from Norway, checked out of camp early and told Nils that he was leaving for Alaska. To Nils's question as to what he would do when he was done with Alaska, he replied:

> Huh--then I'll set my course straight on the Golden Gate! For I reckon by that time my bark will have seen its day. Besides, it's sure to take me at least two years out there. Alaska is big, you see. And should the old hulk still be seaworthy, it'll not be a great run across the strait to Siberia. But I don't suppose I'll ever get that far, though it, too, is a place I've not seen.[39]

As Nils was riding the train back to Minneapolis from the lumber camp where he had spent the previous winter, "the train rocked and roared; by spurts it sped madly on, like a boat zipping full press down a mountainous wave."[40]

In Giants in the Earth, Tonseten's horses were so frightened by the first invasion of locusts in 1873 that "not until he [Tonseten] had the stern of his craft well into the wind could he stop them long enough to scramble down and unhitch them from the reaper."[41]

Syvert Tonseten once had had too much to drink at Hans Olsa's house. No matter how Kjersti adjusted her steps on the way home, Syvert would either range ahead or lag behind; he had great trouble keeping his balance; at

Kjersti's concern over what ailed him, he answered that he felt a little queer, sort of dizzy, and his feet wouldn't work properly. "He lurched ahead like a boat scudding down the slope of a wave."[42]

Navigating.--Activity on land is expressed in terms of transportation at sea in the following nine instances. Ten common nautical idioms relevant to this discussion immediately follow it.

After the men of the little settlement had decided that a trip to the Tronders for wood was a dire necessity, they delayed several days because of the biting cold. A day which breathed a breath of spring finally arrived; and, although none of the group trusted the pleasant appearance of the sky, they still made hasty preparations and left after ten o'clock. About three o'clock the men caught sight of a frightening cloud, a "billowy outline above the prairie."[43] Hans Olsa suggested that they pass a rope from one sleigh to the next so they wouldn't lose each other in the storm. Per Hansa's answer to Hans Olsa's questioning as to the advisibility of doing this was vividly nautical:

> "Yes, yes!" His sailor instincts were all alive. "It looks as if the storm would travel the way we're going. We'll have to watch the wind. . . . Whatever you do, keep a sharp lookout for the country we know on this side of the river. If we should sail past the Tronders', there'll be hell to pay. . . . Hurry up, now. Damn the luck, that we haven't got a compass!" The words tumbled out of Per Hansa's mouth in a raging flood.[44]

His nautical experience had enabled Per Hansa to find his way on his initial trip to the settlement. Then he had found a "landmark"[45] and had told Ola to "be sure to keep as sharp a lookout"[46] as he could.

Hans Olsa's battling the February blizzard which brought on a fatal illness for him and claimed Per Hansa's life is described in nautical terminology. As the snow became denser, the air colder, and the wind steadier, he went over to a distant quarter-section of land to care for his cows. "Had he not been so familiar with the lay of the land, or had he not known how to take his bearings by the direction of the wind, he would never have been able to find the place."[47]

When Per Hansa was leaving on his fatal errand, "he took his bearings from familiar outlines of the landscape, and laid the course he thought he ought to follow. . . . Perhaps it wasn't so dangerous after all. The wind had been steady all day, had held in the same quarter, and would probably keep on."[48] He evidently depended entirely on the wind for keeping in the right direction, as "he moved slowly on with steady strokes, taking note of the wind at odd times."[49]

One evening during the first winter in the settlement when Kjersti and Tonseten came over to Per Hansa's house, Syvert became displeased with Kjersti, spoke angrily,

and rose to go home. Per Hansa did not want them to leave so early after braving the storm to come; and in his argument to get them to stay longer, he said, "You'll have the wind astern, Syvert, going home!"[50]

The writer of this paper had never seen this expression used in just this way before. Surely anyone, except one with a nautical background, would have said, "You'll have the wind behind you (or to your back) going home!"

As Per Hansa was wending his way across southern Minnesota with his family, he found the sun a useful guide in finding his way. As he didn't have a compass, he took "his bearings by means of his watch and the sun."[51] On the prairie, as on the sea, "one had to get one's cross-bearings from the very day itself."[52] After Per Hansa was sure of his bearings, he sent Ola back to the wagon to drive with the directions to "hold her on the sun for a while longer."[53]

When Jakob and his unhappy family arrived at the settlement, Per Hansa became excited at Jakob's mentioning his trying to steer with a rope that was too short "and kept kinking around so much, that it didn't leave any wake."[54] Per Hansa was sure Jakob was a seafaring man to have tried steering that way, but Jakob was not a sailor; he had been taught the trick by fisher-folk.[55]

Per Hansa was the seaman on duty as he sat up during the night to care for the sick Indian; as he became sleepy, "he realized that he would have to pull himself together in order to keep going through the middle watch."[56]

Per Hansa found himself watching Beret very closely in her illness, and he became very uneasy in his concern over the way she was acting. Then he would chide himself with the thought that these trifles were likely to happen under such circumstances.[57] He tried to dismiss his misgivings from his mind by thinking "there was no danger that Beret couldn't stand her watch."[58]

When the Stril, who had checked out of lumber camp early, called Nils out of the shanty to bid him good-bye, Nils urged him not to leave with night coming on. The old Stril laughed and replied, "An old sea dog who has kept the middle watch as often as I can get along all right."[59]

Certainly in the above three instances the nautical usage is most convincing, as it comes from two former seamen, Per Hansa and the Stril.

Ordinarily, "putting an oar in," an idiom which means to make known one's idea, or "resting on one's oars," an idiom which means to taper off on one's activities, should be relegated to the ranks of faded metaphors, but from Per Hansa's lips--or should it be Ole Rolvaag's pen?--they gain new vitality. As all the neighbors sat in Per

Hansa's house on the thirteenth day after Christmas, discussing the destiny of Peder Victorious, "Per Hansa was on the point, once or twice, of putting in his oar, but managed to stop himself in time."[60]

A group of Irish, who had come to claim Tonseten's and Hans Olsa's land, arrived at the settlement. The inhabitants of the little settlement were tense; but as in every crisis, it was Per Hansa who took charge of the proceedings. As he and his friends were approaching the Irish camp, he directed, "I think it will be best for you, Henry, to cut loose; then you, Syvert, can put in your oar when you think it's needed."[61]

Per Hansa's amazing gift of adaptability soon put him far ahead of his friends, who had arrived before him. By plowing his fields and choosing building sod during the day and building on his house in the evening, he soon found he was ready to make a trip for poles to thatch the roof of his newly-built combination house and barn. "The busy season of spring was over; now he proposed to rest on his oars awhile."[62]

As Nils (in The Boat of Longing) watched the people on Nicollet, he thought "if he were any judge, some of these had rowed against the wind all their lives."[63] As he looked at the sinister, weathered look on the faces of some people, he wondered if it were "possible these human beings had

rowed against wind and storm all their lives."[64]

Gjermund Dahl thought there would be four political parties in the field in the fall, and that would mean fishing in troubled waters.[65] The election campaign raged on. "For the past four years the country had been sailing under the colours of the Democratic party."[66]

When Peder found out that Tom was going to make him the subject of a political speech and that Susie's brother, Charley Doheny, knew about it, he gave her some blunt, cold questioning. Later Susie told him, "You come home and sail into me like a wild man because--because . . . I can't tell you what Tom's up to!"[67]

Susie and Peder were discussing his intention of running for county commissioner. Susie told him that she had asked the priest to help him in the campaign. She was sure that would get him in; and once he was in, the rest would be smooth sailing.[68]

About his experience with the Indians, Per Hansa told Hans Olsa and Tonseten when those two returned from town, "It looked like far from plain sailing, I can tell you!"[69]

When Per Hansa and his slow caravan arrived at the settlement, he thought it looked like the pastures of Goshen. Tonseten answered, "That's exactly what we are going to call the place--Goshen--if only you haven't sailed in

to mix things up for us!"[70]

In nautical terminology "to reef" a sail is "to reduce" it. Rolvaag mentions "a man so tall that he had to reef in his height in order to look through the doorway."[71]

Finding "to steer" twenty-two times in Rolvaag's fiction would indicate nautical influence. It is found in four of the five novels used as the basis for this study, but is found most frequently in Giants in the Earth. This word can, of course, be used in ways other than nautical. It is derived from the "A. S. steoran, to steer<steor, guidance; a rudder."[72] The two meanings chosen for study here are: "to direct by means of a tiller, wheel, or other gear, as a ship or an automobile; [and] to obey the helm."[73] The word helm is derived from the "A. S. helma, rudder."[74] It means "the mechanism for steering a ship, comprising rudder and tiller or wheel for moving it; often, the wheel or tiller alone."[75]

In five instances, "to steer" is found in proximity to other trenchant nautical terms. Only these examples are included in this paper; other intriguing, although not obviously nautical uses of the word, have been omitted.

Per Hansa's caravan, of which Rosie the cow was the rudder, steered for Sunset Land. Unhappy Beret wondered if they ever again would see their friends who had gone on ahead. Store Hans told her he thought they would, as they

both were steering for the sun, a sure guide.[76]

After he and the others had come on ahead and left Per Hansa to find his way alone over strange unmarked territory, Hans Olsa had worried about Per Hansa's tardiness in arriving at the settlement. Tonseten was the first to catch sight of the caravan; in telling Hans Olsa that he had seen it, he said,

> I reckon Per Hansa must have got off his course a little. Maybe the oxen didn't steer well, or maybe he didn't figure the current right. . . . No need to worry. That fellow never would drown in such shallow water as this![77]

Jakob mentioned twice his trying to steer with a rope. He was not a seafaring man, but fisher-folk had told him it was possible to steer that way.[78]

Hans Olsa's use of the term "to steer" was in nautical context. His struggle with the blizzard which dealt him a death-blow has been discussed at length elsewhere in this paper. He took his bearings by the direction of the wind; the cattle had sought shelter to leeward of the straw stacks; the wind drove the snow in roaring breakers; and he thought he would never be able to steer a straight course home.[79]

After Peder and his father-in-law had had some angry words over Susie's staying too long at her father's home, Peder thought over his troubles:

Would the gossips prove to be right, after all?

> Wasn't he the commander of his own ship and wasn't he himself laying out its course? Couldn't he steer his own ship wherever he chose?[80]

Tacking is a method by which sailing vessels can be sailed to windward (against the wind). "To tack" in sailing is "to travel in a zigzag course." Since maneuverability was very important to the Norwegian fishermen who sailed to the Lofoten Islands, it can be assumed that Rolvaag was very familiar with this type of sailing.

The writer found this term used nine times as a noun and twice as a verb; in each instance it definitely had nautical connotation. It was found most frequently in Giants in the Earth, and in every instance in this novel it involved Per Hansa, a former sailor.

In Minneapolis, Nils, protagonist of The Boat of Longing, called at the home of his close friend, Kristine Dahl, but found new occupants there. "Because of being fuller, the room impressed him as being even smaller than it had seemed before; the woman had to tack her way across the little patch of floor in order to get to the bed, so she could lay the infant down."[81] Here the word "to tack" has the nautical connotation "to zigzag."

When Per Hansa settled on his land and later found corner stakes with strange names on them on both Tonseten's and Hans Olsa's land, he felt certain that the same misfortune that had befallen his friends certainly would have

befallen him also; so he began searching for stakes on the boundaries of his own land. On "the line between Hans Olsa's quarter and his own . . . he repeated his tactics of a while before, zigzagging back and forth over a broad space; but though he kept tacking around for a long time, he was unable to locate any stake."[82] The next day Per Hansa took the boys with him to search for stakes. He used the pretext that they would pace out their west boundary line; he cautioned the boys to hunt with care. "They made tack after tack, north until they stood on Henry's land, south to Hans Olsa's."[83] They zigzagged east and west, combing the ground with painstaking care. "When they finally stopped on the last tack, looked around, and saw that they had covered every possible place, his [Per Hansa's] voice sounded almost joyful."[84]

Per Hansa would not listen to the others' waiting four days in Jackson, Minnesota, while his wagon was being repaired, as he thought the explanation of exactly what course he was to follow seemed simple. After being lost one day until late in the afternoon, he had been unable to find the trail of Tonseten, Hans Olsa, and the Solum boys. The night before he came to Split Rock Creek, he seemed to take a bearing of the wagons and the North Star and hurried away to the westward to see if he could find a trace of the others. He walked about four miles to a ridge; and looking

at his watch, the North Star, and the moon,[85] he tried

> to fix the bearings of the camp in his mind. . . . First he searched the northerly slope of the hill, beyond the edge of the thicket. . . . When he had found no trace of what he was looking for, he came back to the same starting point and searched an equal distance in the opposite direction; but he discovered nothing on this tack, either.[86]

There was Per Hansa's plan for catching the ducks in the swamps to the westward--"if the ducks got the best of him on one tack, he would fool them on another; into the net somehow they must go!"[87]

Beret thought it would be impossible for human beings to remain on the prairie. Per Hansa could not draw her into a conversation concerning the future "no matter which tack he took nor how hard he tried."[88] Here the term meant a change in the course of one's conversation. This same use first was exemplified in the following: Per Hansa thought he had lost his seed by getting it into the ground too early. Later when he saw Tonseten planting his seed, he went over to talk to him. "Per Hansa didn't feel inclined to open up the subject of his own troubles; he began on a different tack."[89]

A singular description in Peder Victorious concerned an old crow who had stayed north too long and was alarmed at finding Peder, Miriam, and a horse right where he wanted to alight. "His eyes blazed red with anger; he let out an infuriated caw to the old woman [the other crow],

warning her that here she'd better watch her tack."[90]

Lizzie and Louis, the protagonists of Pure Gold, had become so miserly that Lizzie even skimped on food; she stormed at Louis for using tobacco. Usually, he let her rage and promised to quit, but "twice he tried another tack with her."[91] He raged back.

Characteristic Features of Ocean and Sea

The writer found "undertow" in seven places in the fiction. In two instances the word refers to sound, and in the other five instances it refers to a pulling force.

When Hans Olsa lay down with his cattle to rest during a blizzard, the quiet, regular breathing of the animals sounded "like a light undertow on a summer's day."[92]

The first invasion of locusts in 1873, put in nautical terminology, projects to the reader the magnitude of the episode and the utter helplessness of the settlers:

> From out of the west layers of clouds came rolling--thin layers that rose and sank on the breeze; they had none of the look or manner of ordinary clouds; they came in waves, like the surges of the sea. . . . The ominous waves of cloud seemed to advance with terrific speed, breaking now and then like a huge surf, and with the deep, dull roaring sound as of a heavy undertow rolling into caverns in a mountain side. . . . But they were neither breakers nor foam, these waves.[93]

Peder Victorious found himself speaking to a crowd of people in "The Golden Eagle" after he had tried in vain to prevent the County Board from hiring Mr. Jewell, a

self-styled rain-maker, who was to drench the county for seven hundred dollars. "The strained faces tugged at him with the force of a great undertow."[94] Some one came into "The Golden Eagle" to announce that Mr. Jewell was ready to start. The crowd emptied their glasses and left, but Peder stood at the bar drinking glass after glass of rye. "Heavy stillness filled the big room. The undertow was gone. Peder felt himself floating away on the silence."[95]

In trying to understand life about him, Peder thought deeply; he thought that history had raised up men who had caused the stream of existence to flow in new channels. He "felt a restless undertow tugging at him; the idea that life was calling him to other things than milking cows and swilling hogs terrified him."[96]

Gjermund Dahl called on Peder and advised him to run for an office on the Republican ticket. After Gjermund had left, Peder started to go into the house but suddenly began pacing the ground. "What did he have to do there? . . . The soft voice of the spring night no longer reached his ears; he was in the grip of a tugging undertow."[97]

After Nils had come to Minneapolis, he found just watching and mingling with the "great human stream" on Nicollet Avenue thoroughtly fascinating.

> . . . On . . . on . . . on . . . [sic] ceaselessly on ran the stream. Especially when noon came, and for a couple of hours into the afternoon. Then the blue

> smoke of cigars bore through the air in clouds. Through the street whirred two endless processions of motorcars, backs disappearing, fronts appearing. Like running the undertow in Nordland to get past them. But the main current, that which interested him most, ran forth and back, back and forth, upon the walks.[98]

Of the above uses of the word "undertow" the first two mentioned pertain to the auditory elements of an undertow. They definitely relate to sound: the sound of cattle breathing and the sound of locusts. The last four uses of the word pertain to the physical, pulling force which is the primary element of an undertow. In the first two of these last five instances in which the word is used, the undertow could symbolize Peder's feeling that he had a calling to be of service to his community. In the penultimate instance, the tugging undertow might symbolize the forces that were carrying Peder and Susie's marriage toward a definite separation. The significance of the last use is obvious. A simile is used to compare the danger of crossing a street, busy with the traffic of motorcars, to the danger encountered in running an undertow.

The noun "wake" is used in a suggestively nautical manner eight times in the fiction. The examples given below show how the usage varies from purely nautical figures of speech to metaphors faded to the degree that they have lost their strictly nautical connotation.

Per Hansa's caravan left a track behind it like the

wake of a boat.[99] Poor Jakob couldn't steer with a short rope, because it "kept kinking around so much, that it didn't leave any wake."[100] As Peder raced down the road in his buggy, a long cloud of dust lay in his wake.[101]

Westward moving bands followed the railroads like seagulls in the wake of a ship.[102] Per Hansa, Baarstad, and Gurina "found themselves quickly shoved into a corner, out of the wake of the dancers."[103] Kjersti came tripping out of the house in the wake of the minister.[104] Peder's sin brought many in its wake, as he kept lying when he was questioned about it.[105] Peder's thought that his father could manage everything himself brought in its wake another question to ask his mother.[106]

Although the usage of the term "wash" hardly could be termed nautical, the usage of the term "backwash" is vividly nautical. Peder Victorious thought it was "pleasant to feel the wash of the air flooding him like a bath"[107] as he dashed down the road in his buggy. At the Fourth of July celebration Peder and Else found themselves in a surging mob of people. "Before they knew it they had been swallowed up completely by the backwash, were being whirled hither and yon, like chips on a mighty eddy."[108]

Some form of the word "surge" was noted in thirty places in the fiction. Twelve of the nineteen verbal uses, four of the nine noun uses, and both of the two adjective

uses were in proximity to other nautical terms. These eighteen examples are discussed briefly in the following paragraphs.

The pain of knowing that Beret could not free herself from the miserable state into which she had fallen surged through Per Hansa like a wave.[109] When a cutting remark from Beret reached Per Hansa, a wave of anger suddenly surged over him.[110] On the prairie a spirit of faith and self-confidence "would rise and fall at intervals, would swell and surge on again with every new wave of settlers that rolled westward into the unbroken solitude."[111]

When Nils made his first visit to an American theater, he listened as lighter tones rippled from violins and watched as a dancer, who caused shame to surge through him, came floating out.[112] When Nils commenced to cry, all of the unhappy experiences he had encountered surged forward like a terrific sea.[113]

Hazel's thought of Clarence's return from World War I, referred to as a roaring sea, "sent hot thrills surging through her."[114] Waves of uneasiness surged up in the miserly Lizzie Houglum.[115]

When Aline Tufton was called before the congregation to confess her sin, Peder Victorious sensed in her voice a storm of crying gathering ominously, "crying which surged forward in swells, rose to a crest, and was forced back by

superhuman effort."[116] At Aline's harsh treatment, resentment welled up within Peder, "surged back and forth in his mind, gained force, and broke more violently each time."[117] "A wave of deep joyousness surged back and forth"[118] in Peder when his mother proposed going over to Doheny's to see about his (Peder's) and Susie's wedding.

On their first date Peder and Else "were stopped by a mob of people which surged back and forth, and then broke in huge waves."[119] On the third page following this citation, Rolvaag refers to "the surging mob."

Torrents of rain falling were described in a novel manner. "The huge waves racing through the air, encountering an obstruction, broke like surging breakers against a projecting mountainside."[120]

The snow of a prairie blizzard was "a surge which the wind drove before it in roaring breakers; in the eddies around the corners it was impossible to keep one's eyes open."[121]

In the church service conducted in Per Hansa's house, the sound of breathing rose and fell like a heavy ocean swell. Later the room vibrated to a surge of mighty song.[122]

The clouds of locusts "came in waves, like the surges of the sea."[123] Although Tonseten called for someone to help control the horses, "the others, standing like

statues, heard nothing and paid no heed; the impact of the solid surge had forced them to turn their backs to the wind."[124]

Rolvaag uses "to ebb" in two places with enriching effect. Under the strain of a snowy, cold winter the courage of the pioneer settlers was slowly ebbing away.[125] Elsewhere in the same novel, Rolvaag had referred to Per Hansa's courage as ebbing back again.[126]

Twelve figurative uses of "current" were found in four novels. Three of them might be considered common idioms.

There was least variation in the use of the term in The Boat of Longing. In three of the four instances in this book, the current was "the great human stream" on Nicollet Avenue. In the fourth instance the current was the "human current" in Great Northern Station.[127]

In trying to think of a reason why Per Hansa hadn't arrived yet, Tonseten thought he must have got off his course, or the oxen didn't steer well, or he hadn't figured the current right.[128]

"To be cast about like chips on a current" may be a common enough simile, but perhaps the repetition of the phrase warrants its being mentioned here. Beret thought that Destiny "had cast her about like a chip on the current, and then had finally washed her ashore here."[129] She

meditated about being so far from home and about Jakob and Kari's drifting on the prairie "like chips on a current."[130]

Beret hadn't wanted to go so far westward, "but it had been as if a resistless flood had torn them loose from their foundations and was carrying them helplessly along on its current."[131]

In trying to rid their land of the locusts, "simple-minded people would take a washtub and a rolling pin, and beat until they were tired, but never a ripple did such a din cause in the current's steady flow."[132] Per Hansa's sod hut, surrounded by locusts, "looked like a quay thrust out into a turbulent current."[133]

In introducing the events that tell (in Pure Gold) of Lizzie and Louis's having deposited their money in the First National Bank, whose failure threw them into deep despair, Rolvaag writes: "To all men is portioned out a fair share of adversity. . . . Some stand up bravely under it; others are broken utterly, and are swept away like chips upon a swift current."[134]

The word "breakers" was noted six times in the fiction. It appeared twice in Peder Victorious, four times in Giants in the Earth. Four of these examples are found elsewhere in this paper.

There was a storm that drove snow before it like giant breakers.[135]

As Per Hansa saw Tonseten, dancing with an apple-round Tronder woman, go rocking and whirling past, he called out to him, "Careful now, Syvert, old man! There are rocks and breakers ahead of you! What do you think Kjersti would--[sic]"[136] This nautical allusion is particularly convincing, since another, expressed in a gay simile, immediately follows it. Per Hansa saw Hans Olsa right in the midst of a flock of dancers bobbing "up and down, up and down, above all the others, like a buoy on a high sea."[137]

The word "billow" was noted nine times. In the following examples some form of the word is used three times as a noun, once as a verb, and twice as an adjective.

There were "sighs which rose and fell like heavy billows";[138] there were billows of pain;[139] there were clouds that were flaming billows of yellow and gold.[140]

There were "prairies that billowed into slopes";[141] a blizzard approaching as "a black, billowy outline above the prairie";[142] and the snow outside Beret's window which was a billowing sea of white.[143]

"Surf" was noted five times in three novels. Three instances are recorded here.

Louis Houglum's "thoughts pounded like the beating of a heavy surf."[144] At the County Board meeting, "a shove like the roll of a heavy ocean surf"[145] sent Peder to the front of the room. The invasion of waves of locusts broke

"now and then like a huge surf."[146]

The writer found "wave" used figuratively in thirty-four instances in the fiction studied. Some examples are cited in context with other nautical words elsewhere in this thesis. The following examples are presented as evidence of a nautical element in Rolvaag's novels.

There was a time when Per Hansa's voice sounded to Beret "like the indolent swish and gurgle of lapping ocean waves on a fair summer's night."[147]

The snowy terrain in a howling blizzard twice reminded Per Hansa of waves.[148] When he finally made his way to the Baarstads and entered their house, "the heat of the room seemed to flow over him in a great wave."[149]

Per Hansa's reaction to the dance music caused waves of spasmodic twitching to pass over him.[150] A wave of warm joy welled up in him when he learned that Beret would live after the birth of her last child.[151] A great wave of relief swept over him when he felt all was well in his sod hut after the invasion of the locusts.[152] A wave of bitterness rose in his heart as he remembered Beret's unkind words to him.[153]

When Beret learned that she was not going to lose Permand, "wave upon wave of gratitude welled up within her."[154] When Peder found that it was Miriam Nilsen who had helped him out of a fight, "a wave of sympathy swept

over him."[155] When he read of a disaster in the newspaper, "a warm wave of sympathy swept through Peder."[156]

Peder sat petrified when Miss Mahan called him before the class for punishment. "Hot waves rushed to his face, flooded his cheeks, then receded as quickly to give way to deathly pallor."[157] Per Hansa's unflinching determination not to accept his father-in-law's boat, fishing outfit, house, and farm and stay in Norway had sent hot waves through Beret.[158]

The minister himself led the singing at the first church meeting in the settlement. "A few joined in at first, one voice after another straggling along, like waves on a calm sea."[159] When Reverend Gabrielson told Beret that Peder was carrying on with an ungodly crowd, "her countenance became odd to look at, like waves ruffled by a sudden gust of wind blowing straight against them."[160]

When Susie cried, waves coursed through her body and grew into breakers.[161] A great wave broke through her, then sob upon sob.[162]

The prairie had waves of yellow, blue, and green, set into motion by a sweeping gust of wind. Now and then there was a dead black wave, a cloud's gliding shadow.[163] Waves of settlers rolled westward across the prairie.[164]

As Nils played Johan's violin, the melody of the sea overwhelmed him "like the onrush of a great, cold

wave."[165] A peculiar, uncanny brightness like waves coming and going was seen on the fighter Makki's face.[166]

Waves of emotion passed through the ungainly frame of the farmer at whose house Louis Houglum had stopped.[167] A wave of laughter rolled through the room at a witty remark of the rainmaker.[168]

The noun "purl," meaning the soft, murmuring sound of water, and the verb "purl," meaning the moving of water with a murmuring sound, were noted in the selected fiction; these examples are included in this research, as they so obviously carry out Rolvaag's expressed desire to revive memories of the sea.[169]

In describing the sea on the first page of The Boat of Longing, Rolvaag writes of the wavelets: "Then they would murmur on along headlands and around venturesome points, but purl more softly against the beaches of coves."

In this same book (page 151), the immigrant boy Nils was visiting an old lady, Kristine Dahl from Norway, in her home in Minneapolis. As he sat in her home listening to her talk, he thought, "The rich music of her voice filled the room like the purl of water upon ocean strands on still nights."

On his first trip from the settlement into the town of Worthington, Per Hansa and the other men stopped long enough at the Sioux River to catch fish. As they sat by the

bank of Split Rock Creek and ate, "the water purled by below, murmuring gently, reminding them of much that was dear and half forgotten."[170] Sounds, as well as sights, reminded Per Hansa of his life before he came to America. That which was "dear" and "half-forgotten" was a former connection with the ocean off the coast of Norway.

"To drift" would scarcely be noticed if it were repeated in most fiction, since it can be used in ways other than nautical. However, its appearance many times in context with other nautical expressions justifies its mention here. Forty-four examples of this word or variations of it were found in the fiction; each was studied carefully in context. Few of the uses are extraordinary, but the great number of different uses perhaps is significant. The word appears in each of the five novels not fewer than four times. It is found not fewer than fifteen times in Giants in the Earth, nor fewer than eleven times in Peder Victorious. Only those uses found in proximity to other nautical references are included in this study.

In Giants in the Earth the prairie schooners came drifting across the prairie, floated out of the haze, and anchored in front of the sod houses.[171] Jakob and Kari drifted in a limitless void like chips on a current.[172] In her loneliness, Beret felt like "a shipwrecked person stranded on some lonely island far out at sea. . . .

Occasionally there was a sail on the horizon, which drifted across the day and was gone."[173]

In The Boat of Longing, Marie chided Nils for thinking his first cheap movie was wonderful. Although he thought it obviously "wouldn't do to be so saving of every penny and only go drifting along with the current on Nicollet for an hour"[174] each noon, after their evening together Nils again "glided into the Nicollet upstream and began drifting with it till it thinned out farther up."[175]

Fifty examples of the word "to float" were noted in the fiction and were studied in an effort to determine the originality and extent of the use of the word.

Perhaps few of the uses are extraordinary; only a few uses can be interpreted as being strictly nautical. The word is used in each of the five novels no fewer than seven times.

Related Nautical References

Ocean and sea.--Writers before have seen resemblance between the prairie and the ocean. Rolvaag, too, touches on this similarity; but the writer of this paper found that this is only a minor factor in Rolvaag's comparisons with the words "ocean" and "sea." She arrived at this conclusion through the study of thirty-six instances in which these words are used for special effect in Rolvaag's fiction.

In eight of these thirty-six instances, the words do point out resemblance between the prairie and the ocean; but even in these instances the use of the words enhances and becomes an intrinsic part of the mood of the story.

Beret was born in Norway and immigrated to the American prairie with her husband Per Hansa. As she gazed around from the summit of the little hill on their land, she admitted that it was lovely up there. "The broad expanse stretching away endlessly in every direction, seemed almost like the ocean. . . . It reminded her strongly of the sea."[176]

When all the cows in the settlement strayed away, it was Per Hansa who went to find them. Beret was not so terrified of the space and silence of the prairie when Per Hansa was near, but she always felt helpless and emotionally upset when he left. On this occasion she did not show herself but stood looking out the window with her face tear-stained and swollen with weeping and watched him disappear. "To her it seemed as though he were sinking deeper and deeper into an unknown, lifeless sea; the somber greyness rose and covered him."[177]

The winter with its snow, its cold, and its lack of sunlight was having its effect on the mood of the inhabitants of the Spring Creek settlement. Rolvaag expresses that mood in describing one Sunday afternoon as a "dim,

lurid day . . . a pale sun flickering through the drifting snow . . . an everlasting wind . . . the whole prairie a foaming, storm-beaten sea."[178]

As Per Hansa lay on the floor of the Baarstads' house after his struggle through the storm, "every nerve of his body was twitching; little spasms passed over him, like ripples on the surface of a smooth, glassy sea."[179] Here the author uses nautical figurative language to express uniquely Per Hansa's mental and physical reaction to his unnerving experience with the blizzard.

Beret's helplessness and fear for a moment overpowered her when Ola came home with the news that Hans Olsa was dead; she went to the window and stared at the snow-covered landscape. "All the awfulness out there rose up like the flood tide of a mighty sea. . . . The billowing sea of white outside rolled on in an icy calm, into an eternity of snow."[180] All of Beret's helplessness and fear over Per Hansa's long absence were projected to the reader through this simile and metaphor.

Blizzards raged for weeks following Per Hansa's final departure, so that Beret and the boys were hard put to find food, fuel, and clothing and to carry hay from two miles away through snow eight feet deep. When the late spring finally came, the snow soon disappeared, and the lowlands became a sea of water. "As the next sun sank, the

sea was gone and the fields were dry."[181]

In some instances, the primary objective in using the words "ocean" and "sea" seems to be the creation of mood. This creation of mood is not too obvious, but is subtly and effectively woven into the essence of the story.

Preceding the birth of Peder Victorious, Beret became morose and grew convinced that she was going to die. Per Hansa spent much time with her and tried to talk to her, but she was quiet and distant. "In the shadow of a faint smile which she occasionally gave him there lay a melancholy deeper than the dusk of the Arctic Sea on a rainy, grey fall evening."[182]

One evening, Beret, still sad and full of self-reproach because she had allowed Jakob and Kari to leave, went to the top of the hill with her younger children. Rolvaag seems to catch all of her apprehension, loneliness, and frustration when he writes that she thought, "To people this desert would be as impossible as to empty the sea."[183]

While Beret's mind was still somewhat beclouded, Per Hansa was talking to the minister about the tragic situation. He expressed his utter defeat and helplessness in being unable to help her when he told the minister that even though he wondered if two people ever cared as much for each other as he and Beret did, one couldn't "lift the ocean, whether it rages in a storm or lies quiet in a flat

calm."[184]

Gjermund Dahl had spent some time with Peder and had asked him to run for office on the Republican ticket even though he, Dahl, was a Democrat. Peder was so fascinated to have Gjermund's mantle fall on him that he had visions of stars flaring and sparkling. The stars vanished when he suddenly remembered the many differences that were forming a chasm between him and his wife Susie. "Before he was aware of it he had fallen into a black sea of melancholy."[185]

The horizon of Louis and Lizzie Houglum (of Pure Gold) actually had narrowed to the point where they enjoyed money for its own intrinsic value. One night after Lizzie had demanded that Louis divide all their money with her, he took a milk-pail full of money up to bed with him. "He placed the pail on a chair right by his pillow and left it there for the night, falling to sleep in an endless sea of contentment."[186]

The poet (in The Boat of Longing), with whom Nils lived in Minneapolis, read to him a serious poem which he had written. Again, by using the word "ocean," Rolvaag very effectively projects the mood of his character into his fiction. "Nils had fallen into a brown study and was far away. Before him lay a desolate ocean in a murky gloom of dusk and rain."[187]

"Ocean" and "sea" are used figuratively in rather unique ways. Nils Nilson had been a leader in the Prayer Circle, who began to desire a congregation of their own separate from St. Luke's. The group seemed to like Andrew Holte's suggestion of a separation. Nils Nilson, who up to now had not let it be known how he felt about the matter, expressed his opinion, because "the mood of the crowd gave him a feeling of safety, as fair weather reassures the traveller who is about to cross dangerous seas."[188]

Hazel Knapp (in Pure Gold), who became a zealous worker and organizer in the Red Cross Auxiliary because her fiance was in France in World War I, thought of the war as a raging sea.[189] Because Hazel told Roy Henderson she thought Lizzie needed to be taught a lesson, Roy and several other boys in a mob descended on the Houglums' home. The boys had plenty of liquid from the saloon, so several "were half-seas over already." Being half-seas over was being half-drunk; for Steve, who certainly was entirely inebriated, was described as navigating about the yard in a heavy sea. Steve evidently set the Houglums' house on fire while he drunkenly investigated the attic with matches, because soon the roof was ablaze,[190] "sending an ocean of stars flying skyward"[191] and later falling "into the sea of flames."[192]

Nils (in The Boat of Longing) visited an unusual part of the city. The cultural gap between the part in

which he was standing and the rest of the city was nautically reasoned thus by this former fisherman: "Obviously there were oceans and whole continents lying between this place and the one up above, even though only a bridge separated them."[193]

Some of the stream of people whom Nils liked to watch on Nicollet Avenue were comely and happy-looking; others were worn and hideous. A look in the face of the unhappy ones frightened him. "They reminded him of the west sea when it lay sleek far out, with cloudbanks above it, boding not even the weather eye of the most experienced old sea dog could say what."[194]

In another novel, Pure Gold, Louis and Lizzie Houglum were "carried forward by a seething sea of bright faces"[195] as they were waiting in line at the theatre to see their first movie.

Other interesting, significant comparisons are worthy of mention. The sun "swam through endless seas of blue";[196] the prairie "floated in a vast sea of impenetrable violet and purple";[197] the prairie "lay floating in a purple sea"[198] the "sleepy harvest moon was drifting across an immeasurable sea"[199] the clouds during the drought "drifted together out in the west . . . bathed in a sea of red";[200] there was a wide sea of red when the troll's head was cut off;[201] Nils saw a sea of tables on his first

visit to a large American restaurant;[202] "an ocean of swaying heads was about all"[203] Nils could make out in the half-dark on his first visit to a theatre; a sea of light streamed through the doorway of a coach on the train on which Nils and Per were returning from the woods;[204] Kristine claimed Johan's eyes "were just like the sea on a moon-night in autumn";[205] and the clouds of locusts "came in waves, like the surges of the sea."[206]

Sea birds.--Novel, indeed, are the effects achieved by references to birds of the sea. In seven of the folfowing eight examples, people are compared to gulls; in the other example, the canvas-topped schooners are compared to gulls.

Beret marveled at the seeming madness of the westward movement; she saw people, young and old, packing up whatever was movable and leaving their homesteads without a sigh as they headed westward. She thought "people drifted about in a sort of delirium, like sea birds in mating time; then they flew toward the sunset, in small flocks and large--always toward Sunset Land."[207]

As the land seekers continued to pour westward, they traveled in wagons with canvas tops gleaming whitely in the shimmering light. When the wagons were first seen as tiny specks, "one might almost imagine them to be sea gulls perched far, far away on an endless green meadow."[208]

Store-Hans thought the fields of snow were glorious because he could skim over the drifts. He and Ola put on their skis and flew off "like two great sea gulls soaring across the fiord."[209]

Westward moving bands of people followed after the railroads "like seagulls in the wake of a ship."[210]

When Beret went to see what she could do to help Sorine after Hans Olsa's death, the snow was still deep; and she found the going difficult on Ole's skis. Store-Hans became impatient with her slowness and "left her as the gull the boat it doesn't care to follow any longer."[211]

After her father, her brother, and her sweetheart were all lost in the storm on the cod-banks at Varoy, Lofoten, in 1893, Nikoline Johansen had come to visit Sorine, her aunt. Peder had heard Sorine remark to his mother (Beret), "Poor girl [Nikoline], she is like a sea gull with a broken wing."[212]

Nils took Ole Hansen's asking him to look after his boys, Per and Otto (in The Boat of Longing), very seriously. Per's leaving nearly a year later without telling Nils where he was going, caused Nils so much worry that during the two years he worked for the Great Northern Railway, if he happened to be in a city on Saturday night, he would seek out the busiest corner to stand and search for Per "like a lone gull perched watchful on some bold headland round which the

ocean current runs swift."[213]

Direct references.--Rolvaag makes many direct references to Norwegian life, but he weaves them so smoothly into his fiction that he enhances the unity of effect.

Per Hansa's former sea-going experiences helped him in a very practical way to win in a struggle with the forces of the prairie when his family needed a winter's supply of food and clothing, and he decided to take a load of surplus potatoes to town to sell. He had a problem to solve, as potatoes were sensitive to cold; and it was already the twelfth of October.[214] "But ever since the world was made the people of Nordland had known how to bring potatoes safely all the way up to Lofoten, even in the middle of January."[215] So Per Hansa applied his common sense which he had developed during his sea-faring days and transported them safely.[216]

When Hans Olsa and his family called on Per Hansa and Beret one evening, Beret persuaded them to stay to eat. Per Hansa was overjoyed and "went outside and brought in a generous supply of the frozen fish, which he scaled and cut up; he was in the finest of spirits--it seemed just like the good old days in Lofoten."[217]

In inactivity as well as in activity, the prairie was the sea to Per Hansa. For quite a number of days after the winter had set in in earnest, he was able to enjoy the

chance to rest. Eventually, however, he became thoroughly rested; and although the winter days actually were becoming shorter and shorter, to him they seemed to be getting longer and longer. "Time had simply come to a standstill! He had never seen the like; this was worse than the deadliest lay-up in Lofoten!"[218]

Because the winter scarcely moved forward at all, Per Hansa thought a trip to visit the Tronders on the Sioux River would be fascinating. He felt quite capable of managing the trip, even in the cold weather of the prairie.[219] "Hadn't he sailed a cockelshell of an eight-oared boat all the way from Helgeland to West Lofoten in the dark of winter? This would be mere child's play compared to that journey."[220]

At no other place does the author project his nautical experience into his fiction more obviously than he does in Giants in the Earth (page 281). Here he has Per Hansa, a Helgelaending, and Baarstad, a Tronder, "in the greatest comradeship and with the keenest enjoyment" fishing together through the same hole in the ice on the river. He footnotes this episode with: "During the winter seasons at Lofoten, the two clans, the Tronders and the Helgelaendings, had from time immemorial fought many a bitter fight."[221] That night "the two old fishermen sat eating and rejoicing while they told tales of both East and West Lofoten and

forgot everything around them as they went back into the past."[222]

Per Hansa sank into the depths of despondency when he thought his haste in planting his wheat had lost all of his seed to the frost. In his despair he thought that he was nothing but an old sailor and didn't know the least thing about farming. However, Per Hansa's wheat did come up,[223] and the fact that he had sown in advance of his neighbors gave his grain enough time to ripen so that it was saved even though his neighbors' crops were destroyed in the first invasion of locusts.[224]

Per Hansa had figured out how to catch ducks with a net; he bought several balls of net twine and some rope for sheeting and made two shuttles and a reel. He and Ole knitted on the net; and he himself finished knitting, sheeting, and rigging it. With the net he and the boys caught a winter's supply of fish, which they froze in the snowdrifts and salted down in what vessels they could spare.[225] For three nights the father and the boys waded the near-by swamps where ducks were plentiful, and on each following morning they returned with ducks which they had caught with the fisherman's net.[226]

When a tribe of Indians encamped on Per Hansa's land for a night, the cows of the settlement all ran at full speed to join the caravan of Indians, as they had formed

the habit of following caravans from their long trek to Dakota Territory. Per Hansa went to get the cows, and stayed through the night to give medical attention to the infected and badly-swollen hand of an Indian. His method of medication was novel, indeed, to the writer of this paper; Rolvaag writes that Per Hansa "sat down with him [the Indian], and began to draw on the great store of experience he had gathered as a fisherman on the Lofoten seas."[227]

CHAPTER III

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this study the researcher has revealed the manner in which a nautical element became a distinguishing characteristic of Rolvaag's style. This was revealed through the presentation and analysis of his most graphic and/or most numerous nautical allusions.

Summary

The word "boat" or a synonym of the word, figuratively used, was presented in twenty-seven instances to refer to seventeen different items: a situation, a caravan, a cradle, oxen, a sleigh, Per Hansa, Hans Olsa, Beret, St. Luke's Congregation, a church, Peder's life, a fictitious gold company, a sudden fortune, the Stril, a train, Syvert, and a reaper.

Nine vivid accounts of activity on land in terms of transportation at sea were presented; these were followed by ten common nautical idioms.

From navigating aids employed in the fiction, the writer presented uses of: landmark, compass, wind, watch and sun, and rope. Uses of two fundamental navigating activities, steering and tacking, were presented also.

The writer presented thirteen features, characteristic of ocean and sea, from 207 instances in the fiction as illustrative of Rolvaag's vivid nautical allusions; the thirteen features were: undertow, wake, wash and backwash, surge, ebb, current, breakers, billows, surf, waves, purl, drifting, and floating.

Thirty-six comparisons to the ocean and sea were noted in the fiction. Eight of these were comparisons to the prairie. Seven comparisons expressed six different moods: melancholy, frustration, helplessness, contentment, gloom, and mystery. Other items to which ocean and sea were compared are: a venture, World War I, intoxication, stars, flames, cultural gap, faces, the sky, atmosphere, blood, eyes, light, tables, and clouds of locusts.

The writer found people compared to gulls in seven instances; she found the canvas-topped schooners compared to gulls in one instance.

Eight of the numerous direct references to life in Norway and life on the ocean were given as examples of the author's tendency to include direct references in his fiction.

Conclusion

Giants in the Earth can be interpreted as being influenced by the nautical not only in a linguistic sense,

but also in reference to the personality of Per Hansa. His self-sufficiency and his ability to adjust to a new and strange environment might be interpreted as or compared to those traits which a successful Norwegian sailor would need in order to survive emergencies in a small craft hundreds of miles from land or assistance. Under adverse weather conditions at sea in which the situation tapered to a primitive struggle between man and nature, only a resourceful and ingenious seaman could survive; even he might become a victim of the relentless upheavals of the sea. So it was with Per Hansa; only a resourceful and ingenious man could emerge the victor in an elemental struggle with the giant forces of nature on the Great Plains; even he, endowed with the basic quality for survival--adaptability, became a victim of the relentless fury of the plains. This parallel of language and aptitude contributes perhaps to the excellent verisimilitude of this novel.

Except for The Boat of Longing--142 of its 304 pages have Norway and the ocean for a setting--perhaps Giants in the Earth contains the most vivid nautical imagery and attains the greatest degree of verisimilitude. Giants in the Earth is written about Norwegian immigrants. The fact that two of the main characters, Per Hansa and Hans Olsa, were seafaring men lends justification to the extended use of nautical reference in this novel.

His biographers thought that the fresh originality of Rolvaag's style, as to both choice of words and turn of phrase, was attributable to his command of a native dialect. They stated that the imagery of Giants in the Earth was the imagery of the sea and that the whole scene of the Lofoten sea impinged upon the American prairie.[1]

That Per Hansa, the Viking hero, is the strong character in Giants in the Earth is reason enough to impregnate that novel with nautical reference as an essential element in exposition, but to carry this reference into Peder Victorious, a novel of the second generation, and into Their Fathers' God, a story of the second and third generations, indicates that the nautical element itself became an integral part of the trilogy. Both Boat of Longing with a seaman as its protagonist and Pure Gold without a seaman as its protagonist contain material connotative of the nautical.

Rolvaag became a member of the executive committee of Nordlandslaget (Nordland Society), organized in January, 1909. In a letter expressing the objectives of the society, he mentions that the members wished to revive memories dear to them--"memories of mountains, shore, and sea, and of the fjord as it opens out into the wide world."[2] Certainly Rolvaag revives these memories in his fiction. His consistent use of nautical imagery, nautical terminology, and

nautical reference creates a distinctive individuality in his style.

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER I

1. The five novels taken as a basis for this study were first written in Norwegian, as were all Rolvaag's works, and later translated into English.

CHAPTER II

1. O. E. Rolvaag, Giants in the Earth, trans. Lincoln Colcord and the author (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1927), p. xii.

2. According to Theodore Jorgenson and Nora O. Solum, Ole Edvart Rolvaag, A Biography, (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1939), p. 15, it was Jakob Ravnoy (1740-1811), who changed the family name to Rolvaag.

3. Giants in the Earth, pp. xii-xvi.

4. Ibid., p. xv.

5. O. E. Rolvaag, The Boat of Longing, trans. Nora O. Solum (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), p. 153.

6. O. E. Rolvaag, Their Fathers' God, trans. Trygve M. Ager (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1931), pp. 155-56.

7. Jorgenson and Solum, op. cit., p. 122.

8. Ibid.

9. Ibid.

10. Giants in the Earth, p. xvi.

11. Jorgenson and Solum, op. cit., p. 34.

12. Ibid., pp. 35-36.

13. Ibid., p. 3.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Giants in the Earth, p. 86.

18. Ibid., p. 453.

19. Ibid., p. 5.

20. Ibid., p. 175.

21. Ibid., p. 264.

22. Ibid., pp. 269-70.

23. Ibid., p. 270.

24. Ibid., p. 271.

25. Ibid., p. 269.

26. Ibid., p. 416.

27. Ibid., p. 333.

28. Their Fathers' God, p. 248.

29. O. E. Rolvaag, Peder Victorious, trans. Nora O. Solum and the author (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1929), p. 48.

30. Ibid., p. 260.

31. Their Fathers' God, p. 153.

32. Giants in the Earth, pp. 307-308.

33. Ibid., p. 314.

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

36. Ibid., p. 315.

37. O. E. Rolvaag, Pure Gold, trans. Sivert Erdahl and the author (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1930), p. 139.

38. Ibid., p. 173.

39. The Boat of Longing, p. 172.

40. Ibid., p. 196.

41. Giants in the Earth, p. 342.

42. Ibid., p. 91.

43. Ibid., p. 267.

44. Ibid., p. 268.

45. Ibid., pp. 6ff.

46. Ibid., p. 7.

47. Ibid., p. 429.

48. Ibid., p. 463.

49. Ibid., p. 464.

50. Ibid., p. 207.

51. Ibid., p. 7.

52. Ibid.

53. Ibid.

54. Ibid., p. 319.

55. Ibid.

56. Ibid., p. 82.

57. Ibid., pp. 208ff.

58. Ibid., p. 208.

59. The Boat of Longing, p. 171.

60. Giants in the Earth, p. 257.

61. Ibid., p. 143.

62. Ibid., p. 56.

63. The Boat of Longing, p. 91.

64. Ibid., p. 132.

65. Their Fathers' God, p. 295.

66. Ibid., p. 299.

67. Ibid., p. 327.

68. Ibid., p. 285.

69. Giants in the Earth, p. 88.

70. Ibid., p. 28.

71. Pure Gold, p. 323.

72. The Universal Reference Library, (Philadelphia: International Press, 1953), p. 972.

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid., p. 450.

75. Ibid.

76. Giants in the Earth, pp. 6ff.

77. Ibid., p. 26.

78. Ibid., pp. 318-19.

79. Ibid., pp. 429-30.

80. Their Fathers' God, p. 153.

81. The Boat of Longing, pp. 215-16.

82. Giants in the Earth, p. 116.

83. Ibid., p. 119.

84. Ibid.

85. Ibid., pp. 15ff.

86. Ibid., pp. 18-19.

87. Ibid., p. 200.

88. Ibid., p. 211.

89. Ibid., p. 303.

90. Peder Victorious, p. 172.

91. Pure Gold, p. 113.
92. Giants in the Earth, p. 431.
93. Ibid., p. 341.
94. Their Fathers' God, p. 56.
95. Ibid., p. 57.
96. Ibid. p. 97.
97. Ibid., p. 297.
98. The Boat of Longing, p. 90.
99. Giants in the Earth, p. 3.
100. Ibid., p. 319.
101. Their Fathers' God, p. 29.
102. Peder Victorious, p. 116.
103. Giants in the Earth, p. 282.
104. Ibid., p. 365.
105. Peder Victorious, p. 14.
106. Ibid., p. 19.
107. Ibid., p. 283.
108. Ibid., p. 309.
109. Giants in the Earth, p. 211.
110. Ibid., p. 155.
111. Ibid., p. 425.
112. The Boat of Longing, p. 129.
113. Ibid., p. 139.
114. Pure Gold, p. 232.
115. Ibid., p. 336.

116. Peder Victorious, p. 24.

117. Ibid., p. 31.

118. Ibid., p. 349.

119. Ibid., p. 309.

120. Ibid., p. 340.

121. Giants in the Earth, p. 430.

122. Ibid., p. 372.

123. Ibid., p. 341.

124. Ibid., p. 342.

125. Ibid., p. 284.

126. Ibid., p. 17.

127. The Boat of Longing, pp. 89ff.

128. Giants in the Earth, p. 26.

129. Ibid., p. 229.

130. Ibid., p. 330.

131. Ibid., p. 40.

132. Ibid., pp. 352-53.

133. Ibid., p. 347.

134. Pure Gold, p. 80.

135. Giants in the Earth, p. 269.

136. Ibid., p. 282.

137. Ibid., pp. 282-83.

138. Peder Victorious, p. 24.

139. Ibid., p. 247.

140. Their Fathers' God, p. 1.

141. Giants in the Earth, p. 168.

142. Ibid., p. 267.

143. Peder Victorious, p. 176.

144. Pure Gold, p. 305.

145. Their Fathers' God, p. 40.

146. Giants in the Earth, p. 341.

147. Ibid., p. 195.

148. Ibid., p. 270.

149. Ibid., p. 275.

150. Ibid., p. 283.

151. Ibid., p. 239.

152. Ibid., p. 347.

153. Ibid., p. 79.

154. Ibid., p. 418.

155. Peder Victorious, p. 166.

156. Their Fathers' God, p. 220.

157. Peder Victorious, p. 147.

158. Giants in the Earth, p. 226.

159. Ibid., p. 372.

160. Peder Victorious, p. 330.

161. Ibid., p. 98.

162. Their Fathers' God, p. 218.

163. Giants in the Earth, p. 3.

164. Ibid., p. 425.

165. The Boat of Longing, p. 114.

166. Ibid., p. 188.

167. Pure Gold, p. 328.

168. Their Fathers' God, p. 41.

169. Jorgenson and Solum, op. cit., p. 138.

170. Giants in the Earth, p. 169.

171. Ibid., p. 314.

172. Ibid., p. 330.

173. Peder Victorious, p. 326.

174. The Boat of Longing, p. 127.

175. Ibid., p. 131.

176. Giants in the Earth, p. 37.

177. Ibid., p. 105.

178. Ibid., p. 283.

179. Ibid., p. 279.

180. Peder Victorious, pp. 175-76.

181. Ibid., p. 181

182. Giants in the Earth, p. 233.

183. Ibid., p. 330.

184. Ibid., p. 384.

185. Their Fathers' God, p. 297.

186. Pure Gold, p. 192.

187. The Boat of Longing, p. 102.

188. Peder Victorious, p. 55.

189. Pure Gold, pp. 231-32.

190. Ibid., pp. 237-47.

191. Ibid., p. 247.

192. Ibid.

193. The Boat of Longing, p. 108.

194. Ibid., p. 89.

195. Pure Gold, p. 275.

196. Giants in the Earth, p. 297.

197. Peder Victorious, p. 208.

198. Ibid., p. 246.

199. Ibid., p. 314.

200. Their Fathers' God, p. 1.

201. The Boat of Longing, p. 138.

202. Ibid., p. 121.

203. Ibid., p. 126.

204. Ibid., p. 182.

205. Ibid., p. 158.

206. Giants in the Earth, p. 341.

207. Ibid., p. 227.

208. Ibid., p. 314.

209. Ibid., p. 456.

210. Peder Victorious, p. 116.

211. Ibid., p. 176.

212. Their Fathers' God, p. 155.

213. The Boat of Longing, p. 243.

214. Giants in the Earth, p. 167.

215. Ibid.

216. Ibid., pp. 167ff.

217. Ibid., p. 208.

218. Ibid., p. 204.

219. Ibid., pp. 213-14.

220. Ibid., p. 214.

221. Ibid., p. 281.

222. Ibid.

223. Ibid., pp. 295ff.

224. Ibid., pp. 335ff.

225. Ibid., pp. 177ff.

226. Ibid., p. 200.

227. Ibid., p. 79.

CHAPTER III

1. Jorgenson and Solum, op. cit., p. 344.
2. Ibid., p. 138.

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