



Man's encounter with nature: an ecocriticism analysis of Western Classic and Contemporary Novels

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ABSTRACT

People regardless of race and gender significantly learn as they interact with nature that leads to resiliency, adaptation, connectivity, and the fragility and beauty of life, which helps them build a strong harmony and interaction with it. Through literature, this context was further explored to determine how is it possible for human to challenge the nature. This study aims to discover and explore the relationship of human and nature through a thematic analysis of two award winning novels, "The Old Man and The Sea" by Cuban author Ernest Hemmingway and "The Life of Pi" by Yann Martel, a Canadian writer. Through in-depth analysis, five themes emerged in this study, dominance of nature, respect for nature, spiritual intercession, perseverance, and skills over luck. Symbolisms of the two novels that constitute the themes were also compared and contrasted. This study employed ecocriticism to further understand the rhythm of human and nature's existence.

RESUMO

As pessoas, independentemente de raça e gênero, aprendem significativamente ao interagir com a natureza, o que leva à resiliência, adaptação, conectividade e à fragilidade e beleza da vida, o que os ajuda a construir uma forte harmonia e interação com ela. Através da literatura, este contexto foi explorado para determinar como é possível para o ser humano desafiar a natureza. Este estudo tem como objetivo descobrir e explorar a relação do ser humano com a natureza por meio de uma análise temática de dois romances premiados, "O Velho e o Mar" do autor cubano Ernest Hemmingway e "A Vida de Pi" do escritor canadense Yann Martel. Por meio de uma análise aprofundada, cinco temas emergiram neste estudo: domínio da natureza, respeito pela natureza, intercessão espiritual, perseverança e habilidades sobre a sorte. Simbolismos dos dois romances que constituem os temas também foram comparados e contrastados. Este estudo empregou a ecocrítica para entender melhor o ritmo da existência humana e da natureza.

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Introduction

Literature has long been used as a tool for examining the depths of human experience and for uncovering important truths about the unshed reality in the world. Kachele in 2019 emphasized that literature as anything that is penned down. It is an avenue in which a reader creates an artistic tool by expressing his or her ideals and understanding about the text. In studying any piece of literature, the tools used to create meanings are the texts which are used in articulating and communicating best life's experiences, lessons and struggles. It captures one's imaginations and reveals the complex relationships between the person and the cosmos via its rich tapestry of symbols, metaphors, and tales. As they both explore the core of humanity's interaction with nature, Yann Martel's "Life of Pi" and Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea" serve as examples of literature's ability to alter. These novels weave narratives that travel the infinite depths of the ocean and the vastness of the human soul, serving as deep emblems of our home and origin.

A window into many cultures, viewpoints, and spheres of life, literature has the astonishing power to transcend time and distance. Literature reveals human's role in the complex web of existence and captures the essence of our shared human experience via its creative representation. Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea" is a monument to the fundamental bond that exists between humans and nature, representing the resiliency of the human spirit in the face of the powerful forces of the ocean. Hemingway's masterwork immerses us in the turbulent struggle between an elderly fisherman and the huge, merciless sea through vivid imagery and engaging narration, prompting us to reflect on the rich symbolism contained within this primal meeting.

Similar to this, Martel's "Life of Pi" leads readers on an enthralling journey that explores the spheres of both material and spiritual existence. The story transforms into a potent metaphor of human resiliency, spirituality, and the precarious balance between humans and the natural world when the protagonist, Pi, finds himself adrift on a lifeboat in the enormous Pacific Ocean. "Life of Pi" highlights the transforming ability of literature via its evocative storytelling and inventive storyline, guiding us through the worlds of religion, survival, and the enduring power of the human imagination.

This study begins a thorough investigation of the influence of literature on how human perceive the world via the analysis of these two literary masterpieces, illuminating the dense symbolism and enduring roots that lay inside its folios. As this explores deeper into "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Life of Pi," readers are reminded of the literature's enduring ability to capture the core of human existence and to shed light on our complex relationship with the natural world.

Review of literature

In his novel "The Old Man and the Sea", Ernest Hemingway narrates the tale of Santiago, an elderly Cuban fisherman who embarks on a difficult expedition in an effort to capture a giant marlin (Smith, 2023). Santiago confronts the merciless water while contending with mental and emotional difficulties that put his fortitude to the test. Hemingway examines issues of human perseverance, tenacity, and the existential character of existence via Santiago's fight. The tale is full with symbolism, with the marlin standing in for Santiago's valiant foe and the sea denoting both nature's beauty and cruelty. Hemingway uses a variety of literary techniques, such as vivid imagery, succinct and impactful style, the use of repetition and symbolism, to express the depth of the narrative and depict the fundamental link between man and the natural world.

In "The Life of Pi," by Yann Martel, a little Indian child named Piscine Molitor Patel, also known as Pi, escapes a shipwreck and ends up adrift in a lifeboat in the middle of the Pacific Ocean (Mander, 2023). The story recounts Pi's extraordinary adventure. Along with Richard Parker, a Bengal tiger, Pi must negotiate the dangers of the wide sea and face the harsh facts of survival. The work delves deeply into issues of spirituality, faith, and the value of narrative. Martel compels the readers to consider the nature of reality and the capacity of imagination. The Life of Pi" is filled with symbolism, such as the tiger representing the primal instincts in humans, the vastness of the ocean symbolizing the unknown, and Pi's journey becoming a metaphor for the search for meaning and transcendence in life. Martel uses vivid descriptions, philosophical reflections, and allegorical elements to create a deeply thought-provoking and emotionally resonant narrative that explores the complex relationship between human and nature.

Symbolism

The Old Man and The Sea (Smith, 2023). *The Marlin*: For Santiago, the marlin stands for power, beauty, and the greatest challenge. It stands for his relationship with nature, his drive for excellence, and the battle for survival. *The Sea*: The sea represents both life and the vast uncharted territory. It stands for Santiago's source of nourishment and livelihood as well as the erratic and merciless character of life. *The Sharks*: The destructive powers that may undo Santiago's work are represented by the sharks. They stand in for the hardships and challenges that put his dedication to the test and emphasize how transitory triumph is.

The Life of Pi (Mander, 2023). *Pi's full name*, Piscine Molitor Patel, represents his dual nature and capacity for environmental adaptation. Since "Molitor" is the name of a swimming pool in Paris, "Piscine" (which translates to "swimming pool" in French) emphasizes his affection for water. This represents his affinity for water and portends his spectacular naval

voyage. *The lifeboat*: The lifeboat is a representation of solitude, survival, and constraint. It symbolizes Pi's limited resources and the difficulties he encounters while drifting aimlessly on the great ocean. *Richard Parker*, often known as "the Tiger," stands for the wild, primal element of human nature. He serves as a mirror to Pi's own quest for survival and self-discovery by representing the impulses of basic survival that are inside Pi.

Theoretical Framework

To further explore the two novels pertaining to a meaningful journey with the nature, ecocriticism theory was utilized. Ecocriticism focuses on the ecological and environmental aspects of literature. It examines how the natural world is represented, how humans interact with nature, and the ecological implications of these interactions. It can help one explore the portrayal of nature, human-nature relationships, and the ecological themes present in both novels. Ecocriticism is a broad way for literary and cultural scholars to investigate the global ecological crisis through the intersection of literature, culture, and the physical environment. (Gladwin, D., 2019)

Materials and Methods

In the endeavor to unravel the intricate interplay between man and nature in Western classic and contemporary novels, the researchers employed a rigorous thematic analysis. The analytical focus was directed toward two seminal works: "The Old Man and The Sea" by renowned Cuban author Ernest Hemingway (1952) and "The Life of Pi" penned by Canadian novelist Yann Martel in 2001. The methodological choice, thematic analysis, was grounded in its qualitative research prowess, facilitating the identification, analysis, and interpretation of pervasive patterns or themes within textual data (Clark and Braun, 2016).

Further, the researchers acknowledge the imperative for a more explicit exposition of the methodological approach. To augment the clarity of the methodology, the researchers meticulously delineate the steps involved in the analysis, encompassing data collection, coding procedures, and interpretation techniques. Adhering to the comprehensive six-step process outlined by Caufield (2019), the researchers steadfastly pursued transparency and reproducibility in this scholarly endeavor.

The initial step of Familiarization involved an immersive exploration of the chosen literary works. Rigorous readings and re-readings of "The Old Man and The Sea" and "The Life

of Pi" were undertaken to distill a profound understanding of their narrative intricacies, character dynamics, and thematic nuances pertaining to the central theme of man's interaction with the natural world. Subsequently, employing systematic Coding procedures, the researchers identified and marked pertinent passages in the novels that encapsulated the nuanced relationships between characters and their natural environments. Open coding was utilized to accommodate emergent themes and patterns. Through iterative discussions among the research team, the process of Generating Themes involved crystallizing initial themes based on the coded passages and honing in on recurring motifs and pivotal narrative elements that portrayed protagonists' engagement with nature. The subsequent step of Reviewing Themes involved a critical assessment and refinement of the identified themes through collaborative efforts, ensuring consistency and coherence in the analysis.

Following this, in the phase of Defining and Naming Themes, clear definitions and distinctive names were ascribed to each theme, endowing the ensuing analysis with precision and clarity regarding the key concepts extracted from the novels (Caufield, 2019; Terry et al., 2017). Finally, in the Writing Up phase, the researchers compiled the final thematic analysis, providing readers with a comprehensive exploration of the identified themes in both novels. The interpretation techniques were explicated, affording readers insights into how thematic elements were intricately connected to the broader context of ecocriticism, fostering a holistic understanding of the nuanced relationships between man and nature in these literary masterpieces. Through this meticulous and explicit methodology, the researchers aim to contribute to the scholarly discourse with a transparent and reproducible framework for the ecocritical analysis (Clark and Braun, 2016; Caufield, 2019; Terry et al., 2017).

Results and Discussions

The emerged themes in both novels were analyzed and supported through specific citations from certain chapters in the novels. This section also provides interpretation on each theme.

Theme 1: The Dominance of Nature

The thematic exploration of "The Dominance of Nature" in both "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Life of Pi" offers a captivating narrative that delves into the intricate relationship between humanity and the formidable forces of the natural world.

Santiago's poignant battle with the marlin and Pi's harrowing struggle for survival on the Pacific Ocean not only exemplify the indomitable human spirit confronting nature's grandeur but also invite an ecocritical lens to scrutinize the ecological implications of these narratives. As Buell (2005) contends, ecocriticism urges us to move beyond a human-centric

perspective and consider the broader environmental ramifications of human-nature interactions. Santiago's relationship with the marlin, for instance, could be examined through an ecocritical framework to explore its implications on marine ecology and the broader ecosystem.

Additionally, Murphy (2014), acknowledging potential limitations or alternative interpretations is essential. While these literary analyses offer profound insights, they are inherently subjective and may not encapsulate the entirety of the ecological complexities inherent in the selected works. By recognizing this, the study aligns with the humility advocated by ecocriticism, acknowledging that interpretations are multifaceted and can vary based on individual perspectives.

Furthermore, prominent ecocritical scholars such as Lawrence Buell's seminal work, "The Environmental Imagination" (1995), could be invoked to contextualize the protagonists' struggles within the broader ecocritical framework. Similarly, Glotfelty and Fromm's edited volume, "The Ecocriticism Reader" (1996), provides a comprehensive collection of essays that can illuminate diverse perspectives on the intersection of literature and the environment.

Moreover, drawing from contemporary literary theories, a postcolonial reading could be applied to examine how the characters' struggles reflect broader ecological power dynamics. Scholars like Braidotti (2019) in posthumanist theory and Haraway (1988) in cyborg feminism can also contribute valuable insights to understand the complex entanglements between human and non-human entities in these literary works.

In addition, considering the real-world context of natural forces, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) emphasizes the ongoing challenges in predicting and mitigating the impacts of severe weather events (NOAA, n.d.). This recognition aligns with the protagonists' struggles against the overwhelming power of nature in the selected novels.

Theme 2: Respect for Nature

The two novels place a strong emphasis on how interdependent people and environment are, as well as the need of having respect for and humility toward the natural world. Santiago recognizes the marlin's power and dignity in "The Old Man and the Sea," and he appreciates and admires it. He admits that his success is dependent on his capacity to comprehend and interact with natural forces. "I love and respect the sea, and I often think of going to bed in it" (Chapter 1) - Santiago's deep love and respect for the sea are evident from the beginning of the story. "There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the

wood" (Chapter 2) - Santiago reflects on the pain he feels when he hooks a fish, showing his understanding of the interconnectedness and natural processes of the sea.

Meanwhile, the Bengal tiger in the lifeboat Richard Parker and Pi in the movie "Life of Pi" get close along their long journey. "The sun was also starting to grow more respectful of the water and allowing for a balmy, more peaceful setting" (Chapter 30) - Pi notices and appreciates the subtle changes in nature, expressing his respect for the beauty and harmony of the natural environment. Their ability to coexist in harmony with one another inside the boat's natural habitat is crucial to their existence.

This implies that for some reasons, people admire nature's strength. First, a profound feeling of respect and humility have been taught in us by our experiences to natural catastrophes and the enormous loss of life and devastation they may wreak. Moreover, we preserve the stability and functionality of earth's ecosystems to ensure human existence and our capacity to use its natural resources. In addition, the astounding intricacy and beauty of nature inspire awe and gratitude. Cultural and spiritual beliefs frequently place a strong emphasis on how interrelated humans and environment are, encouraging awe of nature's power. In addition, there is now a greater emphasis on protecting and conserving nature for future generations as a result of rising environmental consciousness and the need for sustainability.

Theme 3: Spiritual Intercession

In their intense conflict with the nature, both Santiago and Pi remained in faith. They both acknowledge the power of God to deliver them and supplement them with enough strength. Santiago believed that God would help him through in the vastness of the sea until he gets to the shore. Pi on the other hand questioned God why he was put in the situation. "*You have taken everything from me, my parents. What more do you want!*", Pi shouted when the raging sea swaying his boat. However, his character did not change and continued to believe in God.

In these lines from the novel of Yann, there is an evident divine intervention that took place. "*I felt like I was in the presence of God. I don't know if God exists, but I do know that if He is our Creator, we must respect the creations of our Creator*" (Chapter 16) - Pi acknowledges the divine presence within nature and the need to show reverence and respect for it. "*That night my soul took flight. I soared through the firmament. I saw the earth turning on its axis. I looked down on boiling clouds*" (Chapter 92) - Pi's out-of-body experience while contemplating the vastness of the universe and the beauty of nature emphasizes his spiritual transcendence and connection with the cosmic order.

The idea of spiritual intercession between man and nature is based on the conviction that there is a sacred or spiritual bond between people and nature. *"I am a strange old man." ... "But are you strong enough now for a truly big fish?" "I think so. And there are many tricks." ... "Let him think that I am more man than I am and I will be so."* (Chapter 2) - While not a direct mention of God, Santiago's reference to the power of perception and belief can be interpreted as a recognition of a greater force or divine influence.

It implies that spiritual entities, deities, or forces may mediate or have an impact on how people and environment interact. Numerous cultural and religious traditions have this notion. There is a belief in spirits or deities that inhabit natural elements like mountains, rivers, or woods in several indigenous societies. These spiritual entities are thought of as connecting points between the natural and human worlds. In order to restore harmony and balance, to ask for protection or blessings, or to beg for pardon for any harm done to nature, humans turn to them for intercession.

Additionally, some religious systems consider nature to be holy or divine. According to this viewpoint, the natural world represents a greater force or cosmic energy. In this sense, spiritual intercession is making a connection with the divine essence found in nature through practices like rituals, prayers, or meditation. Higgins (2017) expressed in his article that a certain religion called Pantheism believes that the Supreme being consists of anything and everything including nature. Such acts are said to improve spiritual awareness, promote oneness, and develop a reverent and respectful relationship with the environment. The notion of spiritual intercession with nature and mankind recognizes the inherently interrelated nature of people and the natural world. It highlights the necessity for people to understand their stewardship of the planet and live in peace with nature rather than destroying it or exploiting it. pursuing a spiritual.

In the novel, Pi acknowledges the vital role of the tiger with him on the boat. *"If you were not here, I would have died. My fear of you kept me awake,"* he said to the tiger. Through the end of the novel, Pi recounted his journey saying, *"I wept like a child. It was not because I was overwhelmed at having survived my ordeal... I was weeping because Richard Parker had left me so unceremoniously."* (Chapter 95) - Pi's emotional response to the departure of Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger, showcases his enduring connection and attachment to life, despite the challenges he faced. Santiago also established a strong connection between him and the blue marlin, promising himself that the he must protect it against the sharks pursuing them. Both characters considered these creatures as sent by God to challenge them which eventually led them to deep realizations and reflect to their existence.

Theme 4: Perseverance

Both novels stress the value of perseverance and flexibility while dealing with the difficulties presented by nature. Santiago in "The Old Man and the Sea" exhibits unyielding tenacity in his chase of the marlin, refusing to give in to weariness or despair. His inventiveness and tenacity are evident in his capacity to modify his fishing methods. Pi in the movie "Life of Pi" consistently adjusts to his shifting situation on the lifeboat, managing to support himself and get along with Richard Parker. His existence depends on his adaptability and resilience.

In the novel of Hemingway, here are the remarkable lines that support the theme of perseverance. *"A man can be destroyed but not defeated." (Chapter 3). "The old man was sweating now, pouring sweat. But inside, he was dry and cold and inside, he felt a sharp, wild excitement that he could not understand."* (Chapter 3). These lines demonstrate Santiago's unwavering resolve, mental fortitude, and refusal to surrender in the face of overwhelming challenges, showcasing his perseverance throughout the story.

On the other hand, these are also highlighted in the novel, The Life of Pi. *"I told myself, 'I will not die, I refuse it. I will make it through this nightmare.' I held on to life with both hands."* (Chapter 56) - Pi demonstrates his determination and refusal to succumb to despair or give up on life while facing extreme adversity. *"It's important in life to conclude things properly. Only then can you let go. Otherwise, you are left with words you should have said but never did, and your heart is heavy with remorse."* (Chapter 94) - Pi's commitment to finding closure and resolution demonstrates his perseverance in navigating difficult emotional and psychological territory.

Theme 5: Luck is a Myth, Skill is a Must

Many individuals hold the idea of destiny, which combines spiritual powers and good fortune. It is believed that being fortunate and lucky is a sign of spirituality and success-enabling traits. Faith principles are essential to understand ideas of what people identify as well-being and fulfilment. As surfaced in the study of Calestani (2009), luck can be controlled and changed by treating the spirits better. Likewise, when someone has been unfortunate, like Santiago has been after 84 days of no fishing, Manolin's parents label him as "salao", which is the worst kind of unlucky, and advise him to stay away from them. Santiago himself has a little amount of faith in the idea of luck. When his large fish has already been eaten in half by sharks later in the narrative, he declares that he would pay "what they asked" for some luck in any form. Pi also tagged himself unlucky and lived a long time of regrets for losing his family. He believed that it was his fault why his family was not saved from the deck during their tragic shipwreck.

"He clubbed them, speared them, lashed at them with the tiller, and the sharks had to dodge fast or be hit" (Chapter 2). *"He hit them without hope but with resolution, and each time he hit them he thought of the time when a blow from a club would have killed them"*. *"He clubbed desperately at the shining head until he felt the iron was bent"* (Chapter 2). These lines highlight Santiago's ability to fight off the sharks using whatever means necessary. They demonstrate his physical prowess, adaptability, and skill in defending himself and the marlin from the relentless shark attacks. With his countless experiences in the sea, Santiago did not remain flightless.

"I could weave stories like a spider weaves its web" (Chapter 3) - Pi's exceptional storytelling ability becomes a crucial skill that helps him cope with his circumstances and create meaning in his journey. *"I had to master all my skills to prevent myself from blurting out the words, 'There is no darkness but ignorance'"* (Chapter 27) - Pi's intellectual prowess and knowledge are evident in his ability to draw from his studies and maintain a sense of clarity and perspective amidst the challenges he faces.

These lines highlight the exceptional skills of the characters in each story, be it Santiago's resilience and knowledge of the sea in "The Old Man and the Sea" or Pi's storytelling prowess and intellectual capabilities in "Life of Pi." These skills play significant roles in aiding the characters on their respective journeys.

The two characters reflect the nature of humanity when challenges come. Indeed, resiliency comes from within but without skills, one cannot survive. Luck on the other side remains a myth to some though it is half-truth. In connection to this, Filipinos are well-known for their value of adaptability and resourcefulness after calamities. It takes such skills to save themselves out of raw materials left around. However, Gripaldo (2005), stressed that one of the negative Filipino Values that can be related to the novels is the *Bahala na* syndrome or come what may belief. This shows how reliant they are to luck or to whatever comes.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In the exploration of "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Life of Pi," both novels intricately weave themes of fortitude, the symbiotic relationship between humans and the environment, and the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. Santiago and Pi, as protagonists, exemplify extraordinary skills, unwavering perseverance, and a profound reverence for nature in the face of their respective challenges. These literary works serve as timeless reminders of the indomitable resilience embedded in the human soul.

The contrast between the narratives of Santiago and Pi unveils essential life lessons. First and foremost is the resounding value of tenacity and fortitude. Confronted with seemingly

insurmountable challenges, both characters persist without surrender, embodying the belief that unwavering perseverance may eventually lead to triumph. Their unyielding commitment becomes a source of inspiration for individuals navigating similar tribulations, offering a profound testament to the strength that resides in resilience.

Secondly, the profound reverence for nature depicted in both works serves as a poignant reminder of the intricate connection between humanity and the natural world. Pi's spiritual affinity for animals and Santiago's deep love for the sea underscore the imperative for humanity to acknowledge and preserve the environment that sustains us. These novels serve as catalysts for fostering a greater love of nature and nurturing a collective sense of responsibility for the Earth. The narratives become conduits for environmental awareness, encouraging readers to reflect on their own relationship with the planet and the role they play in its preservation.

Beyond these thematic revelations, the comparison of "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Life of Pi" also illuminates the transformative power of storytelling and imagination in overcoming adversity. Santiago's rich imagination and Pi's adept storytelling underscore the profound impact of narrative in shaping human experiences. They serve as poignant reminders that the stories we tell, both to ourselves and others, have the potential to provide solace, purpose, and strength as we navigate the complexities and challenges of life.

Looking forward, avenues for future research can delve into the nuanced intersections between literature, ecology, and human resilience. Unresolved questions may include the exploration of how different cultural contexts influence the portrayal of the human-nature relationship in literature. Additionally, researchers may investigate the evolving role of storytelling in environmental advocacy and the potential impact of literature in shaping ecological consciousness. Examining how ecocritical perspectives evolve across diverse literary traditions and genres could provide valuable insights into the universality or cultural specificity of ecological themes.

Furthermore, future research may explore the impact of narrative representations on readers' environmental attitudes and behaviors. Investigating the reception and interpretation of ecocritical themes in literature can contribute to a deeper understanding of how storytelling shapes societal perceptions and responses to environmental challenges.

In essence, the analysis of "The Old Man and the Sea" and "Life of Pi" opens doors to a rich tapestry of research opportunities, inviting scholars to further probe the intricate connections between literature, ecology, and the human experience. The potential insights garnered from future inquiries promise to not only contribute to the advancement of ecocritical

scholarship but also deepen our understanding of the dynamic interplay between storytelling, imagination, and our collective relationship with the natural world.

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