

# Seafaring Sagas: ‘Sea’ as a Literary Trope in Hemingway, Melville, and Martel’s Select Nautical Narratives

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## ABSTRACT

The study using eco-criticism and literary techniques including comparison and analysis how the ‘sea’ is used as the evocation of the climbing complexity of Herman Melville’s *Moby-Dick* (1851), Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), and Yann Martel’s *Life of Pi* (2001) within the field of literature, specifically as it relates to how the ‘sea’ represents both a geographic space but also an extensive symbol of humankind’s aspiration to achieve; to strive and conquer against his own existential prohibitions; how common humankind has an exceedingly complex and fragile interplay with nature; and ultimately the profound spiritual transformation experienced through the many hurdles he faces during his environmental journey. By defining the sea as an undefined, vast, trespassable wilderness in which humanity meets Earth’s greatest natural forces, the study analyses how the literary images created by the authors define the meaning behind human experiences as they relate to the sea through contrasting references within each author’s text. It also demonstrates how Melville used Captain Ahab’s monomaniacal pursuit of the white whale to exemplify nature’s overpowering force upon humanity’s desire to achieve; whilst, in contrast, Hemingway used Santiago’s endurance against the sea to represent the human spirit’s ability to withstand unspeakable hardship while reconciling itself, with nature; further, it assess Martel’s depiction of the sea as a transformative experience based upon the author’s ability create faith, imagination, and flexibility to adapt in response to challenges faced by humanity when confronting nature.

## INTRODUCTION

For thousands of years, the sea has been embedded in our cultures through creative expressions (particularly narrative) because it represents the mightiest of all natural landscapes (the strongest of the elements) and have been used to create narratives about exploration, survival, mystery, and transformation. The sea has been used in literature as both a geographic place; however, they also serve as a complex symbolic space for writers to explore how far we can go through our humanity. Because of its magnitude and unpredictability, the sea often symbolizes that which is unknown, that which we do not know about ourselves (the unconscious), and our tenuous relationship with the natural world. As noted by M. H. Abrams, natural elements such as the sea often serves as symbolic structures in the literature to express greater psychological and philosophical meanings than their physical forms [1]. Therefore, many maritime narratives typically use the ‘sea’ as a

metaphorical space where we can examine our endurance, our identity and our existential struggle as human beings.

The sea has played a crucial role in shaping the modern novel via many forms of adventure novels, explorations, and maritime labor, all of which developed with the onset of global exploration and trade by sea, as noted by Margaret Cohen [2]. These adventure stories turn the sea into a moving storytelling space where people have to figure out who they are and what they can do in relation to the unknown. Similarly, Hester Blum points out that maritime literature offers readers access to alternative ways that humans relate with nature because it provides a different view of the natural world for people in the ocean than they would have if living on land [3]. In this way, the sea is both a place of danger and discovery; through experience at sea, characters

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must grapple with what it means when their ability to control the natural world is shown to be limited.

Rachel Carson, in her book *The Sea Around Us* (1951), made an important contribution to our understanding of the ocean's role in the biosphere by showing it to be the largest biologically significant component of the Earth and as having a vital role in supporting life and regulating planetary systems [4]. An ecological view of the ocean allows us to see that it is not only represented in literature but also belongs to all of us and serves as a laboratory for developing meaningful ideas about the world due to its overwhelming size and complexity. Over the last few decades, individuals in the humanities who study ecology have further explored how oceanic environments challenge human-centered perspectives of the world. As an example, Steve Mentz has analyzed maritime literature and has demonstrated a sense of humanity's vulnerability when confronting the enormity and uncontrollability of the ocean and has encouraged a reevaluation of humanity's ability to dominate nature [5]. This cross-disciplinary focus has led to the concept of "oceanic studies," which examines the cultural, historical and ecological aspects of the ocean. Scholars like Philip E. Steinberg have noted how the ocean has acted historically as a place for movement, trade and the exchange of cultures, and has also served as a space that cannot be completely conquered by humanity [6]. The sea is thus in a very complicated place within the human mind because it also exists as a means of connecting cultures, but at the same time, it has the power to destroy those cultures. This duality creates a perfect environment for writers to explore the interaction between humans wanting to achieve great things and environmental limitations. between human ambition and environmental limits.

Maritime literature frequently addresses many essential themes such as survival, identity and mankind's relationship with the natural environment, in conjunction with a more comprehensive intellectual framework. Many classic and modern stories depict the sea as an environment for testing one's fortitude as an individual facing both physical challenges as well as ethical dilemmas and questions about existence. Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) and Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* (2001) are representative of this type of literary tradition; in each case the author depicts human characters trying to survive in the large and ever-changing environment of the ocean, where an individual's ability to survive is highly dependent upon their ability to demonstrate resilience, adaptability and a strong bond with nature.

The sea represents an area in which humans have limitations to their power but also represent an opportunity for a kind of growth and discovery. Though, these works have been written in the different period of the history of literature, yet they share a common theme: the sea as a place through which we can witness the limitations of human power while also providing the potential for change and self-discovery. Ernest Hemingway's novel, *The Old Man and the Sea* has an old man battling against the unbounded powers of nature through the Atlantic Ocean, while Captain Ahab's quest to conquer the ocean hides the true battle of authority against his environment. Finally, Yann Martel depicts a journey across the Pacific Ocean from a shipwreck to surviving on a lifeboat in *Life of Pi*, where the ocean appears as a source of horror, yet it is also an avenue through which he can discover philosophical truths.

Through examining all the seafaring literature side by side, this paper aims to uncover the ways the sea operates as a multi-layered literary metaphor that ties together symbol, environment, and human psyche. By closely analyzing these maritime texts, this study aims to show how the sea remains a major influence on literary depictions of human survival, identity, and the relationship between humans and the earth. Thus, this study constitutes a contribution to the increasing area of study focused on oceanic literature, which considers the 'sea' as a place of narrative development as well as a significant conceptual context to study how humans fit into the larger system of ecology.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The sea has been a source of intrigue for people since time began, providing food, a place to explore, an avenue for adventure, and a world of imagination. As a theme, the ocean extends beyond the physical world and becomes a metaphor for humanity's fears, moral issues of conscience, and existential concerns [7]. From ancient epic poems to modern books, the sea plays a dual role in literature — as an entity rooted in reality while serving as a backdrop for stories about survival, adventure, and philosophical thought. The representation of the sea in literature has developed over many decades, dating back to the earliest myths, epics and poems. For example, in *Odyssey*, Homer places the sea as front and centre in how Odysseus travels home over a ten-year period; it represents chaos as well as the struggle of mankind to overcome fate [8]. Romantic poets like Samuel Taylor Coleridge in his *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* also invoke the sea as a source of the sublime, illustrating how it has the potential to create simultaneous feelings of awe and horror [9]. The sea, in much of Romantic literature, is seen as a

manifestation of freedom, mystery, and unknowable natural forces, highlighting how powerless humanity is in the presence of tremendous natural forces [10]. The role of the sea was transformed during the modernist period by authors who found it to be an ideal setting for examining existential themes and psychological complexity. The sea functioned as a means of exploring human frailty, moral uncertainty, and the conflict between humans' wills and the forces of nature [11]. There was an increase in narratives about the sea being depicted as a space for internal conflict, limits of knowledge and endurance in an increasingly modern world [12].

Ernest Hemingway, in his minimalist style of writing, often depicted the sea as the ultimate test of endurance, bravery, and moral strength. Santiago, in *The Old Man and the Sea*, encounters both a massive and unpredictable ocean as he tries to catch a marlin, making the struggle a requirement for both even a physical challenge and a philosophical challenge [13]. The sea is representing as the stoic ideal of an individual who will face and overcome both natural and existential challenges with dignity and determination [14], [15]. Robert W. Lewis has noted that Hemingway's depiction of the sea being a site of cosmic indifference, demonstrates example after example of Santiago's successes and failures and how they show the resilience of the human spirit regardless of the inevitability of defeat [16].

Melville's novel *Moby-Dick* illustrates how the sea can be interpreted philosophically and ethically, demonstrating that the universe is vast, indifferent to humanity, and full of unpredictability. The sea serves in a metaphorical sense as an example of the indifference and unpredictability of the universe; the character of Captain Ahab and his obsession with pursuing the white whale are representative examples of the human confrontation with forces beyond our ability to explain or describe [17]. D. H. Lawrence viewed the whale as a representation of nature's primal and neutral forces [18]; Leo Marx believed that *Moby-Dick* examines the destructive aspects of human ambition in relation to untamed and ungoverned nature [19]. Melville's portrayal of the ocean includes both terrestrial and narrative examples; by using oceanic environments to portray both metaphysical and narrative aspects, Melville relates his views about humanity's relationship to nature to those of his contemporaries [20].

The novel *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel uses the ocean as both a physical space and an abstract place of discovering who you are. After he is shipwrecked, Pi Patel's long journey over the Pacific Ocean represents a time of solitude, change and questioning his

existence as a human being [21]. Many scholars also discuss how the ocean is a tool for beginning to tell stories, helps to create our understanding of the world and shows us our emotional or spiritual struggles [22], [23]. The story of Pi Patel crosses the boundary of reality and fantasy, faith and rationality, using the ocean as a reflection of his inner self.

Margaret Jacob describes how the process of seafaring exploration helped create both nationhood and culture in Europe; Richard Sugg investigates the ways British imagination and government were influenced by the concepts of 'island nations' and 'maritime power' [24], [25]; Environmental literary scholar, like Rachel Carson, have also pointed out the sea's ecological importance and have argued that literature is one way to understand the sea through its material, symbolic, and emotional power [26]; In addition, Steve Mentz and Philip Steinberg situate the ocean as a social/historical/ecological construct by exploring how human stories and environmental processes interact [27], [28].

Through the use of numerous juxtaposed views on the role of the sea in writings by Hemingway, Melville and Martel, provides evidence that the ocean is a literary symbol with many meanings related to the different ways in which humans deal with life's challenges. The authors emphasize different characteristics of the ocean as it relates to human challenges (e.g., Hemingway focuses on stoicism and perseverance of man; Melville focuses on the universe indifference to man, etc.) but ultimately use the ocean as a literary symbol representing the struggles, strength and ever-evolving relationship between humankind and their natural environment.

## RESEARCH GAP

Although the existing study gives some credible information on the way that Hemingway, Melville and Martel utilise the motif of the sea within their literature, the number of comparative studies between these authors is less. This study intends to fill this void by demonstrating how these authors use the metaphor of the sea to portray different aspects of man. While studies that examine how characters relate to the sea as a symbol of their struggles do provide helpful insight into the individual characters' thoughts and emotions; however these studies do not necessarily address larger social/cultural/historical perspectives that might also position themselves to indicate character's relationship with the sea. For example: understanding how American masculinity is depicted in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* would allow research to explore the way that American brutish manhood is presented through the character's relationship with the sea and examined for

the ways in which it both reflects dominant ideas about masculinity in American society and how it challenges them; in addition, examining Melville's use of the sea in *Moby-Dick* in relation to historical factors would offer opportunities to understand the role of the sea as a mirror of America's 19th Century fears over Expansionist Imperialism and Environmental Exploitation. One more limitation is found in the absence of cross-literary comparisons of each author because the present studies are done using an analytical lens that treats each author independently, thus limiting the potential for broader interpretative insights and preventing a deeper awareness of how the sea represented by the authors connects to much larger literary traditions. Therefore, comparative approaches can offer new foundations for interpretation, such as the juxtaposition of the Stoic conception of the sea seen in *The Old Man and the Sea* against the inherent sense of fate and predetermination found in Classical Greek tragedies such as *Oedipus Rex* by Sophocles; or the comparison of the chaotic, uninterested sea of *Moby-Dick* with the Romantic Sublime found in *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey* by William Wordsworth, to illuminate the many ways that literature articulates the human–nature relationship.

A further gap in the literature is the predominance of Western-like thinking in how most studies have been conducted, thus providing little insight into how the sea appears within other cultural contexts. Studies that examine various cultures and their histories (e.g. *The Sailor Who Fell from Grace with the Sea* (Yukio Mishima), *Midnight's Children* (Salman Rushdie), etc.) show how thematically significant the relationship between the sea and the motifs of isolation, postcolonial identity, and hybridity/integration across cultures is and lend further support for worldwide significance of the sea. In addition to establishing that the relationship between the sea and various cultures is thematically important via literature, the majority of current research on the sea focuses solely on traditional uses as a literary device and has all but eliminated other less traditional meanings from their studies. To illustrate this, when we look at Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and examine his treatment of the relationship between Santiago and the sea, Santiago reposes respect and spirituality in his relationship with the sea, not only as being the product of an stoic journey but, rather, out of a genuine, respectful relationship with it. Similarly, Martel's *Life of Pi* depicts that the relationship between the sea and Pi has both testing (objectivity) and transformative (subjectivity) qualities.

## METHODOLOGY:

This study uses qualitative, comparative literary analysis to analyze sea trope in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, and Martel's *Life of Pi*. Themes of human spirit, struggle, and perseverance will be addressed in three different works of literature that encompass philosophical meaning directed toward the topic of the sea through an analysis of the primary texts. Secondary sources (e.g., scholarly journals or critical essays) will provide context and interpretation about historical, cultural, and philosophical aspects of the three works through which a cross-textual comparison of the three authors' portrayals of the sea as a metaphor/symbol will be presented. This research provides information that synthesizes findings to create larger patterns related to the use of the sea in literature to aid in theoretical understanding and to establish an avenue for future research.

## THE UNFORGIVING SEA: A CRUCIBLE FOR MAN'S SPIRIT IN *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Ernest Hemingway's classic work, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), describes the ocean as both a real site and a metaphorical and existential backdrop to Santiago's struggle against the outer limits of physical strength, dignity, and meaning [29]. Santiago works as a fisherman in the chaotic ocean of the Gulf Stream, which creates discourse about the conflict of endurance, struggle, and moral agency. The accompanying pressure from Santiago's inability to catch fish for eighty-four days establishes the ocean as a powerful entity that tests not only the limits of the human body but also the limits of the human mind; while doing so, the ocean helps reinforce Hemingway's central literary principle, best described as "grace under pressure," whereby dignity and meaning arise from one's perseverance through adversity as opposed to one's guaranteed success [30]. Symbolically, there are many layers of meaning in the way Hemingway distinguishes between *la mar* and *el mar*. The way Santiago conceptualizes the sea as a female who "grants or withholds substantial gifts" serves as a counterpoint to how younger fishermen view *el mar* as a rival [29]. This duality has implications for eco-criticism in that this type of thinking is in line with eco-criticism's notion of nature being a relational (rather than monolithic) entity shaped by human perceptions of nature when viewed through the lens of those experiences that humans have with their environments, as it relates to veganism [30]. This perspective of Santiago's reflects an idea of reciprocity between the natural and human worlds, which is reflective of how he perceives the

sea as an ally rather than a rival in his search to maintain his dignity.

The battle with the marlin represents both an ethical and existential transformation of Santiago; it also constitutes a very intense physical exertion for him. As Hemingway notes, "Then the fish came alive...showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty" [29], showing Santiago's admiration for the marlin expresses a type of sacramental respect towards the marlin, which suggests they are equally valuable as beings of nature rather than one being superior to the other. A similar recognition of the marlin as an objectively different being than Santiago is evident through dialogue related to philosophical concepts about ethical otherness, which states that truly recognizing an Other being has ethical relevance even in circumstances where one being victimizes another being. According to R.W. Lewis, this struggle between Santiago and the marlin personifies what he terms "heroic stoicism," which represents a characteristic used to define the identity of human beings based on the ability to withstand suffering as opposed to determining who has been successful following the defeat of fate [31].

The attack of the sharks and the eventual loss of the marlin's body illustrate an underlying conflict between human endeavor and ecological mishap. This highlights that human action depends partly on uncontrolled occurrences outside of the individual's area of operation and connects well with modernist styles that depict mankind as fragile in relation to the Earth. As Linda Myers describes, Hemingway's story expresses a modernist ethic whereby dignity is derived from interacting with rather than conquering uncontrollable elements within our environment [32]. Santiago's tired return with only the skeleton of the marlin indicates that the value in the journey is simply the journey itself, which is an essential focus within the traditional school of existentialistic thought espoused in the production of 20<sup>th</sup> Century literature.

The relationship with the sea, particularly through Santiago, has an ethical undertone. The guidance of Manolin by Santiago underscores the importance of passing on skills, hope, and optimism to the next generation. There is also an undertone of new imaginative energy emerging with Santiago's rest, worn out by his dreams of lions, which underscores Hemingway's larger belief in hope as an aspect of human endurance. The Old Man and the Sea portrays the sea as a contested space where the human spirit, dignity, and ethics are constantly challenged and reaffirmed.

## **LIFE OF PI: THE OCEAN WITHIN—TRANSFORMATION, IMAGINATION AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING**

Yann Martel's 2001 novel, *Life of Pi*, is not only a typical survival tale; it also contains many substantially deeper themes surrounding human transformation, imagination and the search for meaning through extreme circumstances. The character of Piscine Molitor Patel (Pi), who survive the sinking of a ship and spend 227 days drifting on the Pacific Ocean alone with a Bengal tiger named Richard Parker, becomes an example of human resilience, spiritual perseverance [34]. The ocean is both the physical location in which the novel is set and the metaphorical expression of Pi's mental and spiritual growth. Throughout the book, Martel uses all of Pi's experiences at sea to address differently many of the same, basic issues around faith, identity, and human ability to create meaning in the midst of incredible adversity.

Cultural and religious customs have an influence on Pi's entire life, which has many layers. As a young boy in Pondicherry, India, he was born into the family of a zookeeper; because of this, the child began to be interested in two areas: zoology and religion. Pi's practice of Hinduism, Christianity, and Islam shows Martel's interest in the idea of religious pluralism: that faith can be an overarching way that all humans can understand their suffering and their existence. This has been validated by many scholars who have stated that Pi's openness towards his spirituality is reflective of the broader philosophy expressed by the author that spirituality is a story-like framework for making sense of human experience and giving hope to humankind. Pi's world view gave him some ability to face his uncertainties about the meaning of life, using faith and imagination, even before he survived the shipwreck.

The Pacific Ocean symbolizes Pi's transformation from innocent young adult to a scarred survivor through his voyage across it. The ocean is an unknown, large, unpredictable entity that has the potential to engulf humanity's control. The ocean represents the absurdity of existence and the lack of any absolute meanings imposed by an indifferent universe; this representation of the ocean can be viewed as existential landscapes found in many of today's literary works. In an existential view of the world, survival is not about being able to conquer the power of nature; rather, it is about facing the unknown with courage and flexibility to adapt to whatever challenge may arise:

“Something in me did not want to give up on life, was unwilling to let go, wanted to fight to the very end” [34].

The struggle of Pi to survive demonstrates this existential confrontation with life; he understood what it meant to live without any reasonable hope.

The Bengal tiger, Richard Parker, enhances the overall meaning of the story through various interpretations; however, one interpretation is that of Pi's primal instincts and the psychological balance and duality between civilization and savagery. As Pi struggles to tame and control Richard Parker, he learns to control his fear and maintain his balance. Pi's relationship with Richard Parker is also an example of what some literary theorists refer to as the internalization of the Other: the external threat or danger becomes a projection of the protagonist's inner struggle to survive and establish an identity [37]. In order to survive, Pi chooses to abandon some moral and cultural constraints, including his lifelong commitment to vegetarianism:

“Lord, I am a strict vegetarian... I experienced a type of savagery that I never could have imagined” [35].

Pi's transformation illustrates how extreme situations can change the limits of moral boundaries and identity.

Imagination and storytelling are also key elements in the development of the novel. Due to extreme isolation and despair, Martel uses imagination as a method of psychological survival. The extraordinary aspects of the narrative, such as a carnivorous moving island populated entirely by meerkats, help demonstrate how imagination can change an unbearable circumstance into one that allows a person to keep hope alive. Critical analyses of the way in which the narrative is presented have often been through the lens of postmodern narrative theory, which attributes the instability of truth to the way in which stories shape how individuals see the world [38]. By presenting two slightly differing versions of his survival experience, one using animals and another using humans, Martel invites the reader to determine whether it is the factual accuracy of a story or the emotional and moral implications that ultimately describe what the truth is.

As an agent of spiritual awakening for Pi, the 'sea' serves as a symbol of prayer for Pi as he reaches out to God in his hour of need through prayer and meditation. The ocean is viewed by Pi as a large area to think about the meaning of life and how God exists in that. Martel used the ocean to illustrate the crossing of fear with a higher level than fear, where the ocean shows that you obtain understanding through

experience with the unknown and bad experiences [39]. Therefore, the ocean has also been used to show where one lives in both a way of living and a way of experiencing God.

Pi's final report, along with its vagueness, amplifies the philosophical implication of the novel. When the Japanese investigators question him regarding his story, he presents them with an alternate version of the story using human characters rather than animals. This ambiguity causes readers to examine the limits of rational explanation and explore the impact of conviction and storytelling as changing agents. Stories as Martel implies are not just a reflection of reality but rather a vehicle through which beings derive meaning and deal with traumatic encounters.

At its core, *Life of Pi* is an emotional reflection about how strong our human spirit can be. The sea, which can be described as enormous, unknown, and disconnected from feelings, represents life in its entirety through Pi's experience. Martel shows during this journey that resilience in terms of surviving a life-threatening situation is not solely based on having the ability to survive physically, but is also based on creativity, trust, and being able to discover something meaningful about what we will never fully understand. Therefore, during this novel's journey to convey an experience, it prompts readers to reevaluate the connection between truth and storytelling as an essential part of everyone's ever-evolving quest to find their purpose for existence.

#### **A SEA OF AMBITIONS: NATURE, HUMANITY AND THE AMERICAN SPIRIT IN *MOBY-DICK***

Herman Melville's novel *Moby-Dick*, is not only a classic adventure story about whaling but is also an examination of human aspirations, the fight against the indifference of the universe and the different aspects of what it means to be American. The ocean serves as an important symbolic representation; it represents both what can be achieved from our unwavering determination and how our aspirations can lead to destruction (especially in relation to the historical picture of expanding America during the 19th century and the culture of shipping). The events depicted in *Moby-Dick* occur at a time when commercial whaling was at its peak and follows a voyage of the whaling vessel known as the *Pequod* which is commanded by Captain Ahab (he has one leg because a whale took it from him). Captain Ahab's obsession with capturing *Moby Dick* is driven by his desire for revenge on *Moby Dick* due to the whale taking away Ahab's leg and Ahab has been on this quest since he lost his leg. By using *Moby Dick* to convey the idea of a limitless human capacity for growth and the universe's limitless indifference to our

existence, Melville has constructed a novel which poses questions about our human power limits and the effects of unrestrained ambition [39].

Ishmael the narrator starts off his journey in the town of Manhattan and moves to New Bedford, MA to meet up with a strange friend, Queequeg the harpooner. Ishmael and Queequeg become a part of a whaling trip on a ship called the Pequod and slowly the reader acquires information about Captain Ahab's deadly obsession of finding and killing the white whale Moby Dick, who Ahab believes has injured him in some impossibly cosmic way. Ahab's desire to kill the whale eventually consumes all of his thoughts, turning the expedition into a spiritual struggle rather than just out for profit. Because of this crazed desire Ahab makes the following statement:

“I know not all that may be coming; but be it what it will, I'll go to it laughing” [39].

In giving this signal to the world, it is clear the extent of Ahab's madness and determination that he will face each day without knowing what it may hold.

Moby-Dick's oceanic expanse reflects the expansive ambition within the nineteenth century American spirit that epitomized expansionism at that time. As the primary economic backdrop for the book, whalers' exploration of uncharted lands and their exploitation of natural resources allowed their industry to flourish. Ahab's ceaseless pursuit of the White Whale typifies humanity's quest to subdue nature and create meaning from an amoral universe. Many critics have pointed out that Ahab's fixation on Moby Dick serves as an indicator of how excessive individualism and out-of-control ambition can be destructive to the cultural imagination of Americans [40]. Therefore, the sea becomes a venue for ambition ratcheting up against nature's great and terrible forces.

The ocean is not only a backdrop in Melville's writing but instead acts as a powerful force that thwarts any attempts at taming it. Natural power over human will is demonstrated through elements such as the distance between land and sea, violent storms, and ultimately the might of Moby Dick (the white whale). The failure of Captain Ahab to subdue the whale and thus the ocean, represents not only his tragic end, but serves to illustrate the realities of human pride and belief in the ability to conquer all that exists. As F.O. Matthiessen points out, Melville demonstrates in this work a negative outcome when a person's will attempts to assert its authority and apply meaning for itself to the world around it [41].

Ahab's search is both a physical journey and an emotional adventure filled with tension and

symbolism. His wish for vengeance encapsulates both his individual crisis over his identity and his quest for power. The whale serves as a representation of Ahab's inner turmoil or contradiction, as well as a symbolic representation of how strange, unknown, non-personified forces affect a person's life. Using a psychoanalytical point of view, Melville presents Ahab's obsessive nature toward getting revenge on the whale (due to its tragic death of his leg, in addition to the whales' existence) could be viewed symbolically as Ahab attempting to deal with the symbolic elements that have taken away his authority and masculinity. Ahab's continual pursuit of vengeance on the whale points to the self-destructive ramifications of Ahab attempting to control forces outside of anyone's control.

The different perspectives of the many cultures found in Moby Dick include the various ways they define the “American spirit.” Ishmael, the thoughtful narrator, embodies a sense of inquiry as well as an openness to philosophy that inspires his wonderment and humility at sea. While the first mate, Starbuck, is characterized by a logical mind, moral composure, and faith in God. The opposing figures of Ishmael and Starbuck symbolize the conflict within the context of the creation of a new American identity— between ambition and self-control; between the desire for adventure and the requirement of responsibility. The diverse group of men (the crew) who make up the ship and its crew symbolizes the many different cultural and ethnic groups that make up the United States.

The sea, in Moby-Dick, serves as a discordant reflection of the American experience. In its role as an area for adventure, discovery, and seeking new frontiers, it is also an area where greed, domination, and out-of-control ambition abound. Contrast between humanity's intention to control nature compared to the realization that nature is ultimately out of humanity's control, is a major theme throughout Melville's study of mankind.

Although Ahab's quest results in a tragic ending, there is still hope for spiritual awakening and redemption via the sea. After being the only survivor of the wreck of the Pequod, Ishmael experiences major intellectual and philosophical growth as a result of his voyage. The way that Ishmael sees the other characters and their motivations and conflicts allows him to reflect back on his own life in relation to theirs. Ishmael has been described as being both central and marginal to the story; he participates in and witnesses the tragedy that occurred [42].

The ocean serves as an essential metaphor for human experience in *Moby-Dick* and helps define much of its

significance and relevance as part of American Culture. The ocean represents not only America's ambitious and restless spirit, but also provides an avenue for exposing dangers created by excessive pride (hubris) and obsessive behaviour (i.e. obsessive/compulsive behaviours). Through showing the ocean as both stunningly beautiful and awesomely terrible, Melville created yet another layer of complexity about how humans relate to nature. As a result, Ahab's and the other characters' many different ambitions, identities, and limitations on what humans are able to do are illustrated through the multiple facets of the ocean; the tragedy of pursuing control over the natural world through mastery is an ever-present reminder that we may achieve a tragedy instead of a success.

### FINDINGS

Even though the ocean is considered an uncontrollable force by the characters in the stories, it ultimately serves as a reminder that we are all subject to limitations when it comes to controlling nature. *Moby Dick's* Ahab illustrates the negative results that come from unchecked ambition as well as the hubris associated with seeking to dominate nature. Santiago, from *Old Man and the Sea*, represents the attributes of persistence and humility before nature's strength. The Sea from *Life of Pi* represents both a site of peril and an opportunity for spiritual growth; successfully surviving out at sea involves adapting to the ecological and spiritual requirements of one's surroundings, having a positive belief system and living cooperatively within the natural environment.

Another key point from this study was that many times the sea serves as a medium for character introspection and/or philosophical contemplation at the individual level; characters experiencing significant personal change as a result of their interaction with the ocean confronting major existential crisis questions regarding character's identity, purpose and being human. As such, the sea can also be considered an analogy for human life; being vast in size, unpredictable and impossible to know fully from a human perspective. Another important outcome was the study of the sea and how it reflects the culture of a particular time period or people. For example, in *Moby Dick*, the sea represents the vastness of American ambition and maritime enterprise of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but with a great deal of internal conflict. In Hemingway's work, the sea reflects the internal struggle of an individual against an indifferent universe. In Martel's novel, the sea is a place in which the spiritual, imaginative and survival aspects of life come together in one location.

### COLCUSION

When the ideas of existential reflection, as found in *Moby-Dick*, and the limit of humanity to impose its own will onto the indeterminate and unknowable world of nature are combined, the result is an illustration of the plight of humanity when faced with a world of vastness and mystery. The sea, being a theatrical stage, where Ahab's desire to impose his ambition meets the unknown power of nature and the universe at large. At the beginning of the story, Ishmael, the narrator, introduces himself with the phrase, "Call me Ishmael" [43], which also acts as a way of establishing his character and purpose as he attempts to understand the oceanic world which is both vast and unknowable. Ahab declares that he is hypothetical, "I will throw the Sun at my face if I am insulted" [43], thus demonstrating Ahab's desire to defy the laws of man and God. According to F. O. Matthiessen, Melville's novel illustrates how the will expressed, through ambition, clashes with an indifferent universe and creates tragic consequences for those that attempt to impose their will upon the universe [44]. On the other hand, the sea in *The Old Man and the Sea* is depicted as a space of endurance, humility, and dignity, and thus, by showing Santiago's struggle against the marlin, it exhibits the spirit of the human being and parallelly demonstrates the belief in one's continuous persistence against the adversity of time. Santiago states, "But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated" [45]. This notion is also supported by Baker, who states that Hemingway's heroes demonstrate their moral willpower through their fight against a more powerful natural force rather than by defeating that force [46]. Similarly, the sea, in *Life of Pi*, is used to represent a spiritual or transformative space for the character of Pi, as on the Pacific Ocean, Pi's survival requires both physical endurance and faith based on psychologically. Through which, Pi demonstrates that one's ability to survive is based as much upon one's imagination and faith as it is on one's practical ability. Nature, in the words of Buell, is represented in literature in a manner that reminds readers of the fragility of humanity's place in the large-scale ecosystem in which we live and encourages a more conscious assessment of the limits of human power over the natural world [47].

The sea is therefore represented in these narratives as an indication of larger conditions in mankind, representing the tension of ambition versus humility, control versus surrender, and survival versus transformation. Although initially the characters in these works had the tendency to try to dominate the sea, they eventually realise through their personal experiences that they must also respect the vastness

and unpredictability of nature. Because of this characteristic, it is through the sea that Melville, Hemingway, and Martel demonstrate there is a multiplicity of meanings for the sea, while at the same time addressing the issues of identity, perseverance, and our own humanity's place in nature, demonstrating how our ambition must be combined with a sense of humility and ethical responsibility toward the natural world.

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