

Human Nature: A Metaphor of Spiritual Decadence in the Selected Fictions of the American Novelists

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The Abstract

The Nature has always been an associating determinant and a role player in the plot, narration and human action and in the imaginative structure of the novels. The writers arch their poetic sensibility in context of social awareness towards the nature's laws and its truth. They sensitively draw both divinity and evil side of human psyche. In that respect the twentieth century writers of American literary world such as Earnest Hemingway's *Old Man and the Sea*, *Fare well to Arms*; Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Scarlet Letter* and Henry James's *Ambassadors* have carved deeper experience of an ordinary life in which nature and humans are depicted in opposition rather as fundamental integral part of ecology, environment and spiritual triumph.

The present paper would attempt to study these authors selected works in order to interpret nature that has been metaphorically represented in conjunction with individual's psyche and lastly how nature addresses modern solipsism and ecological sequences.

Introduction

The selected American novels' narratives reveal 'the traditionally conceived "nature" and genealogical influences of theology, philosophy, social justice and ecological architecture and design' (Ingram 9). The "man against nature" conflict is central to Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) where the protagonist contends against a marlin (Ballon 135). The novel advocates that freewill of man grants him the choice to assume that for his survival

whatever he does is for the greater good, it may be apt in human context, but it has posited an alternate free creature defense theory, that animals suffer cost of danger to their life. Man is then the predator and animal is the sufferer. In the novel *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) an American ambulance lieutenant Frederic Henry attempts to escape horrendous suffering of the devastating First World War violence in the battle of Caporetto, fought in October 1917 between Italian and Austro-German forces. His path to seek revulsion is primarily based on his alienation of his conscience (Self) from the outer world happenings. His freewill defense (Max Black: 1965) submits his primordial instincts to decadent enjoyment. He went wrong in the exercise of his free will and indulges in moral evil. The character weakly actualizes the possibility of moral good (Hugh 01) through his conditional depravity. He could not confront denial of life or the debacle of his being looser. Nathaniel Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850) brings out the horror of loneliness in the life of characters. All the characters psychologically fight evil against good – for example Hester's sin is against Calvinistic doctrine, Dimmesdale's sinfulness is against his own spiritual health, Chillingworth's revenge is against moral forces, Pearl's perversion and dream-like elf mind on being born an outcaste in the infantile world due to the stigma attached to her mother. Henry James's *Ambassadors* (1903) is a psychological narrative of self-reflection. Hence the perspectives of anthropocentric, biocentric and ecocentric issues have expanded the binaries within -

- nature and culture,
- nature and actual world,
- nature and human presence,
- nature and human will/self
- nature and boundaries of environment,
- nature and canonical literature on bodies, identities, communities and nation.

Analyses of the Selected Novels -

Nathaniel Hawthorne's the Scarlet Letter (1850)

The author in the novel *The Scarlet Letter* narrates the history of the period 1642 in Boston. The European Puritans settled in New England in those days, who sought to dominate nature both within themselves and in the external world. Thus the external physical nature and human nature tend to be identified. The witch is symbol of prohibited elements in man's own evil nature, particularly the sexual and carnal elements. The witch also represented the evil forces in the American wilderness, which according to the belief of the Americans inhabited

by the devil. To condemn the witch meant to conquer nature, eliminate evil in order to achieve unity and harmony.

At the port of the town Salem, there is a Custom House, where Uncle Sam's government was established. The author while working as the Surveyor of Revenue in the Custom House in the town of Salem in Boston came across a real story of a nun Hester. She suffered due to being a singular woman and was considered a nuisance and an intruder. The facts of the life of Hester Prynne were authorised and authenticated in the account given by Jonathen Pue. Thus Hawthorne autobiographically in the first chapter The custom House - Introductory to the *The Scarlet Letter* writes his sentiments as representative of the ancestral cruelty which was ethically against moral quality and he says, "I hereby take shame upon myself for their sakes and pray that any curse incurred by them-as I have heard, and as the dreary and unprosperous condition of the race, for many a long year back, would argue to exist-may be now and henceforth removed" (SL, 09).

The author states Puritans morality assigned retributions of sins, subsequently many family tree diminished, which was not positively disgraceful to glorify God or being serviceable to mankind. This disgrace happened in the society due to the single unworthy member's decision from generation to generation, which was already in occupation of investing in conquering unknown wilderness of sea borders in America and in South America. Such unhealthy connection of human nature with worn-out codes of society could only harm and perish generations, children like Pearl and women like Hester Prynne would only search unaccustomed Earth as their birthplaces and to have their fortunes in control. Patriarchal body of veterans under their orders kept conflicting corruptions and contradictions between moral good and moral evil in human life. The author with his creative imagination forms an allegorical eulogy in the last chapter with regard to the world of Salemites and the survivors, who in one case, however, is a real sunshine; in the other more resembles the phosphorescent glow of decaying wood (SL, 14). The author ends the novel with a note of hope that corruption and repentance of the evil transform the public common sense.

The author recreates per se for public the story of the life and sufferings of the girl in this novel. He voices emotional overtones and the whole American experience in terms of destruction, retribution, repentance, revelation and recognition. The view of masculinity and femininity in view of European culture and American morality is explored by the author in different ways - such as Hester Prynne ostracized due to inhuman Puritan code of morality and isolation due to the accusation of adultery and her non-disclosure of the name of the

actual parent and standing up at scaffold and wearing embroidered scarlet letter 'A' as reminder of her bold act; Arthur Dimmesdale's silence in the first scaffold scene during the time of public indictment of Hester, his poor spiritual growth due to his non-recognition of his sin and rejection of self-revelation; Roger Chillingworth's vengeance and lonesome dwelling due to his passion to enjoy psychomatic malady of others and devilish transformation of himself to play hard in revenge after knowing the actual sinner and parent of the Hester's child; Pearl being the misfit due to her disinheritance of Puritan rules and is a victim of moral anguish and alienation of the society.

The author presents the allegory of demonic forces in the forest scenes, in the three pillory scenes. We find symbolically the sound pattern of nature revealing lightning, which is as piercing and furious as the shrill and sharp voice of Pearl who dislikes being associated with Dimmesdale, whenever her mother brings her close to the sick clergyman. Pearl's wrath seems to him like a witch, reminding him of his hidden sin and moral evil that detained him to do moral good to the child and her mother. The sound pattern of thunder expresses the impact of sinister forces that compel Dimmesdale to shout and shriek, to face public, to confess on scaffold the sin in order to redeem his guilt and to culminate his inner conflict. Similarly in the chapter twelve the most powerful use of moving light paralleled with Dimmesdale's moving thought, when Mr. Wilson, the sermonist priest of Boston return from the house of parishioner after praying with his moving light which stirs up moral dilemma of Dimmesdale to speak his pangs of remorse and cowardice that made him witness of forced imprisonment and ignominy for Hester seven years back on the scaffold, located in the centre of Boston, outside the prison gate.

Metaphorically devilishness of Roger Chillingworth's destroys his soul and sinfulness of Arthur Dimmesdale deprives him of spiritual triumph. The two dialogues from the novel depict thus - one is spoken by Roger Chillingworth to Dimmesdale during his self-revelation that 'Thou hast escaped me, thou hast escaped me!' The Minister Dimmesdale says in return, 'May God forgive!' Thou too have deeply sinned' ('The Revelation of the SL', 217).

Hawthorne shows his concern to scrutinize the Calvinistic doctrines and Unitarianism in its entirety. The novel *The Scarlet Letter* professes that 'man can make up his miseries in life, if the life is not annihilated in the attempts to indict and punish the wrongdoers in the miserable way, but instead there must be repentance and suffering to redeem one's guilt and sin, the Divine Grace comes through sin, but the sin is not virtue' (Hawthorne 195).

The author satires on social morality of the seventeenth century and projects the picture of the social history of those times in this way that - Calvinistic principles with their deep faith in the suppression of the legitimate sentiments of the human heart is the religious or moral violation of the heterodox religionist and of the law; while Hester and Arthur Dimmesdale's attempt to redeem their illicit love affair that grown to tragic height matured them morally and spiritually. But to explicate the implied sense, it is inferred that public discipline was awful and venerable because the European-American descendents were reared with obsessions, prejudices and pre-occupations as regards the individual maladjustments to society. Lacking in social morality constitutes the tragic flaw. Ironically vehement denunciation of the seventeenth century Puritan morality encouraged the sins of aristocracy and penalised the sins of margins, thus slighted the democratic values and rights of common man.

The novel redresses man's immoral intellectual sense that is framed on account of theodicy. The existence of evil is understood in the perspective of drawing out moral good among human and to understand the apparent imperfections in the world. Suffering in the world has been understood as the source of moral evil and fight for it determines human strength, hope, courage, passion, love, repentance, dreams etc. Subsequently all scriptures substantiate the goodness of humanity in order to subsist the problem of evil in human psyche or in the external forces of nature. Without suffering the meaning to the human existence cannot be given. And suffering is the outcome of freewill defence against freewill creatures that is power against powerless.

Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (1929) delineates the picture of violence and sexual passion, which were symbols of coerced psyche of the dehumanized, desiccated man of the twentieth century, whose conscience is ascribed to a subhuman culture of war and wrath. The author retold the experiences of the First World War that happened in the battle of Caporetto between Italian and Austro-German forces, in which he joined Italian Red Cross because of being an American ambulance Lieutenant. The former forces had to vanquish the field after the defeat. To escape the further sufferings at the hands of Austrian forces, he left for Milan with his beloved Catherine Berkley who looked after him during the war and fell in love with her. To escape attrition, their physical attachment was a psychological refuge from the continuous horror of war. They escaped to brief happiness in Switzerland, but in giving birth to a child the girl dies.

The novelist relates not only the ethics of war-time, but also communicates the pleasures seized in haste which are grimly restricted to gratification of primordial instincts, while their intrinsic qualities receive harsh smash on their face. The author says the actual world portrays life of violence, death and evil, while they wish to live in the world of morals, which is good only to imagine, but not to practice in order to live. Hemingway in this novel narrows the vision which is obsessed by violence and preoccupied with decay, but saved from total misery by visions of endurance. The author expresses about Lieutenant Frederic Henry's preoccupations in the chapter third to the priest that he wanted to go to Abruzzi to return to his father, but he could not do so, because what he wished that could not be possible as he got heavily drunk and got indulged in brothel "the strange excitement of waking and not knowing who it was with you and the world all unreal in the dark and so exciting that you must resume again unknowing and not caring in the night. Suddenly to care very much and to sleep, to wake with it sometimes morning and all that had been there gone and everything sharp and hard and clear and sometimes a dispute about the cost. Sometimes still pleasant and fond and warm and breakfast and lunch. Sometimes all niceness gone and glad to get out on the street but always another day starting and then another night. I tried to tell about the night and the day and how the night was better unless the day was very clean and cold and I could not tell it; as I cannot tell it now" (FA, Book I, Ch. 3;p.11). This poignant description of the routine of a soldier during war-time unveils over-whelming pathos. When his last consoling soul mate Catherine Berkley dies in child-birth, the author brings out the nonchalane of Frederic Henry, when he heard from the doctors that the child in the womb had died. The author writes about Frederic Henry's inner contemplation at such crisis in these words:

I sat down on the chair in front of a table where there were nurses' reports hung on clips at the side and looked out of the window. I could see nothing but the dark and the rain falling across the light from the window. So that was it. The baby was dead. That was why the doctor looked so tired. But why they acted the way they did in the room with him? They supposed he would come around and start breathing probably. I had no religion but i knew he ought to have been baptized. But what if he never breathed at all. He hadn't. He had never been alive. Except in Catherine. I'd felt him kick there often enough. But I hadn't for a week. Maybe he was choked all the time. Poor little kid. I wished the hell I'd been choked like that. No I didn't. Still there would not be all this dying to go through. Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base

they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you the syphills like Rinaldi. But they kill you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you” (FA, Book V, Ch.4; p.312).

Earnest Hemingway elaborates upon the fact that inspite of making separate peace with his penitent, conscience – stricken ‘Self’, his subconscious mind at every hurt and pain sway him in the deluge of war, which did not let him to question his morals, his conscience, his identity, his religion, his being a truant. His potential, his temperament and his sentiments all became victim to the “social antagonism that is constituted through power of relations and to what extent it involves forms of force and domination?”(Edwards 22). While observing this condition of Frederic before the demise of his wife, it seems that the social world had snatched his “juridical power of sovereignty” (Foucault in *Society Must be Defended*), which legitimises its power over one’s life and death. It orients the subject to surrender his will and if he challenges the subjugation, then ends up in hospital or asylum. Frederic Henry earlier seems to be a casual participant in war, but in the last chapter he realises the disgusting fate that consciously bids him to give farewell to his wife, and unconsciously driving his heart and mind to bid good-bye to disaster. Nathaniel Hawthorne aptly denotes in humane sense the significance of women in men’s life “The whole world is divided for me into two parts: one is she, and there is all happiness, hope, light; the other is where she is not, and there is dejection and darkness” (Leo Tolstoy, *War and Peace*). Knowingly and unknowingly his decadent frivolities in adultery and violence had disillusioned him. The novelist wants to convey during wartime “power or force relations are essentially repressive in character; power represses nature instincts, a class or individual” (Foucault 15), therefore the foetus of the child in Catherine’s womb faces repression and gets choked, the lieutenant too represses his natural power of freewill defense and Catherine in the act of volition loses her sexual freedom in achieving liberation from repression, and she says to Henry “There isn’t any me, I’m you. Don’t make up a separate me.” (FA, 90-91). She says this when Fredric Henry offered her to marry him, she could not do so, because she would lose her job in the hospital, but she surrendered herself to him for sexual pleasure sake so that she may continue to construct the power of relations within sexuality and soldier during wartime. John Costello in his book entitled *Love, Sex and War: Changing Values, 1939-1945* writes that “The disruption of normal sexual patterns was noted empirically by a New Orleans “madam” whose business increased when America entered World War I: “I’ve noticed it before, the

way the idea of war and dying makes a man raunchy... It wasn't really pleasure at times, but a kind of nervous breakdown that could only be treated with a girl and a set to" (211).

Initially Catherine's act of offering her sexuality was a metaphor of her patriotic duty, but Frederic misplaced her patriotism as desire of excitement. Thus the novelist raises question of women in relation to Gender and Sexuality in War, who are commodity and free givers of sex, which is a dehumanised part of man and it is apt to cite Franz Kafka with regard to "polymorphous perversion" of sexuality, in which the sexual identities in the second half of nineteenth and twentieth century became parabolic modes of perverse sexual representations and their erotic desire is seasick in the land of sexuality.

Earnest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea (1952) 'asserts in particular man's struggle for triumph in a world that seems designed to destroy him' (<http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/oldman/themes.html>). The novel in particular brings in old man Santiago's struggle with nature's forces on Sea, especially the big whale fish marlin. He thinks if he is able to get back on the island with the huge marlin, fishermen would respect him for this awesome attempt on Sea. When we read the novel, we find Santiago with all his determination, courage, and spell-binding enchantment tries to overcome destructive force to have dignified destiny. He battles against the natural world to beautify his actual world. He attempts to defeat a predator by transcending his respect for his passion. Indeed his act unleashes his characteristics of power, honor, pride, hope, bravery and concentration. These qualities equate with the identity of Nature, because Nature is endowed with either inevitability of destruction or Nature is characterized with circular nature of life and death, which is transcended with the notion of renewal of life, love and hate, destruction and regeneration of nature. Both Marlin and Santiago are the opponents for each other, but in context of human will Marlin is the ideal opponent to be killed for the survival of the larger interest of mankind. While for marlin, human beings by and large are hunters, who seek their fortune in their destruction.

Santiago's conscious decision to act, to fight, and to never give up battle indeed acknowledge his merits of manliness, pride and glory, and his victory transcends the crucifixion imagery, that Christ gave his life for the greater glory of mankind. He fights against sharks like a martyr, he makes his effort like Christ to turn loss into gain, defeat into triumph, even death into renewed life.

The question is then, how humans have been a part in the decadence of nature's laws, why human mind cannot differentiate his coercion psyche of expansion and survival from the

spiritual decay of his self. The killing instinct is an intrinsic quality of Nature, human as being a part of same Nature, sometimes in his wilderness and emotions go beyond to pursue his passion of love and hate, that transcends his self into agony of capturing it and in that primitive state of his primordial urges become as similar as the victimized or victimizer. Victimized falls in delusion of struggle, anguish, ego, determination, unwavering choice of winning the loss into gain, while victimizer too step in disillusionment that unless his passion, pride and power exists as his strengths, he cannot have triumph and the sense of regeneration. Both opposing forces contradict the actual sense of survival, because human will determine his boundaries of conquering wilderness, predators, devil and the unknown, while the Nature determines the human flaws that miscalculate the heroic transcendence of defeat, pride and passion.

Without a ferocious sense of fearlessness, no battle can be one. And it applies to hunter and the hunted, victimizer and the victimized, oppressor and the oppressed, killer and the killed. Either both have to face ruin or both have to concede to defeat. There is loss on neither side, nor gain. It is an illusion; it is just an ambivalence of winning or losing. Actually human world overcomes the unknown, and abandons the idea of defeat, but in that process he destroys somebody or somebody/something is destroyed. If we try to understand this concept in physical ecological sense then it is apt to quote John Dewey, a pragmatist ecologists in America (who writes in context of the world in which we occur that: 'Everything that exists in as far as it is known and knowable is in interaction with other things'. Further he says that 'the career and destiny of a living being are bound up with its interchanges with its environment, not externally but in the most intimate way' (Browne 1).

In context of Santiago's experience, this statement illustrates that human world wants to experience the nonhuman world – from the other things and environment with the acme of human existence and his sense of aesthetic experience and ethics, therefore the human culture wards off any sense of impossibility to realise the potential in the process of understanding and imagining the actual term possible. Thus the old man refuses defeat at every turn: he resolves to sail out beyond the other fishermen to where the biggest fish promise to be. He lands the marlin, tying his record of eighty-seven days after a brutal three-day fight and he continues to prevent sharks from stealing his prey, even though he knows the battle is useless. Thus the battle is within nature and within human nature, in the former there is opposition with regard to the capacity to understand the actual world and in the latter there is

contradiction to level of moral imagination in relation to the physical environment in which humans are involved.

The novel *Old man and the Sea* theorize the interrelationship between the human world and the physical world. It shows humans' genetic exchange and evolutionary potential. This heightened potential exists also in cultural ecotones (Ingram 9). Santiago shows great skill in devising ways to tire out the huge fish he has hooked and ways to conserve his strength in order to land it. Yet in the struggle to survive, this human must often suffer and even destroy the very thing he dreams of. Thus Santiago cuts his hands badly and loses the fish to sharks in the process of trying to get his catch back to shore. Yet the struggle to achieve one's dreams is still worthwhile, for without dreams, a human remains a mere physical presence in the universe, with no creative or spiritual dimension. And so at the end of the story, Santiago, in spite of his great loss, physical pain, and exhaustion, is still "dreaming about the lions"—the same ones he saw in Africa when he was younger and would like to see again (<http://www.enotes.com/topics/old-man-and-the-sea/themes>).

In conclusion we can derive that there is extreme individualism along with interdependence, there is ideal of self-sufficiency but blindness, insanity and hence detrimental to all whether it is society, human or living species on Earth, because the sinister forces alike the shovel-nosed sharks embody the destructive nature and such forces transcend the human world and nonhuman world, unless Human being is too strong and equals fight to death to win without loss. This is yet enigmatic because the conceptual of human mind decide his perception and involvement with wildlife and wilderness, that questions 'human initiative and ingenuity' (Huth xvii) till date concerning the decadence of nature's laws because primitive sense of conservation has been multiplied into the ignoble sense of prosperity, which is the 'the weightiest problem now before the nation' (Ibid. xvi)

Conclusion

The study of the selected novels traverses the readers' mind to the social realities and social problems. They render the message that natural growth of human mind is beyond space and time. Its relativity is inevitable in context of civilizations, cultures and in context to people's descendents and heirs from generation to generation. The material happenings are time-binding; they can be entrapments or imbroglio. They change as the time passes, but by and large they influence civilization and fate of the people. Hence "the spiritual and ethical perfecting of the individual" (Shweitzer 11) requires overhauling of his mind. Unless there is sovereignty of spirit over matter, there will be no outward progress and no internal realisation

of experience. The people have to disentangle human mind with uncongenial and intangible norms of tradition, culture and ideologies. The novelists penetrate deep into realm of human mind, which exercises its power to cope up with reality, while the individual characters writhe in the light of hope, new light or with loss of confidence. “The human mind yield to subjective or sceptical sense of reality, hence it is contended that on the part of culture it is a derangement of cultural mind that infects the lives of all who embrace it”(Adams ix). The novelists attempt to thwart our cultural mind to perceive humanistic perspective with value and meaning, otherwise our intellectual and cultural mind will disintegrate our emotions, our aspirations and our commitments to live life with healthy, harmonious and happy spirit. Whenever the culture of a society ceases to support and to sustain its existing institutions, either they or the culture must be reformed, for social structures can be maintained by force for only so long. Like all dead things, they disintegrate in time” (Ibid. 3).

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