

Anthropocentrism: A Comparative Study of Hemingway and Faulkner's Perception on Human-Nature Relationship

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Abstract

From the early-to-mid 20th century, the environmental issues portrayed in literature changed human environmental awareness and attitudes toward nature worldwide. Hemingway's *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* and Faulkner's *The Bear* depicts the connection between man and nature and how the characters' attitudes and actions affect the environment. This study aims to compare and contrast the portrayals of the relationship between man and nature in both stories and how the authors' perception of the relationship differs. By utilizing a framework of anthropocentrism, this paper will analyze how the characters' actions and attitudes towards nature represent the authors' perceptions of the human-nature relationship. Hemingway's story represents the exploitative attitude of hunting wild animals, while Faulkner's story portrays a deep and respectful connection with nature, thus rejecting the idea of anthropocentrism. These different findings reflect the authors' contrasting perceptions of the relationship between man and the natural world, formed by their experiences and backgrounds. Hemingway's depiction of exploitative hunting reflects his adventurous experience on the African safari, while Faulkner's portrayal of interconnection with nature resembles his connection to the southern rural wilderness of Mississippi. The contrasting perceptions show that the authors' backgrounds play an important role in developing their perspectives and values of human-nature relationships, affecting the way they present different viewpoints and themes in their work.

Keywords: anthropocentrism, author's perspective, Ernest Hemingway, human-nature relationship, William Faulkner

INTRODUCTION

Starting from the early-to-mid 20th century, the environmental issues portrayed in literature changed human environmental awareness and attitudes toward nature worldwide. These issues are continuously happening over time, and human treatment shows different relationships; some utilize nature for their benefit, and some respect, conserve, and fight for nature's rights as living beings. These different relationships shown in literature trigger social conflict about how human-nature relationships should be.

One of the most common relationships between humans and nature that we see today is anthropocentrism. According to Norton (1982) in *Environmental Ethics and Weak Anthropocentrism*, anthropocentrism refers to a belief "that every instance of value originates in a contribution to human values and that all elements of nature can, at most, have value instrumental to the satisfaction of human interests." In addition, Naess (2009) stated that anthropocentrism belongs to the shallow ecology movement, which implies that human value is the most precious. Simply put, anthropocentrism says that humans are the center

of the universe. All non-human things contribute to fulfilling human desires.

In contrast to anthropocentrism, non-anthropocentrism is a belief that nature and non-human entities have an intrinsic value regardless of their utility to humans. In *The Ethics of Respect for Nature*, Taylor (1981) argues that non-anthropocentrism recognizes the “intrinsic value of non-human organisms, species, and ecosystems” and rejects the idea that their value serves solely human interests. This perspective aligns with deep ecology, a term coined by Naess (1973), which asserts the intrinsic value of all living things and emphasizes the interconnectedness of ecosystems. Callicott (1984) further states in *Non-Anthropocentric Value Theory and Environmental Ethics* that non-anthropocentric ethics extends moral consideration beyond humans to other species and entire ecosystems. Essentially, non-anthropocentrism is the opposition to the anthropocentric view and promotes a deeper understanding of the value of nature, viewing humans as part of the natural world, rather than separate from or superior to it.

The tension between anthropocentric and non-anthropocentric perspectives has significant implications for how societies approach environmental issues, resource management, and general human-nature relations. Critics of anthropocentrism argue that it contributes to environmental degradation, species extinction, and climate change (Washington et al., 2017), while proponents claim that a human-centered approach is necessary for solving real problems and developing policies (de Groot et al., 2011). As global environmental issues become more pressing, debates around anthropocentrism continue to develop, influencing academic discourse and policy decisions (Crist, 2019).

Interestingly, these points of view can make their way into literature, serving as a conflict, theme, or even something unimportant. Frequently, stories contain a glimpse of the author’s own life, reflected by the contents of their stories. It has been a common practice in literature to write from their own experiences. Events, emotions, thoughts, and themes are often poured into their stories, whether it is intentional or unintentional. This practice allows authors

to communicate their opinions about certain things to the readers.

Several stories from the early-to-mid 20th century also portray the author’s perception of the relationship between humans and nature through the characters and their actions. *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* by Ernest Hemingway and *The Bear* by William Faulkner depict the relationship between humans and nature through the characters’ actions and behaviors. Their inspiration for writing these stories came from their own life experiences.

Some recent studies have been conducted related to anthropocentrism. One of them is conducted by Hikmah (2021) with the title *The Impact of Anthropocentrism on the Environment in Colin Thiele’s February Dragon* which studies the relationship between humans and nature and its impact on the environment in the story. It is revealed that human activities have both positive and negative impacts on the environment.

A similar study has also been conducted by Sutari (2022) titled *Anthropocentrism and Its Impact on the Environment in Elif Shafak’s The Island of Missing Trees*. It also analyzes the relationship between humans and nature in the novel. The result of the analysis shows that human preferences in their relationship with nature conduce to exploitation.

There is also a study about an author’s self-reflection in a literary work. It was conducted by Nurhamidah et al. with the title *A literary work as self-reflection of the author: Why and how it is manifested*. The author tried to justify that literary works reflect the authors in one or more possible ways. The outcome of this study shows that Jane Austen, the writer of *Pride and Prejudice*, tried to put herself as a manifestation of the character named Elizabeth Bennet in different ways. Nurhamidah et al. also concluded that everyone will reflect him or herself in a way he or she may not realize, regardless of whatever occupation he or she has.

These previous studies invite consideration of how authors' perspectives on the relationship between humans and nature might affect their literary work. Therefore, this study aims to compare and contrast the portrayals of the relationship between man and nature in both stories and how the authors' perception of the relationship differs.

METHODS

This research used the qualitative method. According to Kothari (2004), qualitative research is an appropriate way "in the behavioral sciences where the aim is to discover the underlying motives of human behavior." In addition, Kothari stated that it is important to utilize the qualitative method because it enables us to analyze various factors that motivate people to behave in a certain way or cause people to like or dislike something.

Based on the topic of this research, the data for this study is taken from *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* by Ernest Hemingway, *The Bear* by William Faulkner, and the corresponding authors' biographies. The data from the short stories were words, phrases, and sentences that represent anthropocentrism and nonanthropocentrism. The data from the biographies were pieces of information in the form of words, phrases, and sentences that describe their life background and experiences which show their anthropocentric and nonanthropocentric view.

In collecting the data, the researcher conducted a close reading of the short stories and biographies. The researcher followed some steps:

1. Closely read both stories to understand the characters' actions and behavior.
2. Closely read the authors' biographies to collect important information regarding the authors' perception of human-nature relationships.
3. Selecting the words, sentences, and phrases that represent anthropocentrism in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* and the ones that reject the idea of anthropocentrism in *The Bear*.
4. Connecting the data with the information of the authors' life background.
5. Compare the authors' perception of the human-nature relationship

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study compares and contrasts the portrayals of the relationship between man and

nature in both stories and how the authors' perception of the relationship differs. Two short stories written by different authors will be used: *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* by Ernest Hemingway and *The Bear* by William Faulkner. The data of the authors' life background were obtained from their respective biographies: *The Ernest Hemingway Primer* and *William Faulkner: An Inventory of His Collection at the Harry Ransom Center*. The data are also collected from *Faulkner and Hemingway: Biography of a Literary Rivalry* written by Fruscione (2012) which talks about "the psychological influence these two writers shared" and how their mutual influence and competition shaped their respective writing styles and careers.

Hemingway's Anthropocentric View of Human-Nature Relationship in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*

Ernest Miller Hemingway was considered one of the greatest writers of his generation. He was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois. He was the second son of six children. His parents were Dr. Clarence Edmonds Hemingway and Grace Hall Hemingway. His marriage life was not so smooth like any other. He married four times and divorced three times, almost considering a fourth divorce. Ever since he was little, he has shown an adventurous spirit by actively participating in various activities. In his boyhood, he enjoyed fishing and hunting with his father. In high school, he was a remarkable student. He excelled especially in English classes, tried football and swimming, edited the school paper, and wrote pieces for the school's literary magazine. In his post-graduate years, he went to Kansas City to work as a cub reporter for *The Kansas City Star*. Later in 1918, he began service as an ambulance driver for the Italian army. Once he was wounded on July 8 while delivering chocolates, cigarettes, and postcards to soldiers.

The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber is one of his stories that was inspired by his experience in Africa. The story narrates a wealthy American couple, Francis and Margot Macomber, who were on a hunting trip in the African safari, guided by their professional guide and hunter, Robert Wilson. Some elements of the story are taken from Hemingway's life experience. It is based on an incident that occurred during a hunting trip with Pauline to southeast Africa and the Kilimanjaro region in 1933/1934: While hunting buffalo, Pauline almost accidentally shot Hemingway, and Hemingway later often joked about the incident, saying that she just wanted to get rid of him so that the white hunting guide would survive to end her affair with him.

Based on a piece of his biography and life experiences, it is possible to connect his work with his perception of human-nature relationships.

In his story, Hemingway highlights some parts that represent his perception of human-nature relationships.

Nature and Animals as Resources to Fulfill Human Desires

In *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*, there are some passages that suggest that both nature and animals are used purely to satisfy human needs, without any concern for their intrinsic value.

"You know I don't think I'd ever be afraid of anything again," Macomber said to Wilson. "Something happened in me after we first saw the buff and started after him. Like a dam bursting. It was pure excitement."

This part takes place when Macomber is pumped up after his hunt, which is his transformation point where he turns into a more courageous and masculine person.

This transformation of Macomber's character represents a theme in this story: Conquering nature and animals through hunting can act as a trigger for personal development, especially masculinity and courage. The fact that "something happened" to Macomber's mentality suggests a shot of euphoria gained from the previous hunt, supported by Macomber's description that it was "pure excitement." The masculine and brave side of Macomber that emerges after facing this suspenseful situation shows that dominating or overcoming nature can fulfill human needs mentally.

In his biography, Hemingway is described as an adventurous and excited person. In addition, Fruscione (2012) explained how Hemingway's narrative persona was immersed. "Hemingway's narrative persona immerses himself in the woods, hunting, and exploring as he strengthens physically and mentally." (235) This fact shows Hemingway's personal experience gaining physical and mental strength through the adventurous occasions he had during his life, especially his experience as a hunter. Therefore, this fortifies the suggestion that Hemingway viewed nature and animals as stepping stones for humans to develop themselves, both physically and mentally.

Hemingway complements the depiction of the characters' actions with their emotions or attitudes towards nature and animals as if they don't care at all, such as the passage below:

"Will you have lime juice or lemon squash?" Macomber asked. "I'll have a gimlet," Robert Wilson told him. "I'll have a gimlet too. I need something," Macomber's wife said."

This happens at the beginning of the story, when they satisfy their thirst by drinking a gimlet after a hunt which is not described in the story.

This casual conversation between Francis, Margot, and Wilson highlights no empathy for the killed animals. This bitter attitude toward animals portrays an anthropocentric perspective. The characters seem to consider hunting and killing wild animals as their hobby to satisfy their boredom, signifying a utilitarian perception of nature in Hemingway's work.

The idea of using animals as tools to train and improve human physical fitness was closely tied to Hemingway's personal philosophy and experiences. Hemingway was an avid hunter and nature lover who often described nature as a testing ground for human abilities and character, a view that primarily perceived the natural world in terms of its usefulness to humans, rather than viewing the natural world as something with intrinsic value.

Utilizing Technologies to Overcome Nature

Related to the previous discussion, all the characters in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* seem to be leveraging technology to have an upper hand over nature.

"The motor car climbed up a slight rise and went on through the trees and then out into a grassy prairie-like opening and kept in the shelter of the trees along the edge, the driver going slowly and Wilson looking carefully out across the prairie and all along its far side. He stopped the car and studied the opening with his field glasses. Then he motioned to the driver to go on and the car moved slowly along, the driver avoiding wart-hog holes and driving around the mud castles ants had built."

In this part, Macomber and the hunters travel through the safari by motor cars to explore the field, searching for buffalos.

The utilization of motor cars indicates human dominance over nature. The depiction of the character's actions in this part shows that humans can dominate nature and gain an advantage over animals with the help of technology. This is the reflection of the fact that was written by Fruscione (2012), which explained that Hemingway was well aware that "their hunting grounds are impermanent

in the face of industrialization.” (235) Throughout his life, Hemingway has witnessed the traditional hunting grounds being overcome by the result of modern innovations such as motor cars. Moreover, this part may be the manifestation of Hemingway’s hunting experience in the African safari.

Faulkner’s Nonanthropocentric View of Human-Nature Relationship in The Bear

Born in the same era as Hemingway, William Faulkner was also considered one of the best writers of his era. William Cuthbert was born on September 25th, 1897, in New Albany, Mississippi. His parents were Maud and Murry Faulkner. Faulkner’s spirited personality came from his great-grandfather, William Clark Falkner, who was an infamous Confederate soldier, lawyer, railroad developer, and successful author.

Faulkner was first influenced by Phil Stone, who became interested in Faulkner’s early writing. “He suggested authors and works for Faulkner to read and introduced to him the more colorful elements of local gambling, roadhouse, and bordello culture.” Later, he was also influenced by the works of poets: Shelley, Keats, Verlaine, Housman, Eliot, Pound, and Swinburne. He started writing poetry and published his first poem in 1919, *L’Après-Midi d’un Faune* then shifted his focus to stories and sketches. Many of his stories played out in a fictional place called Yoknapatawpha County, which shows his deep relationships with his hometown, Mississippi.

The Bear is one of his short stories that has autobiographical elements. The story mainly tells about a young boy who participates in an annual hunting trip in the wilderness of Mississippi. Like most of his stories, the story takes place in the fictional Yoknapatawpha County, which shows Faulkner’s interconnectedness with his Southern environment.

Based on a snapshot of Faulkner’s biography, it is also possible to connect his work, *The Bear*, with his perception of the relationship between humans and nature.

In contrast to Hemingway’s story, *The Bear* highlights some points that show Faulkner’s perception of the human-nature relationship as not a one-sided anthropocentric relationship, but a deep and interconnected relationship.

The Acknowledgment of Nature and Willing to Understand and Experience the Wilderness

Unlike Hemingway, Faulkner portrays the characters’ actions and behaviour as connecting with nature, showing acknowledgment and willing to

become one with nature, as can be seen in the passage below:

“He had left the gun; of his own will and relinquishment he had accepted not a gambit, not a choice, but a condition in which not only the bear’s heretofore inviolable anonymity but all the old rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated.”

Here, the boy is depicted abandoning his gun and then venturing deeper into the woods.

Faulkner’s depiction of this action implies a desired reconnection between humans and nature. The act of leaving his gun to travel into nature symbolizes an act of detachment from human technology, which shows that the boy wants to return to a more traditional, natural relationship with nature. In addition, the boy portrays the current condition as a circumstance where “*all the old rules and balances of hunter and hunted had been abrogated*” which shows a shift of perspective on the human-nature relationship, implicating a non-anthropocentric view towards nature.

This presentation of detachment aligns deeply with Faulkner’s personal thoughts on his homeland: “Faulkner lamented in April 1957, that “the New South has got too many people in it and it is changing the country too much [. . .] [I]t gets rid of the part of Mississippi that I liked when I was young, which was the forest.” (236) This quote highlights his nostalgia for the forests of his youth and reveals a deep concern about the loss of natural spaces due to urbanization and population growth.

“Be scared,” Sam said. “You can’t help that. But don’t be afraid. Ain’t nothing in the woods going to hurt you unless you corner it, or it smells that you are afraid. A bear or a deer, too, has got to be scared of a coward the same as a brave man has got to be.”

This is a lesson that was taught to the boy by Sam Fathers.

In this part, Sam’s advice implicitly shows that he acknowledges the power of nature while encouraging a respectful coexistence. It portrays the woods not as something to be conquered, but as a place where humans must learn to belong. The quote “*Be scared,” Sam said. “You can’t help that. But don’t be afraid*” shows acknowledgment of fear of nature, but the distinction between being scared and being afraid is the main point of this quote. It suggests that while fear is a natural response to the unknown and dangerous aspects of nature, we must use that fear as a reason to respect and appreciate nature as a vast and mysterious environment.

Fruscione (2012) describes how Faulkner views nature: "In both the novella and the above passage, the wilderness is greater than the sum of the trees, rivers, and animals that comprise it; it is a repository of life, history, and meaning that its true hunters, Faulkner himself among them, appreciate." (234) This point of view elevates the idea that Faulkner sees nature as not only a physical component, but also a character in itself, treasuring a "life, history, and meaning." This implies Faulkner's nonanthropocentric point of view which shows respect and interconnectedness to nature.

The Respect for Animals in the Woods

In addition, through the characters' action and behaviour, Faulkner emphasizes that respectful coexistence with nature can be done, as shows in the passage below:

"To the boy, at seven, eight, and nine, they were not going into the Big Bottom to hunt bear and deer, but to keep yearly rendezvous with the bear which they did not even intend to kill."

It is described that the hunters conduct an annual rendezvous with the bear, instead of hunting it down.

Faulkner's depiction of the boy's annual occasion presents a spiritual encounter with nature. The yearly rendezvous described in the sentence serves as a reminder for humans to establish and maintain a harmonious relationship with nature by coexisting. The fact that they "did not even intend to kill" the bear implies that humans can also coexist with animals without one overpowering the other.

This description reflects Faulkner's personal connection to nature and his interest in Native American culture. Many Native American traditions view humans as an integral part of nature, rather than separate from it. This holistic point of view emphasizes respect, balance, and interconnectedness with all living things.

Hemingway's Anthropocentrism vs. Faulkner's Nonanthropocentrism

According to the discussion above, it is apparent that Hemingway's *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* and Faulkner's *The Bear* show a contrast in their perspective of the human-nature relationship, also reflecting their distinct backgrounds and perceptions.

Hemingway seems to hold an anthropocentric view, evident from the characters' interactions with nature in *The Short Happy Life of*

Francis Macomber. Hemingway portrays the characters in his story as wanting to prove themselves as the most powerful over nature through exploitative hunting. From hunting animals to evoke masculinity, considering hunting animals as a sport, and utilizing human technology to overcome nature. All of the actions Hemingway portrays resonate deeply with his background as a passionate and active person during his lifetime. From fishing and hunting in his boyhood, being an ambulance driver in the war, to participating in hunting trips on African safaris. Thus, it is evident that the actions of the characters in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber* are inspired by Hemingway's anthropocentric view of the relationship between humans and nature which is influenced by various events that occurred during Hemingway's lifetime.

In contrast to Hemingway's anthropocentric view, Faulkner shows opposition regarding the anthropocentric view, thus leaning towards a nonanthropocentric view. Based on the analysis, the characters' actions and behavior towards nature in *The Bear* reveal the intention to form a spiritual and interconnected relationship with nature, shown in the act of abandoning human technologies, conducting yearly rendezvous with wild animals, and respectful acknowledgment of fear towards nature. Faulkner's depiction of the characters' interaction with nature aligns with his life background as a Mississippi-born person, where he established an intimate connection to the land and its wildlife. Since he grew up in the Southern, rural part of the country, Faulkner was likely influenced by hunting traditions and the complex relationship between humans and nature from an early age. This experience, associated with his interest in Native American culture and philosophy, likely impacted his portrait of a more harmonious and respectful approach to the natural world in *The Bear*.

CONCLUSION

The contrasting perceptions show that the authors' backgrounds play a crucial role in developing their perspectives and values of human-nature relationships, affecting the way they present different viewpoints and themes in their work. Hemingway's anthropocentric perspective may have originated from his adventurous lifestyle, his experiences as a hunter and fisherman, and his African safaris. These experiences may have shaped his view of nature as a challenge to be overcome or conquered and reinforced the idea that humans prove their worth to natural forces, thus influenced his work in the form of the characters' anthropocentric actions and attitudes

towards nature, specifically in *The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*. Faulkner's non-anthropocentric perspective may have stemmed from his deep roots in the American South. His familiarity with the South and his interest in the perspectives of Native Americans may have contributed to his view of nature as something to be respected and studied rather than mastered. Apparently, his record of life experience has also influenced his work, especially in *The Bear*, through the nonanthropocentric actions and behaviours portrayed in the characters.

By utilizing a framework of anthropocentrism combined with authors' information from their biographies, it is possible to uncover the authors' perception of human-nature relationships through their literary work, especially in the character's actions and behavior.

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