



The Human-Nature (Dis)Harmony in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*

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Abstract

*The accelerating degradation of the ecosystem presents a critical concern, threatening the survival of all its constituents, including humanity. In response, individuals from diverse spheres—writers among them—have taken up the challenge of addressing this environmental crisis. This article, therefore, delves into the ecological consciousness reflected in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*. The study aims to explore the environmental dimensions embedded within both texts, guided by the central question: How do Martel and Asong portray humanity's relationship with nature in their respective narratives? Employing Michael Cohen's framework of Ecocriticism, the analysis rests on the premise that both authors advocate for environmental stewardship through varied stylistic techniques. By illustrating both the destructive and protective tendencies of humans toward nature, the paper reveals that—despite differences in temporal, spatial, and cultural contexts—Martel and Asong share converging ecological perspectives. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on literary environmentalism by juxtaposing ecocritical insights from distinct global literary traditions, highlighting that while ecological challenges may be universal, their literary representations are shaped by unique cultural and environmental contexts.*

Key words: Environment, Endangerment, Protection, Awareness, Fiction, Ecocriticism

Introduction

The ecosystem faces mounting threats from numerous sources, creating a situation so dire it is widely recognized as a global crisis. This alarming environmental decline has sparked deep concern across the world, and unless decisive action is taken swiftly, the very survival of humanity hangs in the balance. Tosić (2006: 44) confirms this when he says "[...] man feels *vital*ly threatened in the ecologically degraded world. Overexploitation of natural resources and man's disregard of the air, water and soil that sustain him have given rise to the question of the survival of both man and the planet (Earth)." Glotfelty and Fromm (1996: xx-xxi) equally share the opinion that the earth is under profound threat and go ahead to say that man needs to do something to preserve the environment and by extension secure his own survival. They opine that:

"[...] we have reached the age of environmental limits, a time when the consequences of human actions are damaging the planet's basic life support system. We are there. Either we change our ways or we face a global catastrophe, destroying much beauty or exterminating countless fellow species in our

headlong race to apocalypse [...] If we are not part of the solution, we're part of the problem."

*In light of the escalating environmental crisis, it is imperative to harness every possible avenue for remediation. Literature, as a creative reflection of reality, plays a vital role in engaging with ecological concerns. This study seeks to illustrate how Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and Linus T. Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui* address pressing environmental issues. Central to this inquiry is the research question: How do Martel and Asong conceptualize humanity's relationship with the natural world in their respective novels? The guiding hypothesis posits that both *Life of Pi* and *The Crabs of Bangui* serve as literary vehicles for ecological awareness, employing narrative and stylistic strategies to advocate for a more conscientious engagement with the environment.*

Ecocriticism whose proponents like William Reuckert, Lawrence Buell and John Bate unanimously consider as the study of literature and nature from an interdisciplinary perspective is the theory used in this work. Glotfelty and Fromm (1996: xviii) say: "Simply put, Ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment [...] ecocriticism takes an earth-centred approach



to literary studies". On his part, Tosic (2006: 44) says it "[...] is concerned with the relationships between living organisms in their natural environment as well as their relationships with that environment. By analogy, ecocriticism is concerned with the relationships between literature and environment or how man's relationships with his physical environment are reflected in literature." The Ecocritical views of Michael Cohen were exploited. Such views are highlighted in the statement; "Ecocriticism focuses on literary (and artistic) expression of human experience primarily in a naturally and consequently in a culturally shaped world: the joys of abundance, sorrows of deprivation, hopes for harmonious existence, and fears of loss and disaster" (Cohen 2004: 10). Thus, an ecocritical/ecopoetic analysis of *Life of Pi* by Yann Martel and *The Crabs of Bangui* by Linus Asong will be done to bring out the collective patterns of human behavior that shape their relationship with nature as well as the style used in presenting them. The paper has three parts including the reasons for which man destroys nature; the conflicting link between man and nature; and man's friendly relationship with nature.

1) Constructions of the Reasons for Man's Anti-Nature Conduct

In both Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, the interplay between humanity and the natural world is shaped by a complex web of economic, traditional, cultural, and social influences. Addressing the economic drivers of environmental degradation, Tosic (2006:47) observes that "Immoderate economic schemes and constant economic growth are the reason why man often destroys the world in which he lives." Martel echoes this sentiment by embedding economic motivations within his narrative, illustrating how human greed and utilitarian impulses contribute to ecological harm. Through subtle narrative techniques, he critiques the destructive consequences of prioritizing profit over preservation. This is brought out through the commodification of animals and can be seen when Pi Patel states that: "Animals in the wild lead lives of compulsion and necessity within an unforgiving social hierarchy in an environment where the supply of fear is high and the supply of food low and where territory must constantly be defended and parasites forever endured" (Martel 2001: 19). Here, although Pi defends the ethics of zoos, arguing that captivity offers animals safety and regular food, this utilitarian view reflects how humans justify controlling nature for economic and logistical convenience. This presentation of the zoo as an economic enterprise intensified when Pi declares that: "My father was a businessman. The zoo was his business. He raised us to be attentive to the bottom line" (Martel 2001: 31). Pi, in this flashback, is recalling how he grew up in a zoo managed by his father; clearly indicating that the zoo is a business venture. Therefore, man imprisons animals in zoos for economic benefits. The mistreatment of fauna in the zoo is further hinted at when Pi affirms that: "Just beyond the ticket booth, you saw the cages. And in every cage, a creature that had been taken from its natural habitat and put on display" (Martel

2001: 27). This description of the Pondicherry Zoo as presented by Pi shows how animals are held captive for man's economic benefits. This economic dimension of man's conflicting relationship with nature is given a global perspective when animals are carried from one part of the world to another. The narrator presents this by saying that: "The Tsimtsum was a Japanese cargo ship, a floating industrial island, carrying animals and goods across the Pacific" (Martel 2001: 85). The ship that sinks and strands Pi is not a passenger vessel but a cargo ship—emblematic of global commerce. Its sinking becomes a metaphor for the collapse of human control over nature.

In Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, economic motivations are clearly presented as key drivers behind the exploitation of natural resources. Unlike Yann Martel's more nuanced approach, Asong adopts a direct narrative style to expose how human greed endangers the environment. Early in the novel, Hansel reveals that scientists and engineers have discovered a rare substance—Maleabutoris Ductilus—beneath the soil around Lake Bangui (Asong 2008: 103). This mineral is essential in producing Potabromide Cholocarbonate, a compound used in crafting chinaware, decorative items, and ornaments. Rather than being preserved, this rare resource is relentlessly extracted, pushing it toward extinction. Hansel's financial success as a shareholder in the company exploiting this substance is celebrated in the media, likening his potential wealth to that of Alhaji Djaguda, a prominent cattle magnate from northern Cameroon. This parallel underscores how natural assets—whether minerals or livestock—are commodified for economic gain. The narrative further critiques consumer habits, noting that men spend excessive time in beer and chicken parlours (Asong 2008: 36), where products like beer and poultry are derived from overused natural inputs such as maize and fowls. Hansel's ambition to expand operations into ecologically sensitive areas—Limbe, Barombi Lake, Lakes Oku, and Bambili (Asong 2008: 184)—adds a layer of realism and emphasizes the tangible threat posed to Cameroon's ecosystems. The reference to these specific locations enhances the novel's artistic verisimilitude and reinforces the urgency of the environmental message. Further, when Hansel is seen drinking alcohol, a club member jokingly attributes his indulgence to the sale of cattle, asking, "Which Fulani man has sold cows and is giving drinks to the extent that even my old friend Hansel is also drinking?" (Asong 2008: 96). This moment illustrates how natural resources like cattle can yield immense wealth—if managed sustainably. Farming also emerges as a meaningful, environmentally linked economic activity. Despite receiving financial support from Hansel, Marion remains committed to agriculture, regularly taking her children to the farm (Asong 2008: 131). Collectively, these examples highlight how economic interests often dictate human interaction with nature, frequently leading to its degradation.

Tradition and culture are also reasons for which man endangers the ecosystem as several practices which put the ecosystem under menace are performed. Thus, Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* explores how tradition and culture contribute to the

destruction of nature. This is seen when Pi presents a comparative perception of animals in India. In this regard, Pi says: "In India, people look at animals in a different way. A cow is holy. A tiger is a killer. A goat is food. A monkey is a nuisance" (Martel 2001: 35). This reveals how cultural frameworks can normalize ecological hierarchies, leading to selective protection or destruction of nature. Martel also highlights religious symbolism and animal suffering as the narrator states that: "The orangutan was named Orange Juice. She was a pet, a symbol, a comfort. But she was also a creature torn from her forest" (Martel 2001: 87). Here, Orange Juice, the orangutan, is described with affection and reverence, yet her presence on the ship reflects human appropriation of wild animals for symbolic or emotional purposes; showing how cultural and emotional symbolism can obscure ecological violence, turning living beings into icons while ignoring their displacement. Nature is equally exploited during display and spectacle. In this light, Pi Patel affirms that: "People come to the zoo not to learn, but to be entertained. They want to see the lion roar, not sleep. They want drama" (Martel 2001: 29). Pi discusses public expectations of zoos, shaped by cultural habits of spectacle. These traditions prioritize human amusement over animal welfare. The same perspective is observed during ritual and the illusion of control. Pi describes the structured routines of zoo life, likening them to religious rituals. Yet these rituals mask the reality of control and containment. Pi states that: "We had rituals for feeding, for cleaning, for watching. The zoo was a temple of order. But the animals were not worshipped—they were managed" (Martel 2001: 32). This critiques how cultural rituals can disguise domination, presenting ecological control as reverence while erasing the autonomy of nature.

Like Martel, Asong equally highlights such dynamics in *The Crabs of Bangui*. For example, "There was a picture in which Ta'ata Bolingo stood with Sebastien. The old man was pointing at Sebastien and handing over to him a buffalo horn" (Asong 2008: 55). The use of the horn as a symbol of succession shows that for traditional reasons the cows are potentially endangered. Equally, Lord Casford throws down a fan, claps his hands together high above his head to show the audience that they were bare, and then closes them firmly. He throws them open and a swallow jumps out and perches on the roof top. Casford stretches his hand and beckons to the swallow. It flows to his hands and he turns it round for some time and the villagers discover that it has turned to an egg. He throws the egg into the air and holds a bowl in the air as if to catch the egg in it. Instead, the bowl is filled with grains of peanuts which he distributes to the children who eat with much excitement. Here, nature is endangered for human entertainment. The same situation is repeated when "Casford palmed a two headed snake which circled the priest twice, almost knocking him down with fright. Then he turned the snake into a walking stick and finally into a black wand which he held under his armpit. The old man crackled with laughter, the children screamed with excitement" (Asong 2008: 65). Here again, natural elements are implicated victims in man's activities as the snake is used

and ends up disappearing. Also, tradition demands that a titled man be buried in a particular forest when he dies. The narrator says "Pa Bolingo was a Ta'ata, a title holder in in Akamanang-Ntang and people with that title are usually buried only in the sacred grove in the village" (Asong 2008: 55). The grove is, therefore, disfigured for the burial of title holders. In the same dimension, Hansel tells his club members, "When I went home, Pa, for my father's funeral my people spoiled me with a traditional title, 'he was talking and pointing to a black raffia cap on his head with a red feather, probably of some fowl, and two spikes of a porcupine stuck to it: 'I was forced to become my father's successor. My father was a Ta'ata, and I am that now'" (Asong 2008: 94). The raffia cap and the porcupine spikes for this traditional rite are all gotten by destroying the raffia and the porcupine respectively. The pouring of water on Hansel's new car by Club 49 members as a known way of blessing it and rejoicing with him highlights the role of nature in culture. Another instance where water is used for a cultural / traditional reason is in the quarrel between Madam Genevieve and her husband, Mr. John Efa. When Hansel dupes Madam Genevieve of her money, her superstitious beliefs make her accuse her husband of being the cause of her ill luck. She insists that he should follow her to the shrine of Alhaji Baba the soothsayer for the truth to be revealed. As soon as they enter the shrine, "[...]Alhadji Baba brought a basin of water[...]" (Asong 2008: 205) which he uses mystically to prove Mr. Efa innocent.

Environmental concerns in both texts are closely intertwined with social dynamics. In Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, the depiction of a Chinese shop illustrates how natural elements are commodified for aesthetic purposes: "The left section was a display box with a wide variety of collectables, memorabilia, sea shells, corals as well as volcanic rocks" (Asong 2008: 59). This scene underscores humanity's tendency to exploit the ecosystem for decorative and commercial gain. Social responses to environmental conditions are also vividly portrayed. On a stormy morning as Hansel heads to St Katherine, the severity of the weather renders conventional umbrellas useless. People resort to improvising with coco yam and plantain leaves, clinging together under verandas for warmth (Asong 2008: 6). These natural materials prove more effective than artificial ones, highlighting nature's enduring utility in human life. Nature's protective role is further emphasized through Hansel's rhetorical question about their dog, King: "Do you know how many times we would have been robbed in this house if we didn't have King (the dog) guarding us?" (Asong 2008: 50). Here, the dog symbolizes nature's capacity to safeguard human life and property. Natural elements also permeate the realm of naming and identity. The fictional company Hansel works for—"CRABS AND SHELLS INTERNATIONAL"—derives its name from marine life (Asong 2008: 60), while street names such as "Open Apple Boulevard" and organizations like "LIONS CLUB" (Asong 2008: 110) reflect a cultural tendency to draw from nature in constructing social spaces and institutions. These examples collectively suggest that when humanity fosters a respectful relationship with

nature, it not only benefits from its resources and protection but also integrates it into the fabric of social identity and expression—particularly through nomenclature.

The narrator further exposes the often-overlooked extent of environmental degradation by highlighting the numerous everyday items derived from nature's resources. For example, members of the Central Committee carry black leather briefcases, and Hansel's office features a grand rotating chair upholstered in black leather, with additional chairs adorned with large sea shells. These objects, though symbols of status and comfort, represent the killing of animals for their skin, fur, wool, or shells—underscoring humanity's exploitative relationship with the ecosystem. This disregard for other living beings is poignantly captured in a remark by Hansel's child: "No, daddy was inside the big hall playing with the fishes in the glass box" (Asong 2008: 133). The image of fish confined for human amusement reflects how nature is often imprisoned for pleasure and display. Other items in the narrative also trace their origins to nature. The "casingo" cane wielded by Mamy Casingo, the kola nuts she offers elderly men as rewards, and the sweets given to younger men for sexual performance all stem from natural sources. Similarly, the "boukaro" hut at Ayaba Hotel, the raffia hat, and the brown "jumpa" worn by Ta'ata Bolingo are crafted from organic materials. Even the basket used by mass boys during offerings and the plywood fan used by Jesus of Akamanang-Ntang are drawn from the environment. Collectively, these examples illustrate how deeply embedded natural elements are in human life—yet they also reveal the extent to which nature is commodified, consumed, and often taken for granted.

Like Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, Martel's *Life of Pi* also explores how social motifs contribute to the destruction of nature. Through Pi's reflections on zoo life, human behavior, and survival, the novel critiques how society's values and habits often prioritize control, spectacle, and convenience over ecological respect. This is seen when Pi talks about the zoo thus: "People come to the zoo not to learn, but to be entertained. They want to see the lion roar, not sleep. They want drama" (Martel 2001: 29). Here, Pi discusses public expectations of zoos, shaped by social habits of spectacle. These expectations reduce animals to performers, ignoring their natural rhythms and needs. This critiques how social appetite for entertainment leads to ecological manipulation. Nature is reshaped to fit human narratives of excitement and dominance. In relation to zoo life is the issue of urbanization and displacement which the narrator highlights as follows: "The Pondicherry Zoo was hemmed in by buildings. The animals lived in the shadow of concrete" (Martel 2001: 26). Pi describes the zoo's location in a growing urban environment. The encroachment of human development reflects how nature is confined and subordinated to social expansion. This illustrates how urban growth and social infrastructure contribute to the marginalization of natural habitats. Furthermore, there is institutional control and bureaucracy that negatively affect nature. This is brought out when Pi states that: "There were rules for everything—feeding,

cleaning, watching. The animals were managed like files in a cabinet" (Martel 2001: 32). In this situation, Pi reflects on the regimented routines of zoo life. The institutionalization of animal care mirrors broader social systems that prioritize order over ecological authenticity. Equally, there is the social conditioning and species hierarchy as Pi affirms that: "Children are taught early: the dog is a friend, the pig is food, the snake is evil. These are not truths—they are habits" (Martel 38). Pi challenges the cultural conditioning that shapes human attitudes toward animals. These social motifs justify exploitation and fear based on arbitrary classifications. This reveals how social norms and education perpetuate ecological harm by embedding speciesism into everyday life.

2) Exposition of Humanity's Uneasy Cohabitation with the Flora and Fauna

Both Linus Asong and Yann Martel depict humanity's conflicted relationship with nature in their respective novels. In Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, this tension is vividly illustrated through language and metaphor. When shareholders travel to the supposed headquarters of The Crabs company and begin to suspect Hansel's deceit, the narrator remarks, "One or two persons had begun to smell a dead rat" (Asong 2008: 196). This metaphor not only signals suspicion but also reflects a broader disdain for animals, portraying them as symbols of corruption and decay. Further reinforcing this negative portrayal, Hansel's behavior is described as "catlike" (Asong 2008: 157), suggesting slyness and manipulation. As the shareholders grapple with their embarrassment, their expressions reveal deep-seated prejudices against animals. Godfred Mukulu Foso asks, "How do I narrate the story without looking like a swine?" (Asong 2008: 207), equating pigs with shame and foolishness. He later laments, "Look at the sort of rats that are making a fool of me" (Asong 2008: 208), again using animals as metaphors for deceit and humiliation. The narrative continues to explore this theme through Marion's confrontation with Hansel over his infidelity. Hansel is described as feeling "like a cornered animal with nowhere whatever to go" (Asong 2008: 145), portraying animals as powerless victims of human aggression. His attempt to justify himself includes the phrase "opened a can of worms, a veritable chamber of horrors" (Asong 2008: 147), further associating living creatures with fear and revulsion. When Marion confronts Salomey, Hansel's mistress, she is said to "take the bull by the horns" (Asong 2008: 139) and threatens to report her to "the women who want to protect and own their husbands against vipers like you" (Asong 2008: 141). These metaphors liken Salomey to dangerous animals, reinforcing the tendency to use animal imagery to express hostility and moral judgment. Even moments of celebration are tinged with this negative symbolism. Upon the birth of twins, Hansel is said to have "killed two birds with one stone" (Asong 2008: 162), a phrase that, despite its positive connotation, still implies violence toward animals. The treatment of King, Hansel's dog, serves as a poignant example of human cruelty. King, a crossbreed between a German shepherd and another foreign species, has

been castrated—an act that symbolizes the extreme manipulation of nature to suit human desires. The alteration of King's natural biology for convenience and control underscores the broader theme of exploitation and disregard for animal welfare. Through these varied instances, Asong paints a compelling picture of humanity's fraught and often harmful relationship with animals, revealing a pattern of exploitation, symbolic degradation, and physical harm that threatens the survival and dignity of non-human life.

The narrator says:

"Here, a lucky butcher was seen with two gigantic cane-rats, two fruit bats, a wriggling, bleeding, headless python strapped to a pole which he carried over his inured shoulders [...] an old woman passed with a basin of snails she had collected from under the coffee and cocoa trees, she kept pushing them back into the basin with a piece of wet stick as they continued to crawl to the edge of the basin in the vain hope of finding some escape." (Asong 2008: 6)

The use of adjectives such as "wriggling," "bleeding," and "headless" in describing the python powerfully conveys the brutal suffering inflicted on animals by humans. Likewise, the snails' futile attempts to escape highlight the way animals are confined and exploited for selfish human purposes. In Douala, the disturbing image of "rats bigger than pussycat [...] fighting with dogs over some decaying foodstuff" (Asong 2008: 80) underscores the harsh realities of urban neglect. The fact that hunters approach these rats armed with sticks and cutlasses—as though preparing to battle lions—reflects exaggerated aggression toward creatures struggling to survive. When injured, the rats "cry like a child, shedding tears in the process," a poignant simile that humanizes their pain and urges readers to reconsider how animals, and nature at large, deserve compassion akin to that shown to human infants. The narrative continues with a vivid portrayal of a starving dog scavenging through garbage, locked in fierce competition with emaciated pigs over scraps of food. This scene evokes deep pathos, emphasizing the vulnerability and suffering of domesticated animals. It serves as a stark reminder of the neglect and mistreatment they endure at the hands of humans. Through these emotionally charged depictions, Asong calls attention to the ethical implications of humanity's relationship with animals, urging a more empathetic and responsible approach to the natural world.

Equally, the authors present the abusive and extravagant consumption of animals to decry man's negative behavior towards them. In *Life of Pi*, Yann Martel explores man's conflicting relationship with nature through Pi's evolving attitude toward the consumption of animals. Raised as a vegetarian and deeply spiritual, Pi is forced by survival to confront the brutal necessities of life at sea. These moments reveal the tension between ethical beliefs and biological imperatives, highlighting how human beings oscillate between reverence for nature and domination over it. This can be perceived in Pi's first act of killing as he states that: "I wept heartily over the poor dead fish. I was now a killer. I had taken life. This was the terrible cost of survival" (Martel

2001: 183). After days of starvation, Pi catches and kills a fish for the first time. The emotional weight of this act reflects his internal conflict—he must violate his moral code to stay alive. This captures the ethical rupture between Pi's spiritual values and his biological needs. It's a powerful illustration of how survival can force humans to override their reverence for life. With this, Pi shifts from vegetarianism as he indicates that: "A lifetime of vegetarianism stood me in good stead, but now it was a memory. I descended to a level of savagery I never imagined" (Martel 2001: 185). Pi reflects on how his dietary ethics have been eroded by the demands of survival. His descent into carnivorous behavior marks a turning point in his relationship with nature. Also, there is consumption as a violent act. Pi describes the visceral experience of preparing an animal for food. His revulsion underscores the psychological toll of killing and eating another creature. This is highlighted thus: "I cut into the flesh and it was warm and slippery. I felt like a butcher. I hated myself" (Martel 200: 187). This emphasizes the emotional and moral dissonance involved in consuming animals, especially for someone who once saw all life as sacred.

In Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, the excessive consumption of natural resources for human indulgence is sharply critiqued. Hansel's small entourage to Bangui—fewer than ten individuals—orders the slaughter of two goats and an extravagant spread of African and European dishes. This act underscores humanity's tendency to exploit nature disproportionately for personal gratification. The point is further emphasized when Hansel declares, "Instead of the dead fish in the hotel, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to treat you to a live show. A place where the fish dies only in your belly" (Asong 2008: 188). This hyperbolic statement suggests that fish are kept alive until selected by diners, reinforcing the commodification of living creatures for culinary pleasure. The narrative continues with the group spending entire nights "tracking down and killing mosquitoes" (Asong 2008: 138), a hyperbole that illustrates humanity's relentless destruction of even the smallest elements of nature that do not serve its interests. In another social setting at Ayaba Hotel, Limen Isodore humorously misquotes the idiom "cut your coat according to your size" as "CUT YOUR GOAT ACCORDING TO YOUR SIZE" (Asong 2008: 122), inadvertently casting the goat as a symbol of sacrifice and victimhood. The mistreatment of plants is equally evident. When Pa Bolingo visits his son Hansel, he expresses disapproval of Marion's wasteful habits, particularly regarding plant-based resources. Mimicking the sound of frying, he exclaims, "Tomato, shaaaa... fish, shaaaah... meat, shaaaah... chicken, shaaaah... everything shaaaaaaah" (Asong 2008: 54). Through this onomatopoeic refrain, Asong critiques the careless and excessive use of natural ingredients. Comparative imagery further reveals humanity's disregard for plant life. When Hansel visits St Catherine, he is repulsed by Sister Angela MacDonald's appearance, describing her legs as "a pair of continuous yam-like lumps" (Asong 2008: 15). This simile not only reflects his disdain for her physique but also implies a negative perception of yams. The flashback to a rural science teacher

nicknamed “yam” reinforces the deep-rooted nature of this contempt, suggesting that such attitudes toward plants are ingrained from an early age.

Nature is also invoked metaphorically to express social vices. Upon Hansel’s appointment as Managing Director of the Crabs Company, his family celebrates, with one member saying, “when your person is up the plum tree, you can be sure that you will eat the blackest and the best one” (Asong 2008: 130). Here, trees and plums are used to symbolize opportunism and corruption. Similarly, the narrator compares Hansel’s feigned affection for shareholders to a farmer fertilizing his land—not out of care for the soil, but purely for personal gain (Asong 2008: 179). This metaphor equates nature with manipulation and deceit. Finally, nature is used to illustrate moral judgment. A member of the Crabs Company criticizes Madam Genevieve’s promiscuity, warning that once she has nothing material to offer, the young men around her will abandon her “like birds jumping to another branch to avoid falling with the broken one.” This simile, while poetic, again portrays nature as a backdrop for human vice and opportunism. Through these vivid metaphors, similes, and hyperboles, Asong constructs a compelling critique of humanity’s exploitative and often disrespectful relationship with both animals and plants, revealing how deeply embedded these attitudes are in social behavior and cultural expression.

Similar perspectives are projected in *Life of Pi* as Martel’s narrative focuses primarily on animals and survival, but evoke subtle moments, unlike Asong, where plants are also implicated in man’s conflicting relationship with nature. These instances often reflect utilitarian use, symbolic detachment, or ecological indifference, especially when Pi encounters the mysterious island or uses plant life for survival. This is presented when Pi talks about the Carnivorous Island as follows: “The island was green and rich and algae-covered, but it was a terrible place. It gave life by day and death by night” (Martel 2001: 283). Here, Pi discovers a floating island teeming with vegetation. At first, it seems like a paradise, but he later realizes the island is carnivorous, consuming life through its acidic pools. This reflects symbolic mistreatment of plant life—the island, though lush, becomes a metaphor for nature twisted by survivalist logic. It blurs the line between nurturing and predatory ecosystems, echoing man’s own ambivalence toward nature. This is also seen when Pi uses plants for survival as he declares that: “I tore up vines and twisted them into rope. I broke branches for firewood. I stripped bark for shelter” (Martel 2001: 276). During his time on the lifeboat and the island, Pi uses plant materials to meet his basic needs. His actions are necessary, but they also reflect a utilitarian approach to nature. This illustrates how survival pressures lead to ecological exploitation, even by someone who reveres life. It’s a subtle commentary on how necessity can override respect. With all these, the idea of harmony is just as illusion. Pi highlights this when he affirms that: “The trees were full of meerkats. They sat like fruit, unmoving, watching. The island seemed to offer peace, but it was a lie.” In this context, Pi describes the eerie stillness of the island’s vegetation and its

animal inhabitants. The harmony is deceptive, masking a deeper ecological imbalance. This critiques man’s tendency to romanticize nature while ignoring its complexity. The mistreatment here is not physical but perceptual—reducing plants to backdrop or illusion.

Human dwellings play a crucial role in environmental discourse, often reflecting the degree of ecological awareness—or neglect—of their inhabitants. This is evident in Linus Asong’s portrayal of urban spaces such as Douala, Bangui, and the transformation centre in *The Crabs of Bangui*. When Hansel and his associates arrive in Douala en route to Bangui, they pause at the Deido market, where basins of garri and beans are placed atop “[...] dead rats, rotten banana peelings” (Asong 2008: 79). This unsettling image underscores the unsanitary conditions and disregard for environmental hygiene. Douala is described as a city plagued by filth and decay. Upon arrival, the group is met with “gruelling heat, stinking gutters of stagnant water, the breeding ground for mosquitoes, dead dogs and tottering structures” (Asong 2008: 182). The personification of the heat that “greet[s]” them intensifies the sense of environmental degradation, pointing to air, water, and structural pollution that collectively harm the ecosystem. In Bangui, the neglect of nature manifests again when Madam Genevieve’s handbag falls onto the dusty airport veranda and becomes soiled. This moment symbolically illustrates how environmental disregard inevitably affects human life, suggesting that the consequences of ecological neglect are inescapable and often personal.

In the same vein, in *Life of Pi*, Martel uses the motif of dwelling to explore man’s conflicting relationship with nature. Dwelling becomes both a site of survival and a symbol of control, adaptation, and estrangement. In this light, Pi defends the ethics of zoos, arguing that they offer safety and stability compared to the dangers of the wild. His view reflects a human desire to impose order on nature, even while claiming benevolence. Pi states that: “A zoo is not a prison. It is a place of refuge. It is a place where animals are cared for and protected” (Martel 2001: 19). This reveals the tension between stewardship and control. The zoo is a dwelling shaped by human logic, often at odds with ecological freedom. In addition, Pi presents the lifeboat as a makeshift shelter. After the shipwreck, Pi describes the lifeboat as his only shelter. It becomes a fragile boundary between him and the vast, indifferent ocean. This is brought out when Pi declares that: “The boat was my ark, my refuge, my tiny slice of land in an endless sea” (Martel 2001: 147). Here, dwelling is reduced to survival, and nature is no longer a nurturing space but a force to be endured. Pi’s relationship with the lifeboat reflects his struggle to find stability within chaos. Also, the Carnivorous Island is presented as an illusory home. Pi projects this by saying that: “It was a green, rich, algae-covered island. It gave life by day and death by night” (Martel 2001: 283). Pi discovers a floating island that seems to offer safety and abundance. But its carnivorous nature reveals a deceptive harmony, turning refuge into threat. This critiques false dwellings in nature, where apparent shelter masks

ecological danger. It reflects the ambivalence of nature as both host and predator. Furthermore, dwelling is engulfed in ritual and routine. In this vein, Pi affirms that: "I established a schedule. I cleaned the boat, I prayed, I fished. I made a life" (Martel 2001: 162). Here, Pi describes how he created structure aboard the lifeboat. His routines transform a hostile environment into a livable space. This shows how humans impose dwelling through ritual, even in extreme conditions. It reflects the adaptive aspect of human-nature relations, where survival depends on shaping space.

3) Projection of the Peaceful Coexistence Between Mankind and the Ecosystem

Despite the elements of man's conflicting relationship with nature as outlined above, the writers also highlight the worth or importance of plants and animals. Asong presents to the readers the exemplary way man should live with animals through the relationship between Hansel and king, his dog. The narrator says:

"Hansel seemed to show more concern for it(king the dog) than he did human beings. He would argue:"You have to continue to show love to this dog even when things are rough because it cannot understand like a child. That's why I can prefer to feed the dog and let the child starve. I can tell the child what I will do for him tomorrow or the next week. For a dog it Has no such understanding". And, based on that philosophy he stopped short of dressing a dog up and asking it to sit at table with the rest of the family. Whenever he returned from work the first question after greeting was: "Has king had something to eat?" If by some error Marion had forgotten the way she usually did, he would give all his food to the dog." (Asong 2008: 49)

Hansel's return home after being dismissed from work is marked by a striking image—he carries only a parcel containing bones for the dog, while his children go without bread. This ironic gesture, where the dog receives care over the children, raises ethical questions and subtly underscores the need for compassion toward animals, even as it critiques misplaced priorities. In his effort to attract more reputable investors to his Crabs Company, Hansel recounts the tale of a man whose goose laid golden eggs each morning. This analogy elevates the goose as a symbol of natural abundance and emphasizes the broader value of nature as a source of wealth and sustainability. Upon acquiring wealth, Hansel chooses to flaunt his status through a luxurious car. Asong describes the vehicle using powerful animal imagery: "It stood like a rhinoceros, or even an African elephant, huge, imposing, scary at the same time" (Asong 2008: 87). The simile draws on the majesty and strength of these animals to convey the car's grandeur, while the personification of the car "standing" and the reference to African wildlife lend realism and cultural depth to the description. In another instance, Gwendolyn's grandmother attempts to impress Hansel by claiming, "Gwendolyn is from a family that delivers like ants" (Asong 2008: 19). The simile likens the family's

industriousness and fertility to that of ants, portraying them as paragons of productivity and procreation.

Asong continues to valorize animals through metaphor, comparing influential individuals to "big fish" whose presence attracts others (Asong 2008: 108). This metaphor affirms the positive value of fish as symbols of influence and desirability. Discipline is also framed through nature, as Hansel reflects on the vigilance of girls' college principals, likening them to "a mother hen guarding her chicks" (Asong 2008: 25). This simile celebrates the nurturing and protective instincts of birds, suggesting that such qualities are rare and admirable in humans. Turning to flora, Asong offers a vivid portrayal of the grounds at St. Katherine. A well-maintained grass lawn stretches along a fence lined with meticulously trimmed cypress trees. The scene is animated by "busy" lawn mowers and adorned with flowerbeds of "sweet smelling varieties," each bearing messages like "WELCOME TO ST. KATHERINE," "GOD IS KING," and "CLEANLINESS IS NEXT TO GODLINESS" (Asong 2008: 13). These details highlight the aesthetic and symbolic value of plants, linking environmental care to spiritual and moral ideals. Further enhancing this imagery, a circular lawn features an iron pole bearing the national flag, surrounded by ixora flowers shaped into the phrase "WELCOME TO ST. KATHERINE" (Asong 2008: 14). Another floral message reads "IN GOD WE TRUST," reinforcing the idea that nature, when nurtured, becomes a medium for cultural and spiritual expression. Through these rich descriptions, Asong illustrates a harmonious relationship between humans and nature, positioning St. Katherine as a symbol of environmental stewardship and the potential for coexistence when nature is respected and preserved.

As far as *Life of Pi* is concerned, Martel does not foreground plant protection as a central theme, but there are indirect moments where Pi's interaction with vegetation reflects a respectful and harmonious relationship with nature. This can be perceived in the reverence for the Island's vegetation as seen when Pi states that: "The island was a botanical wonder. I walked carefully, not wanting to crush the carpet of algae or disturb the balance" (Martel 2001: 276). Upon discovering the floating island, Pi is struck by its lushness and biodiversity. His deliberate movements show a moment of ecological mindfulness. This reflects Pi's instinctive respect for plant life, suggesting that even in desperation, he recognizes the sanctity of nature's design. Such dynamics are equally evoked when Pi is observing the Island's flora without exploiting them as he states that: "I did not pick the fruit at first. I wanted to understand the island, not consume it" (Martel 2001: 278). In this situation, before harvesting the island's resources, Pi pauses to observe its rhythms. His restraint contrasts with the typical human impulse to exploit. This demonstrates ethical hesitation, where Pi's curiosity is tempered by reverence—a gesture of harmony between man and nature. Such dynamics are also presented when Pi secures shelter without destroying the flora as he states that: "I used fallen branches to make a lean-to. I did not cut living trees. They were too beautiful, too alive" (Martel 2001: 280). While

creating shelter, Pi consciously avoids harming living plants. His choice reflects a desire to coexist rather than dominate. This exemplifies non-invasive survival, where Pi's actions align with ecological respect.

Both texts also present the peaceful cohabitation between man and nature through man's friendly actions towards the fauna. Martel's *Life of Pi* explores harmony between man and nature through Pi's deep respect for animals, shaped by his upbringing in a zoo and his spiritual worldview. While the novel centers on survival, it also includes moments where Pi expresses a protective attitude toward animals—whether through empathy, ritual, or ethical restraint. This is seen in his respect for animal territory. Early in the novel, Pi defends the ethics of zoos, arguing that animals thrive in environments where their spatial needs are respected. His understanding reflects a protective stance rooted in ecological empathy. In this regard, he indicates that: "Animals are territorial. That is the key to their minds. Only a familiar territory will allow them to fulfill the promise of a zoo" (Martel 2001: 19). This shows Pi's belief that protecting animals means respecting their behavioral and spatial instincts, not just feeding or sheltering them. Equally, Pi has an emotional connection to the Orange Juice as he states that: "She was a good mother, brave and kind. I couldn't bear to see her suffer" (Martel 2001: 107). Here, Pi reflects on Orange Juice, the orangutan, during their time on the lifeboat. His emotional bond with her reveals a protective instinct, especially as she faces danger. This highlights emotional protection, where Pi's empathy for Orange Juice transcends species boundaries. Such boundaries are further blurred in his coexistence with Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger. Pi realizes that survival depends not on defeating Richard Parker, the Bengal tiger, but on establishing mutual respect. His decision to train and coexist with the tiger reflects a protective strategy rooted in harmony. In this light, Pi indicates that: "I had to tame him. It was not a question of him or me, but of us" (Martel 2001: 165). This illustrates protective coexistence, where Pi chooses collaboration over domination, preserving both lives. So too does Pi's ethical reflection on killing. After catching and killing a fish for food, Pi is overwhelmed with guilt. His reaction shows how deeply he values animal life, even when survival demands sacrifice. This is seen when Pi declares that: "I wept heartily over the poor dead fish. I was now a killer. I had taken life." This reveals Pi's moral conflict, reinforcing that his instinct is to protect, not harm, the natural world.

Hygiene and environmental stewardship are central themes in the ecological visions of both authors. In Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*, Pastor Casford's arrival in Akamanang village marks a turning point in the community's relationship with their surroundings. He initiates a transformation in their habits, stating, "I caused them to sweep their compounds, to keep the cooking pots away from dust. As a result, sickness has greatly reduced... surplus crops can now be stored against future use" (Asong 2008: 67). This contrast between past neglect and present cleanliness highlights the tangible benefits of environmental care and the link between ecological health and human well-being. Hansel emerges as a personal

embodiment of environmental consciousness. Recalling his school days, he proudly tells Salomey that students regularly cleaned their surroundings—a practice that instilled a lifelong respect for nature. As an adult, Hansel's home reflects this ethos: "In the front yard were two beautiful gardens in which he planted flowers of countless species... he had flowers in his veranda, in the parlour and in his bedroom" (Asong 2008: 38). Asong's use of adjectives like "beautiful," "countless," and "special," along with the hyperbolic presence of flowers throughout Hansel's home, elevates nature as a source of joy, identity, and aesthetic richness. The Nirvana Hotel further symbolizes humanity's reverence for nature. Surrounded by "the most beautiful flowers and plants" (Asong 2008: 41), and managed by a botanist-horticulturist, the hotel reflects Asong's ideal: that individuals should actively cultivate and protect their environments, much like scientists devoted to plant life. The recurring motif of the color green throughout the novel reinforces this ecological message. Hansel's dark green attire, the green baseball caps worn by the Chinese delegation, and Salomey's pursuit of a "green card" all subtly embed nature into the fabric of the narrative. Green, as a symbol of life and environmental preservation, remains ever-present in the reader's consciousness. Nature is also celebrated through figurative language. Asong compares Salomey to "the beautiful flower in the elegy poem which blooms and blushes unseen" (Asong 2008: 159), using a simile to emphasize both her charm and the intrinsic value of flowers. Similarly, Cranford's statement—"We have been enjoying the fruits of our investment from day one" (Asong 2008: 194)—uses metaphor to equate financial gain with the bounty of nature, elevating fruits as symbols of reward and abundance.

Biblical allusions further enrich the ecological narrative. When confronted by Marion about his infidelity, Hansel references the Garden of Eden, explaining that God permitted man to eat all fruits except those from the Tree of Knowledge. This allusion serves as a moral reminder that nature, though generous, has boundaries—and transgressing them invites consequences, whether divine or environmental. The imagery continues with Hansel "pulling at a stray strand of hair below his Adam's apple which stood like some fruit that was stuck in his throat" (Asong 2008: 58), a simile that metaphorically links guilt and discomfort to the misuse of nature. Through vivid descriptions, symbolic color use, figurative language, and biblical references, Asong constructs a compelling vision of ecological responsibility. His narrative affirms that when humans respect and nurture their environment, nature reciprocates with beauty, health, and abundance—but when exploited, it responds with consequences.

On its part, *Life of Pi* by Martel projects hygiene and environmental awareness as minor but meaningful aspects of harmony between man and nature, especially through Pi's disciplined routines aboard the lifeboat. These moments reflect how maintaining cleanliness and respecting the surrounding ecosystem become acts of survival, dignity, and ecological balance. The ritualized cleansing is presented as ecological respect. Despite being stranded at sea, Pi maintains

a strict hygiene routine. His efforts reflect a desire to preserve human dignity and coexist respectfully with the natural world around him. In this light, Pi states that: "I kept a meticulous schedule. I cleaned the boat, I bathed, I rinsed my clothes. I wanted to remain civilized" (Martel 2001: 162). This shows how personal hygiene becomes a symbolic act of harmony, resisting the descent into chaos and maintaining a respectful relationship with nature. In addition, there is environmental awareness in waste disposal as seen when Pi states that: "I was careful not to pollute the water. I disposed of waste far from the boat, letting the sea take what it could" (Martel 2001: 165). Here, Pi reflects on how he managed waste aboard the lifeboat. His conscious effort to avoid contaminating his immediate environment reveals a survival ethic rooted in ecological mindfulness. This demonstrates environmental stewardship, even in extreme conditions. Pi's actions show that harmony with nature includes minimizing harm to it. Likewise, cleaning is projected as a psychological and ecological order. Pi affirms that: "Cleaning gave me purpose. It made the boat feel like home, and the ocean less like a threat" (Martel 2001: 164). In this situation, Pi describes how his hygiene rituals helped him psychologically adapt to life at sea. By caring for his space, he fosters a sense of control and mutual respect with the environment. This emphasizes how hygiene rituals foster emotional and ecological equilibrium, reinforcing the idea that harmony with nature begins with intentional care.

Conclusion

This study set out to explore the ecological visions embedded in Yann Martel's *Life of Pi* and Linus Asong's *The Crabs of Bangui*. It first examines the underlying causes of humanity's environmentally destructive behaviour, analyzing economic, cultural, traditional, and social influences. It then sheds light on specific manifestations of ecological neglect, including air pollution, wildlife destruction, unsanitary living conditions, deforestation, animal endangerment, poor hygiene practices, and the disregard for microorganisms. In contrast, the study also highlights actions that contribute to environmental preservation—such as regular sanitation of living spaces, the protection of flora and fauna, the celebration of living organisms, and the role of characters who promote eco-conscious living. Through a diverse array of stylistic techniques, both authors raise ecological awareness and portray the duality of human interaction with nature: its destruction and its preservation. Despite differences in geographical, temporal, and cultural contexts, Martel and Asong reveal striking parallels in their portrayal of humanity's relationship with the environment. By juxtaposing ecocritical elements from distinct literary traditions, this work contributes to the broader conversation on literary environmentalism, demonstrating that while ecological challenges may be universal, their literary representations are shaped by unique cultural lenses.

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