

THE MAIN MOTIFS IN “THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA” AND “GURUGLI”

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Abstract. This article explores the main motifs of struggle, solitude, hope, and nature in Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* and Nazar Eshonkul’s *Gurugli* through comparative literary analysis. Both authors, despite their cultural differences, portray the human spirit’s endurance and search for meaning. Hemingway presents struggle as an existential act of resistance, solitude as self-realization, and hope as a vision of perseverance. Eshonkul, on the other hand, interprets struggle as moral defiance against societal corruption, solitude as ethical alienation, and nature as a metaphysical companion. The study concludes that both works converge on a universal message: humanity’s worth lies not in victory but in the courage to continue striving despite absurdity.

Keywords: struggle, solitude, hope, nature, Hemingway, Eshonkul, comparative literature.

INTRODUCTION

Literature has long served as a mirror through which humanity reflects its deepest problems, fears, and aspirations. Across time and cultures, writers have attempted to decipher the meaning of existence through recurring motifs, symbolic threads that connect human experience to universal truths. Among them, motifs of struggle, loneliness, and hope remain essential to understanding the human condition. Ernest Hemingway’s “*The Old Man and the Sea*” and Nazar Eshonkul’s “*Gurugli*” are two monumental works that explore the nature of human perseverance and spiritual resilience in different but converging cultural contexts. Hemingway’s story beautifully depicts an old fisherman’s confrontation with nature and destiny. Santiago’s fight with the marlin has become a timeless metaphor for the human struggle against failure, pride, and salvation. His isolation is not only physical, but existential, reflecting the loneliness of man in the face of an indifferent universe. But through perseverance and an unwavering belief in meaning, Santiago embodies the hope that transcends failure. Characterized by precision and simplicity, Hemingway’s prose contains deep philosophical depth, rooted in existentialism and absurdist thought, and reflects the influence of Camus and Kierkegaard.

On the other hand, Nazar Eshonkul’s “*Gurugli*” refocuses on the mythical Uzbek hero within the framework of the modern post-Soviet philosophical landscape. His story transforms a legendary popular figure into a symbol of the moral and spiritual decline of the modern world. Eshonkul combines myth, fable, and absurdity to challenge humanity’s separation from truth and moral integrity. Motifs of struggle, solitude, and hope serve as central models for Eshonkul’s critique of postmodern fragmentation and mental exhaustion. Its protagonist, though shaped by cultural memory, faces a crisis of meaning similar to Hemingway’s Santiago. A comparative analysis of these two works provides a unique opportunity to explore the intersection of Western modernist existentialism and Eastern postmodernist myth generation. Despite their differences in form and tradition, Hemingway and Eshonkul agree on the philosophical concept that human dignity lies in perseverance. Their protagonists embody the paradoxes of existence: fighting even when victory is not possible, having hope in the midst of despair, and finding meaning in solitude.

Therefore, this study aims to explore how the motifs of struggle, loneliness, and hope function within the two stories by exploring their symbolic, psychological, and philosophical aspects. The aim of research to contribute to comparative literary studies by revealing how cross-cultural narratives express common existential concerns. While Hemingway's Santiago represents the Western ideal of the stoic hero who gracefully confronts the absurd, Eshonkul's Gurugli reveals an Eastern interpretation of heroism in a morally corrupt society. The research will proceed as follows. After reviewing the relevant literature, a methodological framework is outlined and a thematic and textual analysis of the two papers is performed. This discussion synthesizes the findings to demonstrate how both authors articulate an enduring vision of human resilience through the interplay of struggle, loneliness, and hope.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Themes of struggle, loneliness, and the relationship between nature and human existence have long been central to the study of Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea". Ghimire points out that the fight between Santiago and the marlin is "an allegory of human tenacity and the struggle for survival". Similarly, an analysis titled "Hope and Solitude as central motifs in Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea" shows that hope persists even in complete isolation, making the story a model of stoic resilience in the face of absurdity. These readings place Hemingway's writing firmly within the existentialist-modernist paradigm in which nature is both enemy and teacher. In contrast, Nazar Eshonkul's work on Gurugli has until recently focused more on socio-historical realism than on existential analysis of motivation. Though both authors deal with human struggles, there are distinct differences. Although Hemingway is widely discussed within the existentialist and absurdist traditions, Eshonkul's work has rarely been examined through these lenses in a comparative framework. A general trend in Hemingway criticism presents thematic triad of struggle – nature – solitude. For example, one analysis states, "Nature is Santiago's means of testing. She is neither an enemy nor a friend, but a silent mirror of her inner calling".

Critics of loneliness argue that Santiago's isolation becomes both a curse and a condition for meaningful action. Hope in this context remains a metaphysical basis. Santiago catches a marlin, fights a shark, and returns with the skeleton in tow, even though he is ultimately defeated. This is not an external victory, but an internal victory. Regarding Eshonkul's Gurugli, literature often depicts protagonists in terms of social alienation and structural pressures rather than existential loneliness. The struggle stems not from an indifferent nature but from community expectations, historical changes, and ideological burdens.

However, due to this focus, themes such as loneliness (in an existential sense) and the conflict between nature and humans are not often explored in Eshonkul's work. This is where comparative research becomes useful. By placing the two texts side by side, we can ask ourselves whether Hemingway's motif of solitude matches or deviates from Eshonkul's representation of solitude. Does nature behave the same way or differently? and how motifs of struggle are culturally mediated. In this case, we can turn to the broader theoretical foundations of absurdism and existentialism. For example, Camus' concept of the "absurd hero" who fights despite absurdity is applicable to Santiago, but is less applicable to post-Soviet Central Asian literature. In contrast, the protagonist Gurugli can be reconsidered through this lens. In other words, he is someone who situates his struggle within the historical, cultural, and existential vacuum of a society in transition.

However, methodologically, most of the writings on Eshonkul applied realist critical or nationalist literary frameworks, and few used the encoding of individual motifs within the text or careful comparative reading with Western canonical works. Therefore, this study will fill the gap by systematically coding and comparing the frequency of motifs, contexts, and narrative features in the two works.

The present study therefore builds on existing research on Hemingway's existentialist motifs and Eshonkul's socially grounded narratives, and positions itself as a way to contribute to it by identifying gaps in the comparative analysis of motifs and proposing a direct comparison of codes between Western modernist texts and post-Soviet Central Asian novels.

METHODS

This analysis focuses on recurring motifs in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Nazar Eshonkul's *Gurugli*, particularly struggle, solitude, hope, and the identification, classification, and comparison of nature.

This study employs a comparative literary framework that draws on both existentialist and cultural semiotics perspectives. These approaches make it possible to interpret how each author expresses universal human experience in different cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts. Based on previous studies and preliminary investigations, four main motifs were selected: struggle, loneliness, hope, and nature.

Each motif was operationally defined as a thematic unit expressing existential tension or resolution. Once encoded, motifs are interpreted in a narrative and philosophical context. In "The Old Man and the Sea", the motivational context is compared to existentialist principles such as absurdity, fixation, and isolation.

In *Gurugli*, motivation was within the framework of socialist realism, post-Soviet transformation, and moral solitude. A motif comparison table was created to display the presence, function, and symbolism of each motif in both texts. Quantitative measurements (frequency) were only used as additional evidence for qualitative interpretation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Comparative coding revealed that the four motifs of struggle, solitude, hope, and nature are central to both Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Eshonkul's *Gurugli*. However, their frequency, function, and symbolic meaning differ in the two texts. Struggle is at the forefront of both texts, but Hemingway's text is existential and personal, while Eshonkul's is collective and moral. Santiago's solitude is both physical and transcendent. *Gurugli* are social and ideological. In Hemingway, hope appears as inner salvation. Like the moral force of Eshonkul. For Hemingway, nature is the mirror of existence, and for Eshonkul, it is a mythical symbol. In "The Old Man and the Sea", Santiago's battles with marlin and sharks symbolize man's confrontation with fate and injustice. His perseverance – "man can be destroyed but not defeated" - embodies the absurd archetype of the hero. The battle of Santiago is about more than physical survival. It is a spiritual confrontation with the indifference of existence. In contrast, Eshonkul's *Gurugli* sees this struggle along moral and historical continuities. Its protagonist resists corruption, betrayal, and loss of community ethics. This battle is not against nature, but against the collapse of collective identity in the post-Soviet moral vacuum. Thus, whereas Hemingway's struggle defines existence, Eshonkul's struggle defines belonging. Although both stories see struggle as a measure of dignity, the focus of the conflict is different.

Hemingway → Man vs. Nature / Absurdity;

Eshonkul → Man vs. social/moral order.

Solitude appears as the emotional and philosophical core of both works. For Hemingway, Santiago's loneliness is complete, and his isolation from social recognition embodies the tragic dignity of the solitary human spirit. Critics like Ghimire interpret this solitude as a "quiet melting pot of meaning" where defeat turns into self-actualization.

On the contrary, Eshonkul's loneliness is sociological. His protagonist is surrounded by people, but existentially isolated from them. Gurugli's loneliness arises from the alienation between individual consciousness and a corrupt society. This double loneliness – moral and ideological – resonates with postmodern alienation in post-Soviet Uzbek novels. Both authors present loneliness not as despair, but as a precondition for hope. Santiago rediscovers the connection between the sea and fish. Gurugli gain clarity by isolating collective lies. In both stories, hope functions as a redemptive motif, turning defeat into moral victory.

In "The Old Man and the Sea", hope for a return to innocence and strength emerges through Santiago's dream of a lion on the beach. His hope is metaphysical. He knows he cannot win, but he fights because the meaning lies in the fight itself.

However, in Eshonkul's Gurugli, hope is expressed as ethical resistance. Despite the disappointment, the protagonist maintains hope in human honesty and justice. Hope is not a personal fantasy, but a moral position and a challenge to cynicism. So, if Hemingway wants existential perseverance, Eshonkul wants ethical continuity. Nature plays contradictory roles in the two works.

For Hemingway, the ocean, fish, and sharks represent a cosmic dialogue. The ocean is both nourishing and destructive, reflecting the paradoxes of life itself. Santiago calls the sea "La Mar" rather than "El Mar": companion, living consciousness. Nature serves as an existential mirror for humans to test their limits. In Eshonkul's Gurugli, nature functions symbolically as a mythical and spiritual environment. The grassland, the wind, and the sun are not adversaries, but transmitters of primordial wisdom. They embody the collective unconscious of Uzbek folklore. While Hemingway's ocean isolates humans, Eshonkul connects humans to collective memory. This contrast highlights important cultural differences.

Hemingway: Nature = the absurd mirror of existence.

Eshonkul: Nature = the mythical voice of cultural identity. Analyzed through the framework of existential and cultural semiotics, the two authors explain different aspects of human endurance.

Hemingway's Santiago reflects Western individualism and existential absurdity.

In "Gurugli" Eshonkul embodies Eastern collectivism and moral transcendence. But both agree that the human condition is a perpetual confrontation with limitations. The motive of struggle does not bring victory, but moral awakening. The points of contact between the two texts are:

1. Human dignity in defeat;
2. Moral strength in solitude;
3. Nature as a site for experimenting with meaning.

The difference between the two lies in the philosophical direction. While Hemingway's world is ridiculously indifferent, Eshonkul is morally responsive. Therefore, a comparative study of this motif will not only expand cross-cultural understanding but also situate Central Asian literature within the global existential discourse.

Battle: Exists everywhere. Hemingway = existentialism,

Eshonkul= moral social.

Solitude: Hemingway = transcendental. Eshonkul = ideology.

Hope: Hemingway = personal faith. Eshonkul = moral obligation. Nature: Hemingway = Mirror of absurdity. Eshonkul = mythological continuum.

Together they confirm that the essence of humanity lies in courage, not victory. As both authors show, meaning comes not from winning battles, but from continuing to fight them.

CONCLUSION

This comparative study examined the common and different uses of struggle, solitude, hope, and nature as central motifs in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Nazar Eshonkul's *Gurugli*. The results show that, despite significant cultural and historical differences, the two authors agree on universal existential quests such as human resilience, moral integrity, and the search for meaning. Hemingway's stories depict humans bravely and tenaciously confronting injustice. Santiago's physical defeat becomes a spiritual victory. His solitude at sea turns into a spiritual awakening in which he is convinced that the value of man lies not in success, but in perseverance. In contrast, Eshonkul's *Gurugli* translates the same existential motif into a collective moral struggle rooted in the experience of post-Soviet Uzbekistan. What the protagonist faces is not nature, but the moral collapse of society. His solitude symbolizes the conscience of a person who opposes the erosion of truth. The motif of hope combines two worldviews. Santiago's dream of the lion and Gurugli's vision of justice symbolize excellence through faith and perseverance. Similarly, nature, such as the sea or the grasslands, acts as a metaphysical mirror, reflecting the inner world of the heroes. Overall, Hemingway universalizes the human condition through existential minimalism, and Eshonkul moralizes the human condition through cultural symbolism. Both texts confirm the eternal literary truth that the measure of humanity is not in victory but in the courage to persist.

This comparative analysis therefore not only highlights the aesthetic and philosophical affinities between Western and Eastern literature, but also contributes to the growing field of research on transcultural motifs by revealing how literary motifs act as bridges between civilizations and connect the human spirit across boundaries of time and culture.

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