

ISSN-0976-8165



# THE CRITERION

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**VOL. 15 ISSUE-3 JUNE 2024**

**15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS**

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**  
Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

[www.the-criterion.com](http://www.the-criterion.com)

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **The Magic of Nature and the Realism of Social Alienation: A Reading of Marquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor***

**Ann Mary Manuel Chemparathy**

MA English,

Bachelor of Education,

Freelance Scholar.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.12671484>

**Article History:** Submitted-22/05/2024, Revised-20/06/2024, Accepted-21/06/2024, Published-30/06/2024.

### **Abstract:**

Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* presents nature as an inclusive figure and society as an exclusive figure. The novella depicts the ordeal of a sailor cast alone in the sea and his struggle for survival. Through a close analysis of the experiences of the sailor one could infer that the order of nature is inclusive that treats every creature in this environment with equal status. The nature and its various components is portrayed as mother figure that constantly provides its resources for the benefit of the creatures that co- exist with it. What is most intriguing in the novella is the sailor's fate when he comes back to the shore. While in the sea he was in the protective hands of nature which catered to his every need unconditionally. On the other hand when he identified himself as one among the society he was forced to act according to the expectations and commands of the government. His reluctance to recant the true story about the accident leads to his alienation and banishment from the social strata. His reluctance to accept the government polices leads to the destruction of his identity. The article "The Magic of Nature and the Realism of Social Alienation; a Reading of Marquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*" is an attempt to trace inclusive face of nature and exclusive face of society.

**Keywords: Nature, survival, social alienation.**

Latin America has been traditionally represented as a virgin land, where the exuberance of its nature- the enormous mountain chain, crystalline rivers, and deep jungle appear as fixed postcards where human beings arise as innocent creatures living in harmony with their environment. Nature has been a part of Latin American intellectual tradition for over a century. Many Latin American writers were concerned with portraying man- nature relationship. The problem of Man versus Nature, which had hitherto dominated the continent's literature, naturally

receded into the background, telling stories about man's camaraderie with nature. This companionship with nature is combined with the everyday realities of individuals to generate extremely distinct literary experiences. Nature often appeared as a recurring subject or perhaps even as a character in literature even without the consciousness of the writer. When many authors unintentionally portrayed nature and its different roles, many others were more interested in portraying nature, its beauty and its relationship with human beings.

However, conflicts and combats of colonial modernity, the ambiguities and irregularities of the human conditions are also prominent subjects of literature in Latin America. Marquez, like many of the Latin American authors fictionalized this existence of turmoil of the individual in a fragmented life world. With his journalistic skill, Marquez underlines the striking difference between social order and natural order in *Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. He portrays different landscapes of his country in his narratives. Consciously or unconsciously, nature appears to have omnipresence in his novel. Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* is an extraordinary story of endurance of a wrecked man, his survival with the help of natural forces as well as his alienation by governmental agencies.

In this documentary fiction, Marquez reconstructs the ordeal of the sailor who came ashore in a life raft after surviving ten days in the sea, without any food or water. Nature is portrayed as his constant companion in his struggle for survival and escape from sea. The novella was at first published as a series of fourteen journalistic pieces, composed in first person voice of a twenty-one-year old sailor, chronicled the episode of a shipwreck in which eight crew members were left alone in the sea. In a series of twenty six hour interview with the sailor, Luis Alejandro Velasco, Marquez managed to transform Velasco's account into a narrative so dramatic and compelling. In an interview given to *Paris Review*, Marquez describes his interview with Velasco as, "the sailor would just tell me his adventures and I would rewrite them trying to use his own words and in the first person, as if he were the one who was writing." ("Gabriel Garcia Marquez, the Art of Fiction No. 69").

*The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor* can be viewed as a fact represented in fiction. When the incident was later published in the form of a novella, Marquez discarded the common style of narration and used journalistic mode to retell the story of the lost sailor. This was an attempt to give a realistic portrayal of events. Marquez through his vivid imagination and journalistic mode

of writing reconstructs a fantastic tale of endurance, the transformation of the sailor from his loneliness and thirst to his determination to survive. Marquez presents the experiences of the sailor as a non-fictional novel recounting factual events as narrative history. This is more “a form of documentary narrative which deliberately uses techniques of fiction in an overt manner and which usually made no pretence to objectivity of presentation” (Hutcheon 115).

The novella also portrays how humans and other beings mutually complement each other for their survival. Nature plays a decisive role in Velasco’s struggle for survival. The primary setting of the plot is the sea, thus making nature a subject, “an actor in the drama” (Glotfelty xxi). Lost in the sea for ten days, the sailor encounters with the destructive and the nurturing force of the nature. Whenever the sailors feels desperate or lose his hope, the nature revives his spirits and provides him with the strength to struggle, either through challenges or by strokes. The waves and voracious creatures of the sea terrify him while at the same time it amazes him with its lovely spectacles. By linking himself with nature, the sailor derives energy for survival. The sea with all its creatures, the environment, the sea gulls and the celestial bodies, in one way or other, renew his spirits and urges him to stay alive. The nature is thus portrayed as an active subject with its own specific identity and importance.

While accessing the environment of an individual in literary work, one should give importance to the feelings of the individual towards his environment. On the first day of his loneliness in the sea, Velasco encountered the harsh side of nature. The intensity of his solitude and hopelessness was increased by the scorching rays of the sun and the fearsome night. The sun burned his face and shoulders and caused blisters on his skin. The unknown and unseen creatures in the sea that passed near the raft terrified him. All the elements of the nature have their intrinsic value. Anyhow, later, the same tormenting factors invigorated him physically and mentally. Despite the physical exhaustion, he followed the spatial and temporal signs indicated by the sun.

The sun was setting. It got very big and red in the west, and I began to orient myself. Now I knew where the planes would appear: with the sun to my left, I stared straight ahead, not moving, not daring to blink, not diverting my sight for an instant from the direction in which, by my bearings, Cartagena lay.”(Marquez 27)

The pain instilled by the scorching sun enlivened his desire to live. Here both pain and pleasure were provided to him by nature and the same experiences ignited his spirit within to move

ahead and endure. "When the sun touched the wound of my knee, it began to hurt. It was as if it had been awakened. And as if the pain had given me a new desire to live" (Marquez 47). The presence of stars in the night made the sailor feel less lonely. He fixed his look at the Ursa Minor and "imagined that someone in Cartagena is looking at Ursa Minor while I watched it from the sea, and that made me feel less lonely" (Marquez 29).

Whenever the sailor felt exhausted and was gripped by hopelessness, nature provided him with things to which he could cling to. "Nevertheless, each time my spirits sank, something would happen to renew my hopes. That night it was the reflection of the moon on the waves" (Marquez 53). Garcia Marquez tries to assert the order of nature by giving subtle details of the violence and vitality of marine life. The first living being that the sailor encountered after the accident was shark. Even the shark fin evoked fear in him. Although the sharks aroused fear in him, they were one among the reasons for him to struggle for his existence. "On the beach of Cartagena two years earlier I had seen the remains of a man who had been mangled by a shark. I didn't want to be torn to shreds by a mob of voracious beasts" (Marquez 54). The thought of being torn apart by these voracious beasts evoked fear in him and made him to take precautions. He made himself ready to fight with them. Although, sometimes the sailor wishes for death, the fear of the attack of the voracious creatures provides the sailor with the strength to struggle for his survival. Even in that state of desperate and hopeless situation, when the sharks arrives, he will become vigilant and acquire strength to defend himself.

That morning I had chosen death but nonetheless continued to live, with the fragment of oar in my hand, ready to fight for life- to go on fighting for the only thing that didn't matter at all to me know. (Marquez 77)

The sailor's encounter with, "an enormous yellow turtle with a striped head and impassive, motionless eyes, like two giant crystal balls..." (Marquez 76) had similar effect. He becomes cautious and vigilant when the fear of the turtle overthrowing the raft upsets his mind. He grabs his oar and prepares himself for the battle against the creatures that may try to overturn the raft.

According to Barry Commoner, the first law of ecology is "everything is connected to everything else" (qtd. in Rueckert 108). The foundational concept of ecology is that everything is inter-related and nothing is separate. The man and nature are so interlinked that it is difficult to separate them for each other's influence. The human beings and non-human beings, they continuously derive elements from each other for their survival. The sight of the seven seagulls

over the raft instils joy and hope in the sailor. The seagulls are believed to be the symbols of hope for a lonely sailor, “Seven sea gulls over the raft meant the land was nearby” (Marquez 47). The seagulls remained with sailor for two days. Soon his hope proved vain when he realised that those seven sea gulls were lost. The thought that the raft was drifting farther away from the land crushed his spirits. Despite this fact, there exist a connection between the sailor and the lost sea gulls. For the lost sea gulls ships and boats are symbols of hope. However, both their perceptions were false. The momentary hope they had and the hopelessness that followed creates a relation between the sailor and the seagull. Just as the seagulls that fly over the sea looking for a sign, the sailor looked around the vast sea for signs that prove that land is near.

The old seagull that the sailor encounters on the eighth day of his journey again fills the sailor with hope.

A big old dark gull flew over the raft. I had no doubt then that I was near land . . . I felt renewed strength. As I have done on the first days, I began to search the horizon again. Vast number of sea gulls came from every direction. I had company and I was happy. (Marquez 69-70)

When the sea gull perched on the side of the raft, the sailor welcomed him. The gull stayed with him during the night. The old seagull is presented as a motherly figure, who pecked the sailor gently and tenderly and “it seemed that as if it were caressing me” (Marquez 73). The old sea gull turned into his pet. The sailor identifies himself with the old sea gull that like the sailor is lonely and both of them seem to be happy in each other’s presence and cares for each other. Through the report of the symbiotic relationship between the sailor and the various creatures of the marine habitat, Marquez registers the realistic experience of nature and its various components, living and non – living act as compassionate and empathetic members of the extended network of natural life.

A similar kind of relation can be sketched between the sailor and the shark. During the course of his journey the sailor notes that the sharks are punctual creatures. Every day they appeared at five o’clock and disappeared on the night fall. The punctuality of these creatures made him wait for their arrival. Sharks thus turned into his visitors who appeared on a fixed time.

Garcia Marquez through the novella advocates for a rethinking of the commonly held beliefs and perceptions, and different versions about the nature for creating “a consciousness of the essential unity of all life” (Eisler 26). The novella presents the changing attitudes of the sailor towards the sea. As the days passed the sailor came to understand sea as his friend; his companion

in his hardship, providing him with confidence and strength whenever he was desperate and hopeless.

The hopelessness of the previous day was replaced by a mellow resignation devoid of emotion. I was sure that everything was different, that sea and the sky were no longer hostile, and that the fish accompanying me on my journey were my friends. My old acquaintances of seven days. (Marquez 58)

The sailor by identifying himself with the sea tries to locate himself within the natural system. He tries to re-establish the lost link between nature and human beings. The ability to see himself as the part of this vast system increased the sailor's ecological vision. Sea which he found cruel and hard at the beginning turned into his companion. The sea, its water, the gentle breeze filled the sailor with strength and hope. The lovely spectacle of the sea, the immense number of fishes, the moon and the stars all renewed his spirits. The gentle breeze in the sea soothed his body and the murmur of the wind gave him new strength. The breeze moved the raft in a straight line, "from the moment I had found myself in it, the raft had been moving ahead in a straight line, pushed by the breeze faster, than I could have pushed it with the oars" (Marquez 25). The apocalyptic fear of an anticipated peril extinguished his hopes of an escape when the breeze was taking raft farther and farther away from the land. However, this fear disappeared when the nature provided him with different signs that proved land is near. Although the sea water did not quench his thirst it refreshed him and also kept his wound dry. The nature is thus depicted as a nurturing figure, which constantly cater to the needs of the sailor. The sailor finds himself as the part of this nature and accepted both the nature's bounty and adversity.

The sailor continuously identifies himself with nature and derives the strength for survival from the nature. Nature provided the sailor with different signs of land that renewed his strength and spirits. The changing colour of sea from blue to green and the "mysterious root" (Marquez 77) that budded on the raft also gave him the hope of a nearby landing. After ten days of his struggle for survival in the sea, the sailor reached ashore. Throughout his ordeal the nature appears as nourishing and nurturing force.

"Any living thing that hopes to live on earth must fit into ecosphere or perish, (4)" opines Barry Commoner. In the ecosphere there exists a reciprocal interdependence of one life process upon the other, and there is a mutual inter connected development among all of the earth's life.

Nature and its elements can develop only if they identify themselves as the part of a single ecosystem. Luis Velasco's story is a testament to man's instinct for fight and survival. The sailor was able to survive only because he identified himself with the nature and created a harmony among all living creatures. However, the sailor's life after his experience in sea changed enormously. Marquez, by providing the microscopic details of the elements of nature, makes a remarkable distinction between the forces in nature and forces in society and how they work as agencies of construction and destruction respectively. Here Marquez presents this contradiction between social structures and natural power by showing the fortitude of the sailor in the sea and the how the account of the same experience lead to a social exile and estrangement. The sailor was taken from the security of nature to the insecurity of society. After ten days of his close experience with nature, particularly sea, the sailor again confronts with his life in the world of human beings. When the sailor was in the sea he was a subordinate creature who constantly depended on nature for his every need. But when the sailor reached the land he soon became a hero for being on a raft for ten days and enduring hunger and thirst. "In my case, heroism consisted solely of not allowing myself to die of hunger and thirst for ten days" (Marquez 101), tells the sailor. But for the sailor all that he did and all his efforts were the things that he did for his survival. "I never I imagined that surviving ten days of hunger and thirst would turn out to be so profitable" (Marquez 105). The sailor was able to amass a small fortune from his adventure. The people were interested in his story and the reporters were eager to have interview with him. He was paid for all this. In addition there were offers from advertising and publicity agencies. The sailor put it as:

I was very grateful for my watch, which had kept perfect time during my odyssey, but I didn't think that would be much of interest of the watch manufacturer. Nonetheless, they gave me five hundred pesos and a new watch. For using a certain brand of gum and saying so in an ad, I received a thousand pesos. I was lucky that manufacturer of my shoes gave me two thousand pesos for endorsing them in an ad. For permitting my story to be told in a radio I received five thousand. (Marquez 105)

The sailor was devoted as a national hero, he made patriotic speeches on radio and he was displayed on television as an example of future generation. The sailor's heroism and everything surrounded the incident soon resided and took another turn, when the truth about the accident was revealed.



The truth, never published until then, was that the ship, tossed violently by the wind in the heavy seas, had spilled the ill secured cargo and the eight sailors overboard. This revelation meant that three serious offenses had been committed: first, it was illegal to transport the cargo on a destroyer; second the overweight prevented the ship from manoeuvring to rescue the sailors; and the third, the cargo was contraband- refrigerators, television sets, and washing machines. (Marquez viii)

The truth about the shipwreck, like the “destroyer”, becomes a burden for him as many controversies and doubts were raised by media and bureaucratic officials. Like every colonized nation, the governmental system existing in Columbia has the shades of its colonial past. The sailor was pressured, threatened and was attempted to bribe to recant what he said. As he refused to recant the truth he was terminated from the job of a sailor.

By narrating the ill fate of the sailor Marquez truthfully depicts the unfathomable differences between the social order and the natural order, the bare life and the political life. Marquez also tries to describe how the individual is repressed, regulated and deteriorated in the inhuman terrain of bureaucratic domination and legal insurgencies. He was celebrated as a hero as long as he catered to the wishes and rules of the government. Once the truth was revealed which was against the government, the government stripped him off all of his privileges. The sailor and his story were accepted by the society when it was in favour of the government. When the sailor moved away from the so called framework of the rules he was excluded from the society. The sailor lost his job. He was uprooted from the sea to the land. His identity as a sailor was destroyed. The policies of the government show the capacity of man to exclude or destroy those who travel away from its established laws and policies. When the nature extended its help for the sailor for his survival, the community denied him help and stripped off all he had. Marquez through the portrayal of the life of the sailor depicts the extreme experiences that a human being faces in his life. Once he was in the sea he received every privilege that every creature in the ecosystem received. But when he was again back to the land he was forced to act according to the bureaucratic forces that demand everything. Through the portrayal of the experiences of the sailor, Marquez puts forward the binary category of man/ nature. Through the depiction of the different orders of nature that enable the sailor to survive and his elimination from social life after the government

repudiates him, Marquez asserts the nature as an inclusive and protective force and society as an excluding and alienating force.

**Works Cited:**

Commoner, Barry. *The Closing Circle: Nature, Man and Technology*. Bantam Books, 1974.

Eisler, Raine. "The Gaia Tradition and the Partnership Future: An Ecofeminist Manifesto." *Reweaving the World: The Emergence of Ecofeminism*. Ed. Irene Diamond and Gloria Orenstein. Sierra Club Books, 1990. 23-34.

Glotfelty, Cheryll. "Introduction: Literary Studies in an Age of Environmental Crisis." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. The University of Georgia Press, 1996. xv- xxxviii.

Hutcheon, Linda. *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory and Fiction*. Routledge, 1988.

Marquez, Gabriel Garcia. "The Art of Fiction No.69." Interview by Peter .H. Stone. *Paris Review*. 1981. n.p.Web. 17 January 2018.

---. *The Story of a Shipwrecked Sailor*. Trans. Randolph Hogan. Penguin Books, 1996.

Rueckert, William. "Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism." *The Ecocriticism Reader: Landmarks in Literary Ecology*. Ed. Cheryll Glotfelty and Harold Fromm. The University of Georgia Press, 1996. 105-123.