



ESJ Humanities

## Whale Watching Tours as a Cultural Object in Fiction – Jojo Moyes’ *Silver Bay*

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[Doi:10.19044/esj.2021.v17n2p14](https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2021.v17n2p14)

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Submitted: 19 November 2020

Accepted: 25 December 2020

Published: 31 January 2021

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*Cite As:*

Marginean A. (2021). *Whale Watching Tours as a Cultural Object in Fiction – Jojo Moyes’ Silver Bay*. European Scientific Journal, ESJ, 17(2), 14.

<https://doi.org/10.19044/esj.2021.v17n2p14>

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### Abstract

This paper starts from Jojo Moyes’ novel *Silver Bay*, looking at the way in which it presents tourism related to sea life watching and at aspects of people’s existence in a territory that has this type of potential. One of the aims is to raise awareness in what regards the specificity of such beach areas, in terms of not only opportunities, but also threats to sea ecosystems posed by excessive modernization driven by economic interests. Another aim is to interpret phenomena and attitudes presented in the story from a theoretical background, to make visible what mindsets the actions and behaviors in the novel manifest, from those discussed in intercultural, identity and cultural studies, which represent the academic theoretical approach in this research. Examples of these would be uncertainty (in)tolerance, masculine versus feminine cultures, dominant versus harmonizing (outer-directed) attitudes towards the environment. Moreover, certain potential iconoclastic interpretations, such as mystical exaggeration when it comes to interpreting whale communication may be elucidated. The analysis starts with the outline of the story and focal points, then pinpoints the significant role of sea life tourism in the novel. Afterwards, it goes on to set the explanatory background by looking at the polarity old-new and further superposed oppositions, to subsequently get to the description of whale watching, whale behavior and animal-related issues, and finally look into the metaphor of seeing the human being as a whale. The conclusions sum up the main findings: the fiction under the lens here is informative and raises awareness related to the above-mentioned aspects (cultural identity and profiles, intercultural contrastive

interpretations, typical forms of tourism, ecosystem preservation, irresponsible or illegal actions). They point out as well the relevance and placement of the topic in modern approaches on tourism, environmental concerns, sustainability and wildlife preservation in general.

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**Keywords:** Interculturality, tourism, fiction, whale watching, sea wildlife preservation

## **Introduction**

The story in Jojo Moyes' novel centers around Silver Bay, Australia, where Liza McCullen lives with her elderly relative, Kathleen, and her daughter, Hannah, trying to run away from a painful past, which contains, among other things, and as far as she knows, the death of her other daughter, Letty. The only other aspect of her existence that makes her feel alive besides the love for her surviving child is her connection with whales and whale watching tours. Mike Dormer comes to disturb the balance of the residents' lives, driven by corporate ambitions to open up a profitable luxury hotel and nautical sports base business in the area. This venture, however, would pose danger to the sea animals in the bay, especially whales, troubling their migration cycles with the changes that would occur in the amenities needed for the new business and, as a consequence, significantly raised the inflow of tourists. Residents are forced to reconsider their standpoints with respect to their love of nature, fauna and the environment, as well as regarding their mindsets and adaptability to change.

The plane of romance between Liza and Mike is not the primary concern in this paper, nor is the characters' private individual lives. It will rather focus on the issues of whale tourism and nature concerns, of emerging oppositions in context, and of whale watching tours and whale behavior. It will corroborate the information in the novel with what goes on in the real world, explaining the phenomena presented by the book with real facts and issues. Also, the actions and attitudes in the novel shall be interpreted from the perspective of identity, cultural and intercultural studies.

## **The role of tourism and tourism specificity in the story**

When she was 20, Kathleen Whittier Mostyn (a grandmother in the narrative present) caught a bull shark and became famous when the picture of her standing beside her prey made the headlines, and consequently attracted hordes of tourists to Silver Bay, Australia, boosting the family hotel business, as well as those of sailors' whale seeing tours by boat, by drawing curious faces to the region and implicitly hotel Bay in the 50s.

From the very start, it is visible, in the example of Kathleen, how tourism and the cultural attraction of *whale watching impacts the characters'*

– *and generally residents*’ – lives in various ways. The way in which the novel starts, with the description of this photo centered around a young woman’s conquest over a shark – itself a natural attraction – announces, in a very concentrated manner, the very fact that tourism and cultural specificity in tourism intermingle with personal destinies, playing a decisive role in them, on the one hand, as well as, on the other, how this is a focus of attention in the book and a key interest that readers will be told about in what follows, in parallel with the description of the characters’ lives. Both the *weight and the scope of whale-related tourism*, as an aspect to be depicted in the story, are announced at this point through the manner in which the novel begins.

Success, and perhaps, more importantly and basically, survival and earning a living are made possible back in the 50s for Kathleen, her family and local entrepreneurs as a consequence of this picture, geographical reality and occurrence, which is an immensely and relevantly positive aspect. Kathleen’s personal life, however, on the other hand, has to suffer as a result, as her father instills in her the fear that men pursue her only on account of inheriting a business that becomes flourishing overnight. The parent’s overprotective attitude would make her reticent and guarded for the rest of her life, preventing her from accepting anyone close enough to become a life partner, and determining her to establish her priorities around money-making. The connotations around her nickname, Shark-Girl, tend to become interpreted in the line of her being a metaphorical man-eater as well, inaccessible, perhaps feminist, a little too sure of herself for a woman living in those times, which enhance the impression created around her that she is an ivory-tower maid, hybridized with an unfeminine toughness, the result being someone who, for various reasons, will not comply to married life.

The paper will highlight the specific ways in which whale life entwines with the lives of characters. This analysis will show, for instance, how Mike Dormer is changed by the reality of the whales in his very core personality, becoming a better, more empathetic and compassionate person. Also, the sight of these animals will literally prevent Liza from committing suicide and give her a reason to go on living, pulling her out of a bleak depression back afloat, literally and symbolically, after the tragic death of her daughter Letty.

### **The contrast between the old and the new**

The contrast and battle between the old and the new, or tradition and modernity, is a polarity around which additional opposites are built. It functions as a sort of a skeleton key for the whole story and for various themes approached in it.

The facts showing a *cult for the whales* are the following. Sailors used to take tourists at sea, on their small boats, accommodating only a limited number of people, to watch dolphins and, occasionally, whales. There is an

emphasis on the excitement created around the event of spotting a whale, as this is a rare occurrence and needs to be considered a treat. It happens more seldom, it cannot be forced, it depends on chance and basically on the whales' whims. This uncertainty-tolerant attitude towards whether tourists will be benefiting from the sight of such a marine beast or not relies on a deep respect for nature and its creatures. Not disturbing the ecosystem is clearly prioritized over people's interests. The narrator in the novel mentions a precarious and fine-tuned equilibrium, or delicate balance that needs to be preserved: not enough tourists would make the small businesses go bankrupt, but too many would scare away the creatures with ultimately the same result, not to mention the trouble brought to the fauna and ecosystem. Also, another example is the presence of the Parks and Wildlife authority, which regulates behavior with and around animals, and which, for instance, would punish participation at parties with loud music on boats at sea. Yet, there is also the aspect regarding the difficulty of proving these trespasses, once they can stop at any sign of the officials' presence. People's fondness of the animals is also visible in the existence of the Whalechasers Museum. Organized in a rather shabby building that used to be a can factory and which looks like a barn, it is a thing of the past, mirroring the reverence that people acquired for these water beings at some point when, instead of hunting them and processing them, they started paying their respects to this sea creature – sometime in the 1960s, when whaling was given up around Port Stephens. The centerpiece in the museum is the hull of the *Maui II* whale chaser, which broke in two when a minke whale raised it from below on its tail. The morale that accompanies the story is that people need to behold what may come upon them when nature feels that they have disconsidered it. The museum also contains stuffed fish, fishing rods and postcards with wildlife. Fewer and fewer people have visited it with time, but they still come to sign a petition against commercial whaling. In contemporariness, most consider that the attractions of modernity, i.e. golfing and betting, are more interesting than a fragment of whale bone or a baleen, but the fascination with these relics is still there.

Sea animals appear to be more important than financial considerations or any other selfish drives. The welfare of the animals comes first, and the locals are not afraid to pinpoint it and include it in the deal, warning tourists that not seeing the whale is not a deal-breaker. This reflects the *uncertainty-tolerant cultures* and societies that various cultural theorists have talked about, i.e. cultures that do not “*feel threatened by ambiguous or unknown situations*” (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010: 191). In a table illustrating the uncertainty avoidance index by regions of the world, in which number one is the country with the highest index, Australia ranks 57 out of 76 countries and regions (*ibidem*: 194). At the same time, the locals secretly pray for the animals to allow themselves to be seen and to approach the boat, as they are

aware of the fact that tourists may indeed have a point and rightful claim to this for the money that they have paid, but the detail of the prayer and slight anxiety that they feel also shows their deference for nature, the fact that they accept that some things can be left to chance, and the above-mentioned mentality of the small community. Even though their very survival depends on the satisfaction that they can provide for the tourists, preserving the natural equilibrium and peaceful coexistence remains more important. Here, *being in tune with the natural rhythms and in harmony with the environment*, rather than aggressively and egotistically modeling nature to suit human beings' desires, applies as the chief attitude, called "outer-directed" (Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 1997: 141). An additional element that points to this same idea is the way in which sailors have named the animals that they encounter at sea, recognizing each as an individuality and being able to distinguish one from the other. The animals get personified, which shows, again, respect for them, but also affection and a sense of belonging and integration to the natural order of things as a superior force to human beings' devices.

Mike Dormer enters the picture to upset this order and to introduce *the threat and opportunity of modernity* in the area. Representing Beaker Holdings, Dennis Beaker's big company, which is supposed to invest in the region, he comes with the promise of a brighter future as far as financial profit is concerned. He means to provide not only luxury accommodations, but also a spa and water sports base, as well as scuba diving in the area. However, there is a "but". Prosperity can only occur at the expense of danger posed to the ecosystem. Opening up a spa base may scare away the sea animals and disturb the small businesses set up by the residents – be they lodging units or centered on specific tourist activities. These entrepreneurs could either face the extinction of their family businesses or get involved in others, adapting, which would, on the negative side, require extra effort, but also, on the positive one, mean more profit. This dilemma echoes the one of preserving nature's resources, flora and fauna and minding the environment through green acts and sustainability instead of having in view only material gain, since "the tourism industry can also be viewed as a destructive force, associated with negative externalities such as the loss of natural landscapes, congestion, environmental and cultural degradation" (Brokaj, 2014: 103). It raises the highly-debated, thorny issue of targeting profit without damaging the balance established between the natural elements of a place. Further, it mirrors the contrasts between authenticity and artificiality, wilderness and man-made constructions, symbiosis with nature and oppression over it, simplicity and complexity, innocence and a type of perversion through methodization, modesty and luxury, roughness and increased comfortableness. It is perhaps not by accident that the local community is initially represented by feminine energy and women, in three generations – Kathleen, Liza McCullen and Liza's

daughter Hannah – whereas the intrusive present with an eye on the future has as its harbingers males – Mike and his boss, whose masculine energy is aggressive, disrespectful, unminding and thoughtless. Nature is portrayed as feminine, warm and fine-tuning, whereas civilization is masculine, cold and goal-driven. Even the two cultures, the Australian and the European/American/Western ones can be thought of as feminine and, respectively, masculine, opposing tenderness and egalitarianism to achievement and practicality (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2010: 139-140). As Mike gets naturalized, so to speak, he changes and balances his own energies, ideals and expectations, helping Liza and Kathleen adapt theirs as well. A sort of exchange takes place, and a mutual moulding, and the implication might be that it is favored by nature-respecting attitudes. There is, therefore, a whole *set of contrastive values* that the matter of opening up a new modern business in Silver Bay entails.

There are actually *three moments* in which the landscape of Silver Bay is depicted in more recent times, every one of these with its own stage of development. This is if we do not take into account the older, historical stages of the eighteenth century, when the area was first colonized by the so-called civilized world, which was first reluctant to settle in it, but then got motivated by greed, as it saw its potential capitalized upon through logging and harvesting of oysters from the rich beds in the waters. Also, in the nineteenth century, Kathleen mentions the way Britain brought prisoners to Australia and used them to hunt whales which were then sold to the locals, and it was only later on that residents started hunting themselves. The first relevant moment in the relatively more recent history of the place was when Kathleen caused the explosion of tourism and whale tours in the fifties, when two wharves got added to the existing one to usher in the new waves of holiday-goers and their curiosity. In the subsequent large-scale hunting between 1950 and 1962, over 12,000 humpback whales were killed, the prey thus becoming massive and creating unbalance in the environment. In the present, there is another stage, when tourists have lost interest in the tours and prefer other amusements, such as clubs and high-end hotels, in more ostentatious areas such as Coffs Harbour or Byron Bay. These attitudes coexist with the environmentalists' nature-mindful ones, and the separate, cold, money-driven approaches. Then, there is a third moment, after Mike sees his plans brought to life, towards the end of the novel, which manages to combine sustainability with financial advantage, in a business which sees that all types of interests get satisfied. These three moments represent three attitudes to nature and tourism. The first is raw, minding tradition and harmony with the environment, the second illustrates modernity (with all its facets – indifference, selfishness, and environmental awareness) and the third is a successful conclusion of the struggle to blend the first two in a fortunate way. It thus exemplifies the manner in which the best



of two worlds may be had and achieved in a mixture, a sort of synergetic solution to the local reality of the community under the narrative lens. What Mike accomplishes is to preserve respect for nature and local specificity while pushing things forward, towards the future.

The *museum* mentioned above interestingly catches another subtle nuance of meaning related to the opposition between two mentalities and periods of time. In the past people hunted whales, like Kathleen did, and they saw it as a natural act of human beings' grandeur and prevalence over wilderness. However, there were no endangered species because nature did not get exploited massively and constantly with no respect for its balance and solely for material gain. Hunting was possible precisely because it did not take place in bulks, mindlessly. It was a more honest and cleaner manifestation as it were, instead of the programmed, cold and blind cruelty that it became later on with an eye on "progress" and mercantilism, performed so as to serve strictly economic and material purposes. The magnitude of the phenomenon, its excessive, abusive nature and lack of measure and rationality led to a need to ban it as the natural balance became disrupted. So, somehow, if one can see beyond the paradox, the early hunting times displayed more respect for the water beings in question than later, more modern times did. Kathleen speaks of a romanticism of the first years of hunting. The atavistic nature of the hunt back then had more cleanliness to it than the one manifested by people in modernity.

*Digital advertising* is also a relatively new practice for the old generation, represented by Kathleen and her suitor, the elderly Nino Gaines. When Kathleen talks to him about advertising for the pension and museum on the website of a tourism agency in New South Wales, as if it were a new thing to her, instead of just spreading leaflets the traditional way, Nino proves to be one step ahead of his old friend, saying that he has already been selling forty crates of wine bottles a month online – but with the help of Frank, his son. Kathleen is shocked at this and at Nino's adroitness in adapting to technology. Digital advertising illustrates the progress made in the world of representations, and only echoes the photo of young Kathleen with the whale, at the same time opposing it through its significantly increased versatility.

Kathleen refuses to install satellite television and bathrooms in every room at her pension the way Port Stephens and Byron Bay have done. Even though that would mean more tourists, she realizes that it would also sacrifice the peacefulness of their way of life, which she is unwilling to do. Also, Kathleen apparently also rejects the idea of offering packages, such as a meal, accommodation and a trip on Liza's *Ishmael* included, because, in her opinion, high tourist flows are not a priority if it comes with changes that she is unwilling to make. She invokes the same balance mentioned at the beginning

of the book (and then a few times in various contexts and forms), which entails and relies on avoidance of greed and excess.

### **Whale watching**

In the first pages of *Silver Bay*, adolescent Hannah has stealthily embarked on the *Moby One* boat manned by Lance and, through her eyes, readers make the acquaintance of some of the aspects concerning sea wildlife visitation tours. Tourists are served with coffee, tea and biscuits on a windy spring May weather that tends to become cold, enjoying the sight of dolphins as a result of the astute boat manoeuvres made by the captain, which make them sick but also joyful due to the things that they get to see. Besides the seasickness and treats, readers witness the joking with the passengers, as part of a form of marketing, meant to make them attentive to what they are about to have in sight as well as increase their sense of excitement and adventure, not to mention it being an aspect of the entertainment provided for the guests. Jokes are not only with the visitors, as packaging for their experience. The sailors communicate with one another, having specific mariners' humorous exchanges amongst themselves. For instance, Lance on *Moby One* derides through radio the captain of *Sweet Suzanne* for manning the boat as if he were drunk, as it follows a meandering course. The same Lance also mocks the other for keeping the boat at an angle, which makes a few passengers perched over its rail to heave on it at every turn, and thus change the hue of the paint covering the hull. The other man, Greg, retorts with an obscene message written directly on his vessel.

The love for animals is manifest in the names given to the dolphins: Zigzag, Piper, One Cut, Butterknife, Brolly and Polo. Moreover, Yoshi, Hannah's Japanese friend, the steward on Lance's catamaran, has put photos of their fins on the lower deck on a panel, which has then enabled every member of the crew distinguish between the animals they saw based on that and recognize them immediately by association. This is a form of love and respect towards the mammals. Personalization of the animals, as well as affection for them is visible as well in the way in which Hannah makes the comment of them being as intelligent as humans, and in how she imagines them conversing over the humans they have seen during the day, in their "language", making fun of the tourists' dress and attitudes. Even the humor that the captain resorts to in talking with the tourists has a tinge of the respect that he has for the animals: he warns the tourists not to crowd on one side and thus make the boat capsize, as, he says, the dolphins dislike boats that overturn and are disturbed by tourists falling over in their waters. Taking into account the dolphins' disturbance and perspective, even though jokingly, makes the same point of importance granted to the animals and their welfare, in an indirect and subtle way, one more time.



The description in these first few pages reveals some of the common practices surrounding these tours, as well as what the tours are like. Humor (for marketing and among sailors) and care for the animals have already been mentioned above. Also, there are certain rules to be followed while doing the tours. The captain needs to stop the engines of the boat to create the comfort that would determine the dolphins to feel safe enough so as to start playing. Also, if the boat starts moving again, it should do so alongside the movement performed by the sea animals, on a parallel course, as if guided by them. This is, of course, in order to avoid accidents, clashes with them and harming them, as well as startling them. The idea that dolphins need to like the boat and the people on it to stay with it and to allow themselves to be photographed is clearly put forth. The story here mediates some of the regulations and realities of these trips on water, helping tourists find out, understand and become more informed as far as this cultural reality is concerned. What is also manifested is the love for the fauna of the place, which accompanies these descriptions as an ever-present element highlighted in various ways, as discussed – in jokes, personalization, change of perspective with that of the animals, and corresponding rules.

Dolphins are not the only attraction, or the greatest. The whales supersede them. There is a tradition of watching them, to which the name of the Whale Jetty bears witness. Lance introduces the event as a rare one, a fact suggested by how he suddenly changes course of the boat, risking to make a few tourists lose their balance, in order to catch with his boat the whale that he has spotted. Also, he announces this possibility as a valuable opportunity and as a surprise, as something particularly special. The humpback whales cross the local waters on their migration from the Antarctic towards the north. This announcement is important enough to deserve a translation into Japanese and Korean. In relation to whale sighting, what could also be said that pertains to this cultural reality as it is depicted in the book is that boat size is an issue, as well as competition between boats that can provide this kind of service. Usually bigger boats may, as well as should be the ones to approach whales. Lance makes it clear that he wants to keep the information he has received from a helicopter hovering the bay a secret from other boat owners. Providing this kind of experience is obviously a way of advertising one's craft and business as having a competitive edge, and the possibility to attract more tourists on one's vessel to the disadvantage of other boat owners, and to practice higher fees. One more advantage of getting in the proximity of the whale first is a better viewing angle and position in comparison with the other boats'.

As far as the *behavior of the whale* is concerned, there are a few fun facts presented in the novel. Apparently, the animal can move extremely fast despite its huge dimensions and weight, as well as be playful, rolling on its

back to show its white belly or lobtailing (beating the water with its tail). The belly is usually filled with crustaceans and barnacles that have clung to it, making it look rigid and marked by time and life, as if it were a living island. If the splashes of water that it makes are more than thirty seconds apart, then it is preparing to deep-sea dive, but if the intervals are shorter, then it will remain on the surface and the tourists have an opportunity to watch it at length. When Mike Dormer convinces Liza to take him on a boat ride for whale watching, as she lowers a hydrophone into the water, Mike is surprised to hear a long wail. Liza explains that whales in a school sing the same song for approximately eighteen minutes, and if a solitary whale with a different song joins the group, its tune is taken up by the respective school; hence, they learn from one another and communicate through sound; also, different schools have different songs. But how evolved the communication achieved through this song really is? Studies have shown that humpback whale songs are rhyming phrases, as they end with similar syllables, which can “last up to twenty-three hours”, and which are performed by males in the winter around breeding time, so they may actually represent mating techniques and may not be filled with more meaning than birdsongs (Rothenberg, 2008: 132). In 1963, the first symposium on whale research in Washington established that whales made clicking sounds and that they could also hear them, even though it was not sure how they produced these and if they actually communicated with one another, although it seemed a logical conclusion (Burnett, 2012: 562). Extensive research on whales in the sixties (some of which involved drug-related episodes, controversially, for both the researcher and the mammal) and the idea that their brain size points to superior intelligence fueled the movements against whaling in the early seventies (*ibidem*: 628). These were also helped when taped cetacean sounds and noises (navy-recorded a few decades back, as part of experiments meant to ascertain the possibility of using cetacean and their intelligence in war) were presented as a language and as communication in the album *Songs of Humpback Whales*, released in 1970, becoming the “soundtrack of the ‘Save the Whales’ campaign” (*ibidem*: 629). Hence, Dr. Graham Burnett, Professor of history and history of science at Princeton University, amply depicts the spiritual interpretations around these dolphin and whale songs as complex messages as much romanticized, a circumstantial outcome rather than something backed up by science.

The beached baby whale is an extremely delicate and sad event in the *Silver Bay* novel. It also represents a high suspense point, when relevant character features about Liza are put forth. The stranding is perhaps a result of the disorientation caused in the animal by excessive noise previously made on a pleasure cruise boat. Loud noise is known to cause disturbance in whales’ ability to communicate and triggers confusion among them, negatively impacting echolocation. The rudeness of the drunk young passengers, who

refuse to heed Liza's repetitive warnings and pleas to turn down the volume of their music, triggers a very violent reaction from the female character in question, as she subsequently uses flares to determine them to leave – a dangerous thing to do, which also prompts a visit to Kathleen's motel from the part of the authorities. The policemen question the characters whom they find there on account of the events of the day, but are deftly deterred by Greg's lies, while he takes the blame on him, and by Mike's distractions as he inquires why they did not answer Liza's call more promptly, and thus points the finger back at the officials. The whale which Liza spotted and wanted to show Mike when the boat of party-goers interrupted their pursuit has a baby, which unfortunately becomes stranded nearby, while its mother swims and wails (according to Liza), unisolated, a little bit farther from the shore. Actually, Yoshi contradicts Liza by saying that female whales do not sing, and that the song comes from a male one that usually accompanies or escorts a mother and its baby. Liza enters the sea, together with Greg, Kathleen, Yoshi and others, putting water on the two-meter baby whale to help it hydrate, and they all try to push it to re-enter the sea. The novel captures the tenderness and unwavering determination of the people who stand by the animal for hours on end, keeping it alive while encouraging it to orient itself and swim back to its mother, but their dedication is in vain. They also receive the support of men from the Parks and Wildlife authority. Despite the fact that they move it to deeper water as well as back, striving to make it find its way, it is clear that if it cannot do that on its own, it will only drown if taken at a distance. Liza is the one who cannot give up on the baby whale, having the hardest time to confront reality, as she practically begs the men to hold on a bit longer, or at least take the baby to its mother. In the end, they apply a lethal injection to put the animal out of its misery.

Liza makes an interesting description of humpback whales. It is also an empathetic one, in which sentiment and affection are transparent. She describes their vulnerability and gentleness, as well as their childish and honest conduct, which come in contrast with their big dimensions and apparent accompanying threatening nature. Humpback whales approach a boat and study the people on it, sometimes overtly, by sticking their head out of the water. In Liza's view, a whale may like certain people or not, and it would remain nearby or leave, accordingly. Fishermen used to call this species of whales "happy", because, depending on their mood, one might see some floating belly up and wiggling a fin, or jumping in the water, pirouetting around like ballerinas. Also, like children, these whales tend to become jealous of the spectacle that the dolphins offer people and of the humans' enjoyment of these creatures, and when this happens they come nearby and interrupt the show given by their fellow marine animals, as if eager to be applauded themselves.

One night after Mike comes back to Australia, subsequent to his quitting the company he had been working for, the people at Silver Bay face another crisis. A lot of sea animals and birds get entangled in nets, close to the shore, which causes them serious injury or even death. Hannah follows the others into the water without permission, going away at sea in a boat, endangering her own life in order to move a dolphin, but Mike manages to save her life, as well as the dolphin's, while jeopardizing his own. The phenomenon described in these pages is known as "ghost nets" or "fatal entanglement", which is considered a "silent killer", as it occurs globally every day, and the figures are worrying: after 1950, when fishing gear was no longer made of bio-degradable materials that break down at sea, it augmented progressively, the estimations being that between 2003 and 2013 it accelerated by forty percent, reaching a point where over one hundred thousand animals die annually as a result of this, or of debris ingestion (Ghost Nets, *Planet Love Life*, <https://www.planetlovelife.com/pages/wildlife-entanglement>).

Apparently, an astonishing 640,000 tons of fishing gear gets dumped in the waters, either by poachers or as a result of negligence, creating these "death traps" (Alberts, 2018). Mammals and turtles need to breathe, and, once entangled in these nets, which prevent them from reaching the surface to get air, they may drown as a consequence; net may cut the flesh, severing muscles and blood vessels; if tails, fins or flippers get strangled by this rope, their tissue may become necrotic (*ibidem*). Apart from accidental nets, there are those named "walls of death" or "illegal drift nets", which reach "up to 50 km in length and 50m in depth", and which "were banned in international waters by the UN in 1992 for any length above 2.5 km" (Yeung, 2020). In the novel, this latter term, namely walls of death, is used, which may point to illegal activity rather than the habitual residual nets mentioned above (Moyes, 2019: 249). The online press, for instance *The Guardian*, signals in 2020 the legislative discontinuity and ambiguity in these matters, which creates lack of uniformity, confusion and room for interpretation and ongoing illegal acts unfolding below the radars of the authorities; for instance, there is inconsistency in defining the legal nets exactly (Yeung, 2020). Moreover, there are workarounds, as fishermen may carry legal smaller nets called *ferrettara* and, once out at sea, attach more of them together to create larger ones (*ibidem*). In the book, the dead animals gathered in these nets attract tiger sharks, about which Yoshi explains that they are named garbage eaters (Moyes, 2019: 307). The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) warns, in a study conducted as early as 2008, that 11 out of 21 species of "oceanic pelagic sharks and rays" are threatened to become extinct (IUCN, 2008). The proximity of this predator to the shore may raise the problem of shark attacks on humans, and potentially the need to retaliate, which would only lead to more deaths among the members of this already endangered sea species as well.

### **Metaphor animal/whale-human being**

This metaphor arises in the novel as part of the love for and empathy with animals. Liza is compared to a whale and jokingly called by Greg the Princess of Whales as she joins the family and friends over for prawn supper after the whale sighting. Liza also seems to have an uncanny communication with the first whale of the season. While all boats – *Moby One*, *Sweet Suzanne* and *Moby Two* – rush to reach it first, so as to provide for the tourists a better view and photographing angle, it turns out that Liza is already there on her *Ishmael*, and closer than any of them might have hoped to get – close enough to brush its teeth, as Greg humorously remarks. It is almost as if Liza has sensed the presence of the water mammal, having the intuition to wait for it at the perfect spot. A parallel is drawn between Liza's behavior and that of the whale: as Greg asks her out, and she refuses, Lance compares the two events at the end of Chapter One as the two "firsts" of the season, highlighting their simultaneity as a nice symmetry.

Liza describes the extraordinary mothers that whales make, which is perhaps a feature with which she resonates and which makes her draw closer to these animals, finding resemblances with herself in this respect. Having lost a child (Letty), she empathizes with the way in which some mother whales would let themselves get stranded just to save their baby whales, or with male whales making wailing sad sounds when they feel that a baby of theirs is in danger, not leaving its side. It happens with the mother whale of the animal that dies as a result of becoming beached. Traumatic past determines Liza to even identify with the entangled baby whale wrecked ashore, as well as with the situation and its mother, striving to save it the way she wanted to save her own daughter, Letty. We realize that Liza understands the death of the baby whale and the pain of the animal mother through the filter of her own experience of loss of her daughter. She associates the two events, which is yet another reason why she is unwilling to give up on the baby whale. In saving it, she unconsciously sees a chance of symbolically saving her long-lost daughter. Had she managed to do so, the success would have offered her a kind of compensatory satisfaction. Instead, the failure deepens her trauma, functioning as a reminder of her helplessness.

The sight of seven whales circling the boat on which Liza was with Kathleen, one of the days after she had finally pulled herself out from the paralysis of staying only in bed after Letty's death, was what saved Liza's life at the last minute. Right before she saw them, she was contemplating the possibility of committing suicide by throwing herself overboard. The symmetry of the animals' dance in the water made her remember that there might be some order and harmony in the universe and she changed her mind, deterred from a tragic self-inflicted end in the last moment. Liza's life and survival were literally joined to the whales'. The strange connection that got

created between the female protagonist and these beings that day manifests itself in the way in which Liza would be the first to track them and get to them, before all the others, as if she feels their presence.

Compassion and respect for the whales is what draws Liza and Mike together. It is what triggers Mike's reeducation and transformation as a human being, awakening his ability to feel and empathize, as well as prioritize other things over money. They are what brings Mike to Silver Bay in the first place, and, after he and Liza become a couple and Mike settles to Australia for good, the whales become the center of their new business and life.

## **Conclusion**

*Silver Bay* has the quality of putting forward some major concerns regarding sea wildlife and the preservation of the environment. Besides entertainment, fiction sometimes brings the plus value of being informative in a very straightforward and decided manner, as far as issues that need people's attention and which should be addressed in the real world, and of raising awareness in the respective directions, motivating the taking of action. It is the case of Moyes' novel that has represented the object of our analysis here. *Silver Bay* is not only a beautifully romantic story, it tells us about the reality of whale watching, specific to certain parts of the world (like the Australian continent), as well as about the problems arising in the area of tourism and sustainability related to this topic – ecosystem preservation, illegal hunting/whaling, death nets, stranded or beached animals and how this incident may be avoided (at least in part), noise disturbance or pollution, the clash between natural conservation and financial gain in the corporate world that would, in certain areas, be at the expense of natural imbalance and endangered fauna.

The first section of the body of this study has shown the way in which interaction with sea fauna may bring about, at an individual level, fame and financial benefits, on the one hand, as well as misfortune and stereotyping for women as being too independent and self-sufficient, on the other. Then, in the next part, focusing on the differences that arise along the historical axis between certain time periods, in terms of people's mentalities, we have found interesting accompanying contrastive values, such as (chronologically) the ones between: harmony with nature, and an interest in dominating it at all costs; feminine, accord attitudes in dealing with the environment, and masculine ones, dictated by practicality; a raw attitude of self-reliance in dealing with the fauna of the place, which nevertheless relied on balance with the environment, and a mercantile one, of mindless exploitation of nature and lack of equilibrium; last but not least, rudimentary marketing was replaced by more modern means involving advanced technology. The next section, on whale watching, discloses the way tourist tours unfold in the area, the locals'



affection for the animals, some fun facts about the whales in terms of their behavior and habits, the controversial issue of the nature of communication between whales (revealing that some mystical aspects related to it are rather a myth, and the factors that led to their emergence, historically), not to mention some problems that threaten the health of sea ecosystems such as ghost nets, walls of death and illegal hunting. The last chapter before the conclusions points to the shared features that justify a metaphorical outlook on the female character Liza as a symbolical whale: her seemingly special and strange communication with the mammals in question, being extraordinary mothers, the struggle in human traumatic experiences that resembles a whale's beaching, and empathy. All these findings provide a comprehensive outlook on the cultural specificity of life in beach areas in Australia.

The book does not stray from reality, proving quite realistic, educational and edifying in some respects. The interested reader may throw a glance at statistics regarding the number of animals facing extinction at the hand of death nets, as a result of poaching or negligence, motivated by the mentioning of this fact in the novel. Also, the story opens an avenue towards the history of Australia and, in particular, that of the places surrounding Silver Bay. It introduces a few facts from biology, especially the behavior of whales and dolphins, thus bringing the reader closer to these species, engendering, why not, and last but not least, a love and appreciation of animals and awareness as far as the natural diversity of living beings on the planet.

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