

Decentering the Human at Sea: Nonanthropocentrism in Gary Paulsen's *The Voyage of the Frog*

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Received: January 20, 2026

Accepted: July 15, 2026

Online Published: September 9, 2026

doi:10.5430/wjel.v17n1p61

URL: <https://doi.org/10.5430/wjel.v17n1p61>

Abstract

As a frequently overlooked dimension of the wilderness, the sea functions as a critical site through which fictional characters come to recognize human smallness. This is mediated by encounters with the volatile weather, nonhuman life, and a mode of perception that contrasts sharply with that of a civilized human community. The young adult (YA) novels authored by Gary Paulsen have often been categorized as man-against-nature narratives which emphasize human confrontation with and mastery over the natural environment. However, this paper argues that such readings overlook the ecocritical themes embedded in Paulsen's works. It therefore attempts to analyze *The Voyage of the Frog* (1989) from a nonanthropocentric worldview in which the sea functions as an ecological agent that undermines the assumptions of human superiority and reveals humanity's vulnerability within an interconnected environmental system. Drawing on Greg Garrard's wilderness concept and Paul W. Taylor's lens of nonanthropocentrism in environmental ethics, particularly his idea of respect for nature, the article presents a close reading from the framework of the principles such as nonmaleficence, the denial of human superiority, and ethical transformation in the selected YA text. The findings show that the narrative embodies a theme highlighting how the protagonist, David Alspeth, when cast into the nonhuman world such as the sea, gradually transforms toward nonanthropocentrism. He learns to recognize that he is not the center of value judgment, nor is he the superior creature compared to the animals. By foregrounding these ethical dynamics in the reading of the selected text, the study contributes to the growing body of scholarship that re-evaluates Gary Paulsen's YA fiction through an important ecocritical and nonanthropocentric lens.

Keywords: wilderness, nonanthropocentrism, nonmaleficence, denial of human superiority, Gary Paulsen, *The Voyage of the Frog*

1. Introduction

Ecocriticism in literary studies has increasingly foregrounded questions of ethical orientation and ontological positioning in response to the ecological pressures of the Anthropocene, a human-dominated phase of Earth's history (Nichols & Gogineni, 2018). Within this discipline of inquiry, ecocriticism has moved beyond representational analysis to interrogate how literary texts imagine humanity's place within a more-than-human world. Many studies now read literature as staging entanglements within a more-than-human world where children's and middle-grade eco-narratives decentralize the human to cultivate a sense of responsibility towards the more-than-human others (Bradfield, 2020; Kwintowski, 2025). Recent ecocritical studies stress that it no longer only traces images of "nature," but interrogates how texts construct human-nonhuman interdependence, challenge anthropocentrism, and imagine ethical obligation toward nonhuman beings (Tajane, 2024; Rishma, 2024).

Young adult (YA) literature, with its emphasis on vulnerability, transition, and ethical formation (Saelens & Larsen, 2023), offers a particularly productive site for such inquiry. Yet wilderness narratives for young readers—especially those centering survival stories—are frequently interpreted through a residual man-against-nature framework that privileges human resilience and mastery. For example, ecofeminist and feminist readings of wilderness-centered YA fiction recast nature less as an adversary and more as a source of empowerment, relationality, and resistance to patriarchy, where resilience becomes a form of spiritual and psychological transformation rather than sheer domination (Fiza, 2025; Junker & Jennings, 2022). Such approaches risk overlooking how wilderness narratives have the potential to destabilize human-centered perspectives and position humans as ecologically vulnerable participants within larger nonhuman systems. This limitation is especially evident in the criticism of *The Voyage of the Frog* (1989) by Gary Paulsen, where existing scholarship has largely emphasized adolescent survival, psychological maturation, and adventure (Salvner, 1996; Avinger, 2006), while giving comparatively little attention to the novel's nonanthropocentric environmental ethics.

The scholarly gap addressed in this article, therefore, concerns how *The Voyage of the Frog* challenges anthropocentric assumptions through its representations of the sea and human-nonhuman relations. Specifically, this paper asks: how does the novel construct a decentered human position within the marine environment, and how does the protagonist's experience at sea articulate a nonanthropocentric environmental ethic? Addressing these questions is significant because the maritime wilderness of the novel differs from the more

commonly studied terrestrial wilderness spaces. The sea is not represented as a landscape available for human habitation, conquest, or symbolic belonging. Rather, it functions as an unstable ecological space that exposes human fragility, dependence, and limited agency.

The novel centers on fourteen-year-old David Alspeth, who undertakes a solitary voyage aboard the sailboat *Frog* to fulfill his dying uncle Owen's final wish of having his ashes scattered at sea. After a violent storm leaves him stranded in the open ocean, David is forced to survive within an environment defined by isolation, scarcity, and ecological unpredictability. His encounters with storms, plankton, algae, dolphins, sharks, and whales gradually transform his understanding of the nonhuman world. Initially approaching the sea through fear and anthropocentric assumptions, David increasingly recognizes the autonomy and intrinsic existence of nonhuman life, reflecting what Paul Taylor (1986) identifies as respect for organisms pursuing their own good in their own ways (p. 45).

The study argues that the selected text, *The Voyage of the Frog*, articulates a nonanthropocentric vision by representing the sea as an ecological force that destabilizes human authority and repositions humanity as only one vulnerable participant within a broader environmental network. Rather than depicting survival as domination over nature, the novel frames ethical growth as a process of adaptation, restraint, and recognition of ecological limits. David's transformation emerges not through conquering the wilderness but through learning coexistence and ecological humility within an environment that exceeds human control.

Methodologically, this study combines Greg Garrard's ecocritical concept of wilderness with Paul W. Taylor's environmental ethics to read the YA novel *The Voyage of the Frog* written by Gary Paulsen. Garrard's framework is used to examine how the sea destabilizes anthropocentric subjectivity within the text while it simultaneously functions as a space of ethical transformation for the protagonist. In addition, Taylor's (1986) principles, particularly the ethic of nonmaleficence (p. 172) and the denial of human superiority (p. 129), provide a basis for analyzing David's evolving moral relationship with the nonhuman beings in the text. Through careful textual analysis, the paper discusses how the novel constructs ecological vulnerability and relational dependence as central conditions of human existence at sea.

By examining the maritime environment as a site of ontological and ethical decentering, this article contributes to expanding appreciation of Paulsen's YA works by extending the discussion of his novels beyond conventional survival and maturation narratives toward a specifically nonanthropocentric reading. In addition, the study contributes to ecocritical approaches to reading YA literature by showing how maritime survival fiction can articulate complex environmental ethics and challenge the assumptions of human exceptionalism within contemporary ecological discourse.

2. Conceptual Framework: Wilderness and Nonanthropocentrism

The study employs textual analysis as its primary methodology to examine how environmental ethics and nonanthropocentric perspectives are represented in the selected narrative. The close reading process begins with the selection of textual evidence in *The Voyage of the Frog* that prominently depicts David's interaction with the wild sea, encounters with nonhuman entities, survival practices, and moments in which he reassesses his relationship with nature. The analysis first applies Garrard's concept of wilderness to interpret how natural environments function not merely as settings for David's survival, but as spaces that destabilize human dominance and foreground ecological interdependence. This is followed by the adoption of Taylor's environmental ethics, particularly the principles of nonmaleficence and the denial of human superiority to examine how the narrative challenges anthropocentric assumptions and constructs ethical relationships between humans and the nonhuman world.

In Paulsen's novel, the sea functions as a powerful narrative force that continually destabilizes assumptions of human dominance and control. Through unpredictable weather conditions, the immense spatial scale of the maritime environment, and repeated encounters with nonhuman agency, the protagonist is positioned as vulnerable, dependent, and exposed within the nonhuman world. Accordingly, Garrard's concept of wilderness enables the close reading to examine how the maritime environment operates not merely as a setting, but as an ecological space that reshapes the protagonist's perception of humanity's relationship with nature. Through close reading, the analysis investigates how the protagonist's encounters with storms, sharks, and whales contribute to his ethical and psychological transformation, ultimately challenging his anthropocentric perspectives and foregrounding his ecological interdependence.

To explore the protagonist's nonanthropocentric transformation, this study further draws on Taylor's biocentric formulation of nonanthropocentrism, which argues that all living beings are "teleological centers of life" possessing inherent worth independent of human use or perception (1986, p. 122). The notion of nonanthropocentrism constitutes a critical reorientation of ethical and interpretive frameworks that challenges the privileging of human interests, values, and agency over those of the more-than-human world (Callicott, 1984; Gansmo, 2017; Göçmen, 2023). In contrast to anthropocentric worldviews, which position nature as instrumental to human ends, nonanthropocentrism affirms the moral considerability and intrinsic value of nonhuman beings and ecological systems. Within the nonanthropocentric framework, nature is considered valuable "for its own sake," not only instrumentally (Vincelette, 2025; Ahmed, Rahman, & Islam, 2025). In environmental humanities and ecocriticism, this perspective has been central to rethinking literary representations of wilderness, agency, and ethical responsibility, particularly in narratives that stage encounters between human subjects and environments resistant to domination or assimilation. Taylor's framework provides a normative ethical basis for evaluating human conduct toward nonhuman entities, making it especially productive for the close reading of literary texts in which ethical orientation emerges through the character's action, restraint, and relational awareness rather than explicit moral instruction.

Two terms from Taylor's ethics, nonmaleficence and the denial of human superiority, are particularly central to the present analysis. According to Taylor, nonmaleficence refers to "the duty not to do harm to any entity in the natural environment that has a good of its own" (p. 172). The examination of the scenes in which the protagonist refrains from exerting harm onto his natural surroundings signals a

departure from survival narratives premised on domination. Instead, it articulates an ethics of minimal intervention shaped by vulnerability and attentiveness to ecological limits.

Closely related to nonmaleficence is Taylor's proposal of the rejection of human superiority, which challenges hierarchical models that elevate humans above other forms of life based on rationality, culture, or technological capacity. In a nonanthropocentric framework, humans are understood as members of the biotic community rather than its moral center. This denial of human exceptionalism has significant implications for literary analysis, as it shifts the interpretive attention from human triumph to relational coexistence and ecological embeddedness. The paper investigates how David is confronted by a violent storm, endangered by sharks, and observed by whales, emphasizing his vulnerability within the maritime environment. It further discusses how David perceives the natural world as both mystical and awe-inspiring, as certain spaces within the environment are represented as domains predominantly inhabited and occupied by blue whales. Plots as such reveal how the protagonist's superiority as a human is denied.

The concepts of wilderness and nonanthropocentrism, with the outlooks of nonmaleficence and the denial of human superiority, form an integrated conceptual framework to analyze *The Voyage of the Frog*. The discussion proceeds by identifying narrative episodes in which ethical restraint, vulnerability, and ecological awareness emerge within the protagonist in response to the marine environment. These scenes are interpreted not as signs of human weakness but as indicators of ethical maturation and nonanthropocentric transformation within the character. By foregrounding these nonanthropocentric principles, the study demonstrates how Paulsen's novel reimagines young adult development as an ethical process grounded in respect for the more-than-human world rather than mastery over it.

3. Analysis and Discussion

The wilderness in *The Voyage of the Frog* serves as a site for nurturing the protagonist's transformation toward nonanthropocentrism. Fourteen-year-old David Alspeth inherits a sailboat, named the Frog, from his uncle Owen, who, before dying of spinal cancer (Paulsen, 1989, p. 12), instructs David to scatter his ashes "out to sea alone, until [he] can't see land" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 22). This request initiates a journey that deliberately removes David from the safety and predictability of civilization and immerses him in the vast, indifferent wilderness of the sea. In ecocritical thought, the wilderness frequently functions as a space of ethical and ontological reorientation. As Garrard (2012/2004) argues, the wilderness is often imagined as a site of renewal and self-realization, where one might experience a more authentic relation to the earth (p. 66). Paulsen reconfigures the sea as precisely such a space—simultaneously threatening and regenerative—within which David's moral and ecological transformation unfolds.

The sailboat's name, Frog, carries symbolic weight that reinforces the novel's nonanthropocentric ethos. As an amphibious creature that inhabits both land and water, the frog embodies ecological adaptability. By bestowing an animal name upon an inanimate object, the text destabilizes the rigid boundaries between the animate and the inanimate, foregrounding a worldview in which nonhuman entities possess relational and symbolic significance. This gesture aligns with Buell's (1995) observation that ecocritical writing often involves a decentering of the human, granting nonhuman presences ethical and narrative weight (p. 302). The Frog thus functions not merely as a vessel but as a companion that mediates David's encounter with the sea and facilitates his passage through loss, isolation, and transformation.

After Uncle Owen's death, David's first engagement with the boat is inseparable from grief. Memories of his uncle surface as the protagonist approaches the vessel, recalling the moment when his uncle realized his impending death: "by Tuesday he knew he was going to die" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 3). David attempts to suppress his emotions, yet the "memory of the whole stinking mess" floods his thoughts (Paulsen, 1989, p. 3). Owen's final wish—to be taken "out to sea alone" and scattered where land is no longer visible (Paulsen, 1989, pp. 7, 12)—forces David into solitude and into direct engagement with the nonhuman world. This enforced isolation marks the beginning of David's transformation, as he enters the wilderness not as a site of conquest but as a space of confrontation and learning.

Owen's will to have his ashes returned to the sea reflects a deeply ecological consciousness. His wish signifies a symbolic dissolution of the boundary between self and environment, envisioning death not as separation but as reintegration into elemental processes. Owen's life choices reinforce this ethos. He resists technological mediation, particularly the boat's motor, which he derisively calls a "cast-iron mainsail," refusing ever to use it (Paulsen, 1989, p. 11). This rejection of mechanization aligns with what Nash (2014) identifies as the Western "wilderness ideal," a longing to escape the constraints of industrial modernity and reconnect with the primordial (p. 5). The character Owen thus functions as a mentor figure whose ecological values extend beyond death, shaping the protagonist's journey toward respect for nonhuman agency.

As David moves farther from land, the wilderness depicted in the text also offers a space for direct experience, which is essential for the young adult's transformation from being anthropocentric to recognizing and acknowledging the decentralizing of human position, represented as becoming nonanthropocentric. With "no plane, nor other boat," and no sign of "another human on the planet" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 31), the protagonist is forced to confront the reality of human smallness within a vast ecological matrix. Moreover, the place offers him a chance to think of the relationship between humanity and the nonhuman world. Engulfed by swirling water and a white cloud, David is portrayed as under tons of water and gaining "more pain, not just in his head now but in his shoulder somehow" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 40). The abundance of water exerts its overwhelming power on the character, which envelops and submerges him, rendering him almost indistinguishable from his environment. The physical sensations of the pain experienced further reinforce David's precariousness of existence and bodily connection to the natural world. The wilderness in this scene operates as a liminal space, which George Turner

(2018/1999) and Arnold Van Gennep (2019/1909) respectively describe as a transitional zone in which established identities dissolve and new orientations emerge.

Through this liminal ordeal, Paulsen presents the wilderness as a site of ethical reorientation rather than a backdrop for heroism. David's solitary voyage fulfills Uncle Owen's unspoken pedagogical intention to foster the young protagonist's ecological humility and awareness of nature's agency. As Garrard (2012/2004) argues, the wilderness experience does not offer an escape from reality. On the contrary, it cultivates an awareness of nature's independence and humanity's embeddedness within the larger ecological community (Garrard, 2012, p. 77). By portraying the protagonist's immersion in the wild sea through experiences of hunger, vulnerability, and encounters with nature's indifference and magnificence, the novel demonstrates how individuals like David develop a deeper and more critical understanding of the more-than-human world by relinquishing a human-centered perspective. This realization allows him to recognize that humans are not unconditionally superior to nonhumans, nor is he the center of the universe. As highlighted in an earlier discussion, Owen is convinced that the position of humanity in the nonhuman world remains as an explorer of the universe rather than a dominating ruler (Paulsen, 1989, p. 24). A case in point within the novel is when David experiences profound hunger on the boat, an embodied awareness rarely encountered in his domestic life. After two days of hunger at sea, the protagonist experiences unexpected emotional responses such as anger, followed by an intense appreciation for food (Paulsen, 1989, p. 59). Here, the sea reinforces his decentered human position through its indifference to the protagonist's needs. While supporting abundant nonhuman lives, the sea seemingly offers David little sustenance because the seawater surrounding him is not suitable for sustaining his survival. Dependent on a limited supply of freshwater in his sailboat, David becomes acutely aware of his vulnerability:

He didn't know how soon he would get more water... and if he ran out of water he would start to drink seawater and he'd read stories about people who drank seawater going insane and dying horrible deaths. (Paulsen, 1989, p. 52)

This scene depicts how the sea functions as a metaphorical desert, exposing the fragility of human survival and underscoring the limits of human agency within nonhuman systems. These encounters reveal how the wilderness strips away the comfort once taken for granted in the city. Hunger and thirst become a pedagogical force, fostering humility and recalibrating David's values. Removed from urban abundance, he confronts the unsteadiness of survival and begins to recognize that the nonhuman world does not exist to sustain human convenience.

The narrative underscores the sea's indifference through vivid depictions of its uncontrollable weather, presenting the wilderness as a force unconcerned with human vulnerability. When a storm strikes, David is nearly thrown from the boat as the wind "picked him up almost bodily and threw him out" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 37). The mainsail lashes "like a demon gone mad," resisting all attempts at control (Paulsen, 1989, p. 37). Such imagery personifies the storm not to humanize it but to emphasize its uncontrollable power. Nature here is not moral or malicious but indifferent, operating according to its own rhythms. The storm's violence culminates in David's physical injury, rendering him acutely aware of his fragility. Paulsen writes that the wind tears at David's body, pulling his "eyelids away from his eyes" and sending the boat skidding "like a leaf" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 37). Moreover, the power of the wind is portrayed as catching the protagonist "full on in the center of the top of his head" with an exploding pain that covers "the whole top of his brain like a burning glove" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 37). This moment dramatizes human fragility within the wilderness, as the overwhelming force of nature highlights David's insignificance. The protagonist is thus stripped of protection and reduced to bodily endurance, exemplifying what Cronon (1996) describes as the wilderness's reminder that "the world is not made for us" (p. 86). The storm in the novel functions as a rite of passage, dismantling David's illusion of control and initiating what Garrard (2012/2004) terms an "anti-anthropocentric" (p. 161) revelation inherent in the wilderness experience.

In the aftermath of the storm, David's response to environmental degradation reflects the principle of nonmaleficence, which Taylor (1986) defines as an outlook of doing the least harm to the environment. This is displayed when the protagonist is tempted to discard accumulated trash in his sailboat into the sea. His subsequent refrain shows an acute recognition of both ecological consequences and the scarcity of resources: "Nothing was trash now... When he had nothing, everything was valuable" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 79). Moreover, he is aware that the trash will attract sharks, which will threaten his personal safety. This ethical restraint from causing harm to nature exemplifies a priority towards preservation over convenience. David's revaluation of waste disposal portrays an emerging environmental ethic grounded in responsibility and sustainability.

The theme of nonanthropocentrism is further reinforced in the novel when inanimate objects are accorded human attributes and agency. The Frog is described as an extension of Owen's identity: "The top of the boat, the outside, looked like Owen's as well. She was all business" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 12). This attribution of character and continuity onto the vessel destabilizes the distinction between human identity and nonhuman materiality. The boat is not merely a passive object but an active participant in David's journey, embodying values, discipline, and purpose inherited from Owen. Such a representation aligns with Taylor's nonanthropocentric ethics by emphasizing mutual constitution between humans and their environments. This relational ontology also shapes the author Paulsen's portrayal of mourning. Owen's lingering presence in the vessel suggests that identity persists beyond biological death, remaining embedded in material and ecological processes. Rather than framing death as the end of human significance, the release of his ashes into the sea conceptualizes existence as continuous and relational, consistent with the ecological thought which considers life and death as interconnected phases within broader environmental systems.

This dissolution of boundaries recurs in David's developing relationship with the vessel itself. After enduring disasters and encountering marine lives, David begins to perceive himself and the boat as collective entities, lexically referring to himself and the Frog as "we" (Paulsen, 1989, p. 113). He speaks aloud to the boat, "Well... I guess we should reef sail if the wind is going to keep getting stronger," and senses "the

life of the Frog coming up through them into his legs,” realizing that “it would be we from now on” (Paulsen, 1989, p. 113). Unable “to draw a line where he ended and the Frog began” (Paulsen, 1989, p. 113), he finds that the fusion transcends physical boundaries and echoes the earlier conflation of Owen and the vessel. This incident symbolizes David’s ethical and ontological integration into the environment, cementing a nonanthropocentric worldview in which humans are embedded within, rather than elevated above, ecological systems (Leopold, 1949; Taylor, 1986; Plumwood, 2002).

Apart from the Frog, David’s encounters with marine lives lead him to realize that human superiority disappears in the natural world. Early in the voyage, he witnesses bioluminescent microorganisms disturbed by the boat’s passage, realizing that the Frog intrudes upon their living zone and frightens them (Paulsen, 1989, p. 26). Shortly afterward, a dolphin appears, moving with “an incredible burst of speed” beneath the glowing water, and “a torpedo form” cutting effortlessly through its environment (Paulsen, 1989, p. 27). The dolphin’s grace and mastery contrast sharply with David’s confinement to the vessel, offering him a moment of humility. He recognizes that the dolphin’s attunement to the sea surpasses human capacity and briefly wishes to embody its freedom and fluidity (Paulsen, 1989, p. 114). This scene disrupts anthropocentric assumptions by portraying nonhuman animals exceeding humanity in adaptability to a certain environment, like the sea.

The Voyage of the Frog further presents a challenge to human superiority through the protagonist’s encounters with sharks and whales. When a shark repeatedly strikes the sailboat, David realizes that he is no longer the observer but a potential prey (Paulsen, 1989, p. 65). The protagonist is frightened at the sight of the shark, which underscores humanity’s precarious position within the marine ecosystem and disrupts assumptions of dominance. Nevertheless, the author emphasizes that the shark is not villainized, and it responds instinctively to light resembling a wounded fish (Paulsen, 1989, p. 65). Similarly, Paulsen’s portrayal of the whales elevates them as dominant agents within the sea. The whales are portrayed as “towering over” David and observing him with apparent intelligence (Paulsen, 1989, p. 108), which inverts the hierarchies set by human civilization, ranking humanity unconditionally at the top. Another example involves the setting of a bay occupied by whales, where David is a temporary outsider. During the short period of company among the whales, the protagonist develops an emotional attachment to them, subsequently becoming sad at their eventual departure (Paulsen, 1989, p. 111). This interconnectedness with nonhuman beings demonstrates David’s recognition of their intrinsic value, which contributes to the narrative’s nonanthropocentric ethic by positioning humans as participants in, rather than masters of, a shared ecological community.

The Voyage of the Frog thereby articulates a nonanthropocentric ethic through the denial of human superiority. As Taylor (1986) argues, claims of human superiority are untenable when removed from a strictly human-centered evaluative context (pp. 129–130). Paulsen’s narrative repeatedly exposes human vulnerability in contrast to nonhuman adaptability and ecological attunement. In doing so, it aligns with Buell’s (1995) assertion that literary ethics require acknowledgment that human interests are not the only legitimate ones (p. 7). Within the selected YA novel, the protagonist David’s seafaring experiences foster a transformative awareness of humanity’s limited position within an interconnected environment, fulfilling the belief that true understanding arises through engagement with wilderness beyond human control (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001; Naor & Mayseless, 2020).

4. Conclusion

This study demonstrates how Paulsen’s YA novel, *The Voyage of the Frog*, systematically dismantles anthropocentric assumptions by portraying the setting of the sea as an autonomous ecological space beyond human control. Through the protagonist David Alspeth’s solitary journey, the author constructs a narrative in which human survival depends not on mastery over nature but on adaptation to ecological conditions and recognition of nonhuman agency. The analysis indicates that the nonanthropocentric vision in the selected text is developed through three interwoven narrative strategies: the decentering of human superiority during maritime vulnerabilities, the representation of interdependent human–nonhuman relationships, and the ethical emphasis on restraint and ecological responsibility.

The findings reveal that the writer Paulsen repeatedly positions his protagonist as physically and psychologically vulnerable within the oceanic environment. Encounters with storms, sharks, whales, and the immense unpredictability of the sea destabilize David’s anthropocentric notions of superiority by exposing the limits of his human power and technological dependence. At the same time, the novel reframes nonhuman entities not as symbolic extensions of human experience but as autonomous presences existing independently of human needs. The sailboat named *The Frog*, marine animals, and even microscopic sea lives, culminate in functioning as participants within an interconnected ecological network rather than as passive background elements. This relational structure ultimately redefines David’s understanding of survival, shifting it from domination toward coexistence and ecological attentiveness.

The study further reveals that the setting of the wilderness in the novel operates as a transformative ethical space. Removed from the structures of civilization, the protagonist David gradually develops a heightened awareness of ecological interdependence and the consequences of human actions. His careful conservation of resources, refusal to pollute the sea, and increasing respect for nonhuman lives reflect a sense of moral responsibility grounded in adaptation rather than conquest. Within the novel, Paulsen presents environmental ethics not as abstract philosophy but as a lived survival practice shaped through direct engagement with the nonhuman world.

This article contributes to the scholarship of Paulsen’s YA fiction by extending existing discussions of wilderness survival beyond psychological maturation and adventure narrative frameworks toward a specifically nonanthropocentric reading of maritime ecology. While previous studies on Paulsen’s literary works often emphasize adolescent resilience or survival, this study demonstrates how *The Voyage of the Frog* articulates an environmental ethic that decenters human exceptionalism and foregrounds ecological relationality. In addition, the article contributes to ecocritical studies of YA literature by showing how young adult maritime narratives can function as sites for ethical and

ecological reorientation. Finally, the paper argues that the novel ultimately suggests a recognition of humanity as a vulnerable participant within the broader ecological system, a perspective which is believed to be essential for imagining more responsible relationships with the natural world in the context of contemporary environmental crises.

Acknowledgments

Not applicable.

Author contributions

The PhD candidate Rao Na was responsible for data collection and wrote the article. The corresponding author Dr. Florence Toh Haw Ching was responsible for study design and revision. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Funding

Not applicable.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Informed consent

Obtained.

Ethics approval

The Publication Ethics Committee of the Sciedu Press.

The journal's policies adhere to the Core Practices established by the Committee on Publication Ethics (COPE).

Provenance and peer review

Not commissioned; externally double-blind peer reviewed.

Data availability statement

Not applicable.

Data sharing statement

No additional data are available.

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