

# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Being born comes as a free gift. Survival, however, is a price every being has to pay with determination. Like Mother Teresa said, “Life is a struggle” (“Mother Teresa Quotes”). As human beings, people struggle every day against forces they find – either from within themselves, from the society, or the physical world (Murphy 134) – in order to survive. In spite of hopes, dreams, and optimism that every human being seems to have, and regardless of age and era, it is a fact that life is indeed a struggle. In their novels, Robinson Crusoe and Life of Pi, the authors Daniel Defoe and Yann Martel seem to support this view of life.

Daniel Defoe, often said to be the founder of the English novel (Taormina), wrote Robinson Crusoe at the beginning of the eighteenth century. In addition to the significant role of religion that the book offers (Cox), its narrative about a castaway’s adventure on a lonely island has made the story considered a myth in Western Culture (“Robinson Crusoe in Hollywood”). The character of the novel has received the approval from generations of readers and is recognized as “a literary and cultural icon” (“Robinson Crusoe: Introduction”) for his demonstration of survival through independence and hard work.

Three centuries from the writing and publication of what is regarded by many as the first English novel (“Robinson Crusoe”), a Canadian novelist and short-story writer Yann Martel wrote Life of Pi, a story which will not only make its readers believe in God (Martel), but also offer a character who is “meant to be regarded as an exemplar” (Morra). Pi Patel’s intelligence and courage in struggling to survive at sea with only animals as companions is praiseworthy. Pi’s fable-like long journey told in vivid descriptions has proven Martel’s quality as “one of Canada’s most acclaimed novelists” (Z).

While Robinson Crusoe and Pi Patel are both admirable characters, their religious views, along with their respectable personalities and the ordeals they encounter create noticeable differences between the two protagonists. Throughout the story, both characters clearly show their beliefs in God, each in their own way. While Crusoe is strongly influenced by Protestant values, Pi’s multi religions make him view God in a more open-minded way. Whereas Crusoe as a young man in his early thirties is applauded for his independence and hard work during his isolation in the island, Yann Martel’s protagonist, a sixteen year old Indian boy, is praised for his intelligence, courage and ability to adapt throughout his ordeal at sea. (“Life of Pi - Pi’s Physical Journey of Suffering and Pain”).

Apart from those differences between the protagonists and despite the fact that they are written in two different eras, Robinson Crusoe and Life of Pi convey the same idea about survival, along with a similar view of life. As Perrine has mentioned in his book Story and Structure, “view of life” is an aspect from which the readers may “derive the theme of a story” (Perrine 102). In this thesis, I analyse the theme of the two novels, using that aspect.

Theme itself is “[the] underlying meaning of a literary work“ (“Literary Elements”). Identifying the theme of a novel is important because it allows the readers to comprehend the author’s purpose in writing the book. Since “the main character usually illustrates the most important theme” of a novel (“Literary Elements”), I utilize the protagonist’s characteristics to disclose the themes of Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and Martel’s Life of Pi.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The problems that I discuss in my thesis are:

1. What are the themes of the two novels?
2. How do the protagonists’ characteristics contribute to the revelation of the theme of each novel?

### **Purpose of the Study**

With those problems above, the purposes of the study are:

1. To reveal the themes of the two novels.
2. To show how the protagonists’ characteristics contribute to the revelation of the theme of each novel.

### **Method of Research**

In analysing Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe and Martel’s Life of Pi, I use library research. First, I read the two novels as the primary texts. It is then followed by searching for references on the authors and the literary works which will be useful to support the analysis. The research also includes the use of

Internet sources to help me in finding materials needed. Finally, I draw some conclusion of what has been discussed.

### **Organization of the Thesis**

This thesis consists of four chapters, preceded by the Preface. Chapter One is the Introduction, which consists of the Background of the Study, the Statement of the Problem, the Purpose of the Study, the Method of Research, and the Organization of the Thesis. Chapter Two is the analysis of theme of Robinson Crusoe. Chapter Three is the analysis of theme of Life of Pi. The last chapter, Chapter Four, is the Conclusion. The thesis ends with the Bibliography and the Appendixes, which contain the synopsis of the two novels and the biography of the authors.