



MAN AND NATURE AS PORTRAYED BY ERNEST HEMINGWAY IN *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

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Abstract: *The Old Man and The Sea* (1952) is the best finest novel of Hemingway. It has been interpreted as an allergy of the writer's struggle with his craft. Nature plays a very huge part in the novel *The Old Man and The Sea*. Santiago and marlin had fought very terribly. The old man totally depends on the nature because it provides his livelihood. The relation between Marlin and Santiago is more like a friendship. This novel also explains on the point of "survival of the fittest".

Key notes: Old man, Sea, marlin, struggle, skeleton, Survival of the fittest.

The Old Man and The Sea (1952) is the best finest novel of Hemingway. It has been interpreted as an allergy of the writer's struggle with his craft. Hemingway himself becomes the hero of this novel because he really finds himself involved in the game situation. It is swiftly and smoothly told; the conflict is resolved into a struggle between a man force which he scarcely comprehends, but which he knows that he must end in defeat. Hemingway's experiences are reflected in his work, transmuted into artistic forms by the alchemy of art.

Hemingway portrays the character Santiago and praises him for his bravery, courage, and determination. Though he is old, he does not lose his heart and hope. He steadily moves to achieve his goal to catch the big fish. He faces struggles and misfortunes to succeed in life. Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the sea* is based on a true anecdote that he had heard and published as an article in a periodical in the spring of 1936. This anecdote was about an old man fishing alone who had caught a huge fish which had towed him a day, a night, a day, and another night.

The fish pulls the boat all through the day, through the night, through another day, and through another night. It swims steadily northwest until at last it tires and swims east with the current. The entire time, Santiago endures constant pain from the fishing line. Whenever the fish lunges, leaps, or makes a dash for freedom, the cord cuts Santiago badly. Although wounded and weary, the old man feels a deep empathy and admiration for the marlin, his brother in suffering, strength, and resolve.

On the third day the fish tires, and Santiago, sleep-deprived, aching, and nearly delirious, manages to pull the marlin in close enough to kill it with a harpoon thrust. Dead beside the skiff, the marlin is the largest Santiago has ever seen. He lashes it to his boat, raises the small mast, and sets sail for home. While Santiago is excited by the price that the marlin will bring at market, he is more concerned that the people who will eat the fish are unworthy of its greatness.

As Santiago sails on with the fish, the marlin's blood leaves a trail in the water and attracts sharks. The first to attack is a great mako shark, which Santiago manages to slay with the harpoon. In the struggle, the old man loses the harpoon and lengths of valuable rope, which leaves him vulnerable to other shark attacks. The old man fights off the successive vicious predators as best he can, stabbing at them with a crude spear he makes by lashing a knife to an oar, and even clubbing them with the boat's tiller.

Although he kills several sharks, more and more appear, and by the time night falls, Santiago's continued fight against the scavengers is useless. They devour the marlin's precious meat, leaving only skeleton, head, and tail. Santiago chastises himself for going out too far, and for sacrificing his great and worthy opponent. He arrives home before daybreak, stumbles back to his shack, and sleeps very deeply.

The next morning, a crowd of amazed fishermen gathers around the skeletal carcass of the fish, which is still lashed to the boat. Knowing nothing of the old man's struggle, tourists at a nearby cafe observe the remains of the giant marlin and mistake it for a shark. Mandolin, who has been worried sick over the old man's absence, is moved to tears when he finds Santiago safe in his bed. The boy fetches the old man some coffee and the daily papers with the baseball scores, and watches him sleep.

When the old man wakes, the two agree to fish as partners once more. The old man returns to sleep and dreams his usual dream of lions at play on the beaches of Africa. The power of the sea the central theme of the text. There is an old fisherman in Cuba, Santiago, who has gone eighty-four days without a catch. He is thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck, and his hands had deep creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords.

He was heavily injured. So, none of these scars were fresh. They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert. Santiago's lack of success, though, does not destroy his spirit, as his cheerful and undefeated eyes show. He has a single friend, a boy named Mandolin, who helped him during the first forty days of his dry spell. After forty days, though, Mandolin's parents decided the old man was unlucky and ordered their son to join another boat. Despite this, the boy helps the old man to bring in his empty boat every day.

Santiago tells Mandolin that tomorrow he will go out far in the Gulf to fish. The two gather Santiago's things from his boat and go to the old man's house. His house is very simple with a bed, table, and chair on a dirt floor. The two friends speak for a while, then Mandolin leaves briefly to get food. Santiago falls asleep. When Mandolin returns, he wakes Santiago. The two eat the food the boy has brought. During the meal, the boy realizes the squalor in which the old man lives and reminds himself to bring the old man a shirt, shoes, a jacket, and a blanket for the coming winter.

Mandolin and Santiago talk about baseball for a while, and the boy then leaves to be woken in the morning by the old man. Santiago sleeps. Santiago leaves shore early in the morning, before sunrise. He knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean. Soon, Santiago rows over the great well, a sudden drop of seven hundred fathoms where shrimp, bait fish, and squid congregate.

Moving along, Santiago spots flying fish and birds, expressing great sympathy for the latter. As he queries, "*Why did they make birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel*" (23). She is kind and very beautiful. But she can be so cruel. Santiago keeps pressing out, past the great well where he has been recently unsuccessful. Santiago sees a man-of-war bird overhead and notices that the bird has spied something in the water. The old man follows near the bird, and drops his own lines into the area, hoping to capture the fish the bird has seen.

There is a large school of dolphin traveling fast, too fast for either the bird or Santiago to capture. Santiago moves on, hoping to catch a stray or perhaps even discover a marlin tracking the school. He catches a small tuna after not too long and then feels a bite on one of his deeper lines. The first bite is hard, and the stick to which the line is connected drops sharply. The next tug is more tentative, but Santiago knows exactly what it is. "*One hundred fathoms down a marlin was eating the sardines that covered the point and the shank of the hook where the hand-forged hook projected from the head of the small tuna*" (41).

Encouraged by a bite at so deep a depth so far out in the Gulf, Santiago reasons that the fish must be very large. The marlin nibbles around the hook for some time, refusing to take the bait fully. Santiago speaks aloud, as if to cajole the fish into accepting the bait. He says, *“Come on. Make another turn. Just smell them. Aren’t they lovely”* (42). Eat them good now and then there is the tuna. Hard and cold and lovely. *“Don’t be shy fish. Eat them”* (42). After many false bites, the marlin finally takes the tuna and pulls out a great length of line.

Santiago waits a bit for the marlin to swallow the hook and then pulls hard on the line to bring the marlin up to the surface. The fish is strong, though, and does not come up. Instead, he swims away, dragging the old man and his skiff along behind. Santiago wishes he had Mandolin with him to help. As the sun goes down, the marlin continues in the same direction, and Santiago loses sight of land altogether. Expressing his resolve, Santiago says, *“Fish...I’ll stay with you until I am dead”* (52).

He expresses ambivalence over whether he wants the fish to jump, wanting to end the struggle as quickly as possible but worrying that the hook might slip out of the fish’s mouth. Echoing his former resolve though with less certainty, Santiago says, *“Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends”* (54). A small bird land on the boat, and while Santiago is speaking to the bird, the marlin lurches forward and pulls the old man down, cutting his hand.

Lowering his hand to water to clean it, Santiago notices that the marlin has slowed down. He decides to eat a tuna he has caught in order to give him strength for his ordeal. As he is cutting the fish, though, his left-hand cramps. *“What kind of hand is that”* (58), Santiago says, *“Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good”* (58). The old man eats the tuna, hoping it will renew his strength and help release his hand.

As the sun sets, Santiago thinks back to triumphs of his past in order to give himself more confidence in the present. He remembers a great arm-wrestling match he had at a tavern in Casablanca. It had lasted a full day and a night, but Santiago, El Campeon the Champion as he was known then, eventually won. *“He decided that he could beat anyone if he wanted to badly enough and he decided that it was bad for his right hand for fishing”* (70). He tried to wrestle with his left hand but it was a traitor then as it had been now.

Recalling his exhaustion, Santiago decides that he must sleep some if he is to kill the marlin. He cuts up the dolphin he has caught to prevent spoiling, and eats some of it before contriving a way to sleep. Santiago wraps the line around himself and leans against the bow to anchor himself, leaving his left hand on the rope

to wake him if the marlin lurches. Soon, the old man is asleep, dreaming of a school of porpoises, his village house, and finally of the lions of his youth on the African beach.

At sunrise, the marlin begins a large circle. Santiago holds the line strongly, pulling it in slowly as the marlin goes round. At the third turn, Santiago sees the fish and is amazed by its size. He readies the harpoon and pulls the line in more. The marlin tries desperately to pull away. Santiago, no longer able to speak for lack of water, thinks, *“You are killing me, fish. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother”* (92).

Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills you. This marlin continues to circle, coming closer and pulling out. At last it is next to the skiff, and Santiago drove his harpoon into the marlin's chest. *“Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty”* (94). It crashed into the sea, blinding Santiago with a shower of sea spray. With the glimpse of vision he had, Santiago saw the slain beast laying on its back, crimson blood disseminating into the azure water. Seeing his prize, Santiago says, *“I am a tired old man. But I have killed this fish which is my brother and now I must do the slave work”* (95). *The Old Man and The Sea*, teaches an important lesson, that wrong decision sometimes teaches the truth and reality of life that helps in taking the right decision in the future.

Nature plays a very huge part in the novel *The Old Man and The Sea*. Santiago and marlin had fought very terribly. The old man totally depends on the nature because it provides his livelihood. The relation between Marlin and Santiago is more like a friendship. This novel also explains on the point of *“survival of the fittest”*. Santiago's pride may be his strength, but it is also his greatest weakness, leading to his downfall. Santiago realizes that it his pride that caused a great fish's life to be wasted. Santiago learns an important lesson and his perspective of himself will be changed. In conclusion, Santiago's humble pride, led into him conquering the mighty marlin, and to his downfall, which was to lose the fish to the sharks and come back without it. He sacrificed the magnificent fish for nothing. Santiago's pride can be compared to everyone's mistakes.

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