

The Old Man and the Sea Study Guide

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway

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Contents

The Old Man and the Sea Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Introduction.....	4
Overview.....	5
Author Biography.....	6
About the Author.....	8
Plot Summary.....	9
Detailed Summary & Analysis.....	11
Characters.....	23
Setting.....	26
Social Concerns.....	27
Social Sensitivity.....	28
Techniques.....	29
Literary Qualities.....	30
Thematic Overview.....	31
Themes.....	32
Style.....	34
Historical Context.....	36
Critical Overview.....	38
Criticism.....	40
Critical Essay #1.....	41
Critical Essay #2.....	44
Critical Essay #3.....	49
Adaptations.....	55
Topics for Further Study.....	56



What Do I Read Next?..... 57

Topics for Discussion..... 58

Ideas for Reports and Papers..... 59

Literary Precedents..... 60

Further Study..... 61

Bibliography..... 63

Copyright Information..... 64



Introduction

When *The Old Man and the Sea* was published in 1952 to wide critical acclaim, it had been twelve years since Ernest Hemingway's previous critical success, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. His major writing effort during the intervening period, *Across the River and Into the Trees*, published in 1950, had been widely dismissed as a near-parody of the author's usual style and themes. *The Old Man and the Sea*, however, was a popular success, selling 5.3 million copies within two days of its publication in a special edition of *Life* magazine. A few complaints about the stilted language of some of the Spanish transliterations came from critics. Some also found Santiago's philosophizing unrealistic. Nevertheless, the story won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953. A year later, Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. The Nobel committee singled out the story's "natural admiration for every individual who fights the good fight in a world of reality overshadowed by violence and death," (noted Susan F. Beegel in "Conclusion: The Critical Reputation of Ernest Hemingway"). Although Hemingway's writing continued to be published, much of it posthumously after the author's suicide in 1961, *The Old Man and the Sea* is generally considered by many to be his crowning achievement. The work was especially praised for its depiction of a new dimension to the typical Hemingway hero, less macho and more respectful of life. In Santiago, Hemingway had finally achieved a character who could face the human condition and survive without cynically dismissing it or dying while attempting to better it. In Santiago's relationship with the world and those around him, Hemingway had discovered a way to proclaim the power of love in a wider and deeper way than in his previous works.

Overview

The Old Man and the Sea is one of the most popular and moving works of the twentieth century. When The Old Man and the Sea first appeared in the September 1, 1952, issue of Life magazine, millions of people stood in line at newsstands to purchase a copy; 5,300,000 copies were sold in two days.

The excitement generated by the novella, rare for such a serious piece of literature, can be traced to its unforgettable portrait of the old fisherman, Santiago, and its vivid presentation of the novella's other principal presence: the sea.

The Old Man and the Sea probes basic questions of life and death, and explores humankind's relationship with nature.

Free of the sentimentality that often characterizes stories dealing with nature and animals, the story still carries emotional impact. Above all, it is an action story, with the great noble marlin, the malignant savage sharks, and the wise, skillful, and patient old man holding center stage.



Author Biography

Ernest Hemingway was born in Oak Park, Illinois, in 1899. He was the second son of Clarence Hemingway, a doctor, and Grace Hall Hemingway, who had been an aspiring opera singer. While his father encouraged his son's athletic and outdoor skills, his mother fostered her son's artistic talents. In school, Hemingway was an active, if not outstanding, athlete. He wrote poems and articles for the school newspaper, and he also tried his hand at stories. After graduation Hemingway became a reporter on the *Kansas City Star*, where he learned the newspaper's preferred style of simple declarative sentences that was to permanently influence his own style of writing.

In May of 1918, Hemingway volunteered for duty in World War I, serving as an ambulance driver on the Italian front. This experience later served as the source material for *A Farewell to Arms*. He, like the novel's protagonist, was wounded in the legs. However, instead of being returned to the front he was sent home, where he was greeted as a celebrity. He spent months convalescing at the family cabin in Michigan. Having recovered, in 1920, Hemingway moved to Toronto where he functioned as companion to a disabled youth. There, he again entered the world of writing by working for the *Toronto Star*. After marrying, he became a correspondent with the paper. His position enabled him to begin pursuing a career as a novelist. He and his wife, Hadley Richardson, left for Paris, where Hemingway associated with a group of other authors known collectively as the "Lost Generation." The group included James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, and Ford Madox Ford.

Awaiting the birth of their child, the Hemingways returned to Toronto in 1923. Following the birth of their son John, the family went back to Paris. There Hemingway spent a year and a half editing a literary magazine. 1925 to 1929 proved to be a prolific period for Hemingway, who wrote and published the short story collection *In Our Time* and the novels *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Farewell to Arms*, as well as others. The end of the 1920s was marred, however, by his divorce from Hadley in 1927 and by the suicide of his father in 1928. In the same period, Pauline Pfeiffer, whom Hemingway married the same year as his divorce, nearly died while she was giving birth to their child. This experience later found its way into the death of the character Catherine Barkley in *A Farewell to Arms*.

The 1930s, on the other hand, were filled with writing and adventure, as Hemingway hunted in Africa, fished in the Gulf Stream near Cuba, and reported on the Spanish Civil War for the *North American Newspaper Alliance*. During the mid-1930s Hemingway began gathering material for *The Sea*, one part of which eventually became *The Old Man and the Sea*. The other parts, as edited by Charles Scribner, were later published posthumously in 1970 as *Islands in the Stream*.

In 1940 Hemingway left Pfeiffer for Martha Gellhorn. The same year he published *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Hemingway and Gellhorn then went to China. Next, he became a war correspondent with the U.S. Fourth Infantry Division where he met Mary Welsh. In 1946, one year after divorcing Gellhorn, he married Welsh.

The Old Man and the Sea won the Pulitzer Prize in 1952. Two years later, Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature. But as he approached his sixties, Hemingway's health began deteriorating. The once robust adventurer now suffered from hypertension, mild diabetes, depression, and paranoia. Despite treatment for mental health issues, Hemingway committed suicide on July 2, 1961. He is remembered as one of the great stylistic innovators of modern American literature.

About the Author

Ernest Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, Illinois, the son of Grace and Clarence Edmonds Hemingway. Hemingway first published his writing in the Oak Park High School newspaper, and he began his journalistic apprenticeship as a teenage reporter for the *Kansas City Star* in 1917. Although his family expected him to attend college, Hemingway was drawn instead toward the excitement of World War I. In the spring of 1918 he volunteered with the American Red Cross as an ambulance driver on the frontline in Italy; in July 1918, two weeks shy of his nineteenth birthday, he was wounded in battle.

After recovering from his wounds, and until he was able to make a living writing fiction, Hemingway supported himself as a journalist. He lived in Paris in the early 1920s and worked as a foreign correspondent for the *Toronto Star*. His first important work of fiction, a collection of short stories entitled *In Our Time*, appeared in 1925, followed in 1926 by *The Sun Also Rises*, considered a classic novel of the twentieth century. For the next three decades, Hemingway published one best-selling volume after another, including *A Farewell to Arms*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), and *The Old Man and the Sea*. One of the most famous and influential novelists in history, Hemingway is known for his precise, innovative prose style and his unique vision of experience.

Hemingway married Hadley Richardson in 1921; following their divorce, he married Pauline Pfeiffer in 1927. That marriage also ended in divorce, and Hemingway married Martha Gelhom in 1940, only to divorce her and marry Mary Welsh in 1945. His macho public image—hunter, aficionado of bullfighting, drinker, and womanizer—made him a celebrity. The author's persona tended to overshadow Hemingway's actual writing, and many readers, caught up in the superficial and glamorous aspects of his life and career, overlooked the timeless, fundamental values that anchored his fiction. The Hemingway code has often been summed up by the author's own phrase "grace under pressure," yet many observers fail to see that this "grace" is not only physical, but moral and spiritual as well. Much of Hemingway's important fiction is valuecentered and profoundly religious.

None of Hemingway's fiction was written specifically for young adults. Yet, as with many classic authors, many of his works appeal to adults and young adults alike. Hemingway's short stories and some of his longer fiction, especially *The Old Man and the Sea*, are taught in schools around the world, and young adult editions of *The Old Man and the Sea* have appeared in many languages.

Hemingway received many awards, including the Pulitzer Prize for *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1953, and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. On July 2, 1961, Hemingway committed suicide at his home in Ketchum, Idaho.



Plot Summary

An Unlucky Boat

The Old Man and the Sea tells the story of Santiago, an aging Cuban fisherman, who alone in his small boat faces the most difficult fight of his life against an enormous marlin. At the beginning of the short novel, Santiago has lost his fisherman's luck; he has gone eighty-four days without catching a marketable fish. Even his closest friend, a village boy he taught to fish, has left him to work on another boat. The local fishermen make fun of Santiago or feel sorry for him, but he himself remains hopeful and undefeated. Every day he rises early, prepares his skiff, and rows far out into the Gulf Stream in search of marlin.

Though ordered by his parents to work on a luckier boat, the boy still loves Santiago, and he visits the old man's simple shack when he can. Once married, Santiago now lives alone in increasing poverty. He has little to eat, and frequently must rely on the boy or others in the village to bring him food and clothing. As they share their meals, Santiago and the boy discuss baseball and the important players of the period, especially "the great DiMaggio." The old man tells of his early life working on ships that sailed to Africa. When he sleeps, Santiago dreams of being young again and seeing "lions on the beaches in the evening."

The Truly Big Fish

Early one morning the old man rises, shares coffee with the boy, and sets out for the far reaches of the fishing grounds. He passes all the other fishermen, who stop to work "the great well," the point where the ocean drops off suddenly to seven hundred fathoms. He watches for flying fish or other signs of bait that might signal the presence of larger fish. Soon he catches a small albacore and, using it for bait, quickly hooks something very large. Though he pulls as hard as he can on the line, Santiago cannot move the great weight on the other end. The big fish refuses to surface and begins to swim out to sea, towing the skiff behind it.

Eat it so that the point of the hook goes into your heart and kills you, he thought. Come up easy and let me put the harpoon into you. All right. Are you ready? Have you been long enough at table?"Now!" he said aloud and struck hard with both hands, gained a yard of line and then struck again and again, swinging with each arm alternately on the cord with all the strength of his arms and the pivoted weight of his body. Nothing happened. The fish just moved away slowly and the old man could not raise him an inch. His line was strong and made for heavy fish and he held it against his back until it was so taut that beads of water were jumping from it. Then it began to make a slow hissing sound in the water and he still held it, bracing himself against the thwart and leaning back against the pull. The boat began to move slowly off toward the north-west.



Alone and unable to release the tightening line, Santiago struggles to hold onto the fish. Without the boy to help him, he knows that either he or the fish will die from this. His body is old but still strong, and he maintains his grip on the line despite his age and increasing discomfort. After several hours, night falls, but he never considers giving up. He realizes that he will need to eat to keep up his strength, and as the sun begins to rise the next day he consumes one of the small tuna he caught the day before.

During the second day, the great fish surfaces just long enough for Santiago to see him. The sight of the great marlin, "two feet longer than the skiff," inspires the old man. He remembers a time in his younger days when he arm wrestled a man in a Casablanca tavern. The match began on a Sunday morning and lasted the entire night, ending the following morning when Santiago forced his opponent's hand to the wood. Night comes again and the old man realizes that he needs to sleep. He wraps the line around his shoulders and cramps his body against it. Then he sleeps and dreams of the lions.

When Santiago wakes it is still dark, though the moon has come out. While he was sleeping, the great fish has risen to the surface, and now Santiago can hear the marlin thrashing and jumping in the distance. As the old man gathers all his strength to hold onto the line, the marlin begins to circle the boat, and Santiago knows he has won. After several turns, the fish pulls closer, brushing the sides of the boat, and the old man, seeing his chance, drives his harpoon into its side. With a final struggle that sends spray over the entire skiff, the fish dies, its dark blood staining the blue water.

Destroyed But Not Defeated

Now many miles out to sea, the old man lashes the great fish to the side of his skiff and sets his small sail for home. After about an hour of smooth sailing, however, his luck runs out. A shark, following the trail of blood left by the huge fish, bites into the body, taking a large piece of flesh. Santiago manages to kill the "dentuso" with his harpoon, but he realizes that more sharks will follow. He begins to wonder whether he committed a sin in killing the great marlin, but before he has time to decide, the sharks close in. Fighting a hopeless battle, the old man kills several of the large "galanos" before he loses first his harpoon and then his knife. By the time the skiff reaches the village, little remains of the great fish but the head and skeleton.

Convinced that he "went out too far" and bears responsibility for the loss of the fish, the exhausted Santiago returns to his shack and falls asleep. The fishermen in the village marvel at the mutilated fish; at eighteen feet, it is the largest marlin they have ever seen. The boy brings the old man food and fresh clothes and watches over him as he sleeps.



Detailed Summary & Analysis

Summary

The old man, a fisherman, has gone for 84 days without catching a single fish. This is considered *salao*, or extreme unluckiness, in the small Cuban fishing village where he lives. After the first 40 days, the parents of the boy who normally fishes with him force him to switch to a more profitable boat, and they catch three good fish in the first week he is on board. The boy is sad to have had to leave the old man he has fished with for so long, and each evening when the old man comes in empty-handed, the boy goes to help him bring in his equipment.

On the 85th day, the boy tells the old man that he can rejoin his boat, thanks to the lucky week of fishing he had had on the other boat. The old man is the one who taught the boy to fish, and the boy has a deep love and feeling of loyalty towards the old man. The old man tells him to stay on the lucky boat while the luck runs. The boy reminds him of the last dry spell they had had together, and of how on the 87th day their luck had changed and they caught large fish every day for three weeks. The old man remembers this well, and tells the boy that he knows the boy did not leave him out of disloyalty.

The boy and the old man sit and have a beer on the Terrace. Some of the fishermen make fun of the old man, and others are sad for him. The old man is not angry at being made fun of, and is happy for the simple pleasure of having a beer with his friend. As they sit drinking their beer, the boy offers to go out and get sardines for the old man for the following day. The old man declines, telling him to go and play baseball with his friends. The boy returns that he would like to help the old man in any way he can. The boy asks the old man how old he was when he first took him out to sea. The old man does not hesitate, remembering it as clearly as if it had been yesterday. He tells the boy that he was five, and that the boy had nearly been killed by a fish that the old man caught that was too large for the boat. The boy says that he remembers the tail slapping, banging, the thwart breaking and the noises of the old man, then not so old, clubbing the fish to death. He questions the boy remembering so vividly, but the boy tells him that he remembers everything from when they first started fishing together. He once again asks the old man to let him get sardines and bait for the following day. The old man consents. The boy asks where he'll be fishing the next day, and the old man tells him that he'll be far out, and hopes to be out at sea before it's light. The boy tells him that he will tell the owner of the lucky boat to go far out as well, in case the old man catches a big fish and needs help.

Together they take the old man's equipment up to his small shack. They go through the same motions that they have gone through for years. "May I take the cast net?" the boy asks, knowing that the cast net was sold long ago. "What do you have to eat?" the boy asks, knowing that the old man will answer that he will eat a fictitious pot of yellow rice with fish, when in reality he has nothing. The boy goes out to get the sardines and bait, leaving the old man sitting in the sun reading the newspaper about the baseball scores.



They are both Yankees fans, but while the boy is concerned about the Indians of Cleveland defeating the Yankees, the old man has faith in the abilities of the great DiMaggio to overcome any adversary.

When the boy comes back from getting the sardines, the old man is asleep. He notes the man's powerful but old shoulders as he lays an army blanket over him, and his tattered shirt that has been patched so many times that it looks like a boat sail.

When the boy comes back again, the old man is still sleeping. He wakes him gently, and tells him he has brought him some supper. The old man tries to say he is not hungry, but the boy encourages him, telling him "You'll not fish without eating while I'm alive." The old man finally consents to eating what the boy has brought him. They sit down to eat, and the boy asks the old man about the baseball. The old man tells him that in the American League the Yankees are ahead. The boy tells him that they lost today, but the old man shrugs it off happily, telling the boy that the great DiMaggio has recovered from his injury. They reminisce about the day that the great Dick Sisler came to the Terrace, and both the old man and the boy were too shy to invite him to go fishing with them. He comments to the boy that when he was the boy's age, he had already sailed to Africa and had seen the lions on the beach in the evening. The boy patiently tells the old man that he had already told the boy about Africa, and suggests that they continue talking about baseball. They talk about the greatest managers, and the boy suddenly comments that the old man is the greatest fisherman ever. The old man is happy for the compliment, and thanks the boy. The boy urges the old man to get some sleep for the following day, and the old man promises to wake the boy in the morning.

The old man falls asleep almost immediately. He dreams vividly however, not of women, or great occurrences, of fights or fish, but of Africa. He dreams of the Africa of his youth, of the hot white beaches, the high capes, the great brown mountains, and the lions on the beach. "They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy. He never dreamed about the boy."

When he wakes, he pulls on his trousers and shivering with cold walks to the boy's house. He enters through the unlocked door, and gently touches the boy's foot to wake him. He sees the boy struggling against his boyish sleepiness, and apologizes softly.

They put the gear in their respective boats, and then drink coffee with condensed milk. The old man drinks his coffee slowly, as he knows it is all he will have until he returns from sea. Finally, they rise, wish each other good luck, and the old man sets off alone in his boat.

The old man has decided that he will stake the outer lying areas of the sea as his fishing grounds for the day, so he rows swiftly, with only the dipping of other fishermen's paddles in the water for company in the still dark early morning air. Soon even those sounds are gone as he pulls farther away than many will venture that day. The man-made sounds are replaced by the hissing of the flying fish hurling themselves through the air.



The old man rows steadily and when the sun begins to rise he finds that he is further out than he thought. He lets down his bait, one down forty fathoms, the second at seventy-five, the third at one hundred and the fourth at one hundred and twenty-five.

The old man sees a man-of-war bird circling in the sky close to his boat, an indication that there are fish close by. He sees flying fish jump out of the water, and thinks that there must be a dolphin chasing the flying fish that the man-of-war bird is eyeing. The dolphin chases the fish away from the boat, but soon after he sees that, the man-of-war bird has spotted some more fish. He catches an albacore tuna, which he can use as bait for larger fish. "He'll weigh ten pounds," he says aloud to himself.

He does not know how long he has been talking aloud to himself. He remembers that he used to sing aloud to himself when he worked on the turtle hunting boat, but thinks that he may have started talking to himself just since the boy had left. A tug on his line interrupts his musings. There is a fish eating his sardine bait, and he begins to pray and hope wildly that the fish will bite. The tugging stops for a moment, and then starts again moments later.

When he is satisfied that the fish has taken hold of the bait, he pulls hard on the line. The line does not give an inch, and it is stretched taut almost to breaking point. The fish begins to swim slowly, pulling the boat along with him. The old man wishes fervently for the boy, but is grateful that at least the fish is traveling parallel to the surface and not down. The old man thinks to himself that the pace will kill him, but four hours later, they are still traveling steadily northwestward. He feels strong, and is confident that he can outlast his adversary, although he wishes for a glimpse of the fish to know what he is facing. The fish keeps the same pace in the same direction all throughout the night. The old man drinks some water, changes position and urinates over the side of the boat, but apart from that does not move all his energy and attention focused on the fish at the other end of his line. He wishes again for the boy, and thinks briefly that no one should be alone in his or her old age. He reminds himself that in the morning he must eat the tuna he caught earlier in the day, for strength.

Before daylight, he feels another fish take the bait on one of his other lines. He cuts it swiftly, not wanting to take the risk that it would interfere with his fish. He makes the necessary adjustments of his line to ensure that it would not happen again. "Fish," he says, "I'll stay with you until I am dead." He tightens the line slightly, trying to force the fish to jump out of the water, enabling him to see his opponent and forcing the fish to fill his air sacks with air, ensuring that he would not swim down into the depths of the sea to die. However, the line is already tight to the point of breaking, and the old man eases up.

When daylight comes, he sees that the fish has not allowed himself to be turned by the current, but continues to swim northward steadily. "Fish," he vows aloud once again, trying to bring himself courage, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends."



A warbler comes and settles on the line, and the old man begins to talk to him. He is happy for the companionship, as his back is now causing him great pain. Suddenly the fish gives a mighty pull, almost tipping the old man overboard. The old man notices that his hand has been cut and his bird friend has flown away. "You're feeling it now, fish," says the old man, "and so, God knows, am I." He chides himself for allowing himself to be caught off guard, and reminds himself that he must eat the tuna before it begins to rot. He wishes once again for the boy. He sticks his hand in the ocean to wash the blood away, and notices by the flow of the water against his hand that the fish has slowed considerably.

He cuts his tuna into six slimy red pieces, throwing the rest of the carcass overboard. As he is cutting the tuna with his right hand, his left hand begins to cramp. He is disgusted with the betrayal of his own body. "What kind of a hand is that," he wonders aloud, angry. "Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good." He quickly forces down the tuna in an effort to bring strength back to his almost lifeless hand.

The hand continues to cramp, and he hopes fervently that when the sun comes out and when he digests his fish and the sun comes out his fingers will unfurl from their useless position. "I hate a cramp," he thinks. "It is the treachery of one's own body. It is humiliating before others to have a diarrhea from ptomaine poisoning or to vomit from it. But a cramp, he thought of it as a calambre, humiliates oneself especially when one is alone." He thinks repeatedly of the boy, and how he would rub the cramp out if he was there. Suddenly, he is startled out of his reverie, because the line begins to come up, and his great fish surfaces. "He came out unendingly and water poured from his sides. He was bright in the sun, and his head and back were dark purple and in the sun, the stripes on his sides showed wide and a light lavender. His sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and he rose his full length from the water and then re-entered it, smoothly, like a diver."

After seeing the fish, he must come to grips with the fact that physically, he is no match for it, and that the only thing the old man has going for him is his intelligence and his willpower. Although he is not religious, he decides to say Hail Marys and Our Fathers to assist in his quest to conquer the fish. He feels better, and his hand by noon has uncramped. Although he is in extreme pain from being in the same position for so long, he is still lucid, and decides to re-bait one of his other lines to try to catch another fish to eat, in case the battle continues throughout the night.

When night falls once again, the old man remembers a tavern in Casablanca, when he arm-wrestled with the great Negro from Cienfuegos, who was reputed to be the strongest man on the docks. They wrestled for a full day and a full night, each trying to get the other's hand to the table. Blood oozed from the fingernails of each man's hand, and referees were changed every four hours. On the morning of the next day, the old man, who was then a young strong man, defeated the giant Negro athlete. From then on, he was called Santiago El Campeon, or The Champion, and when he was challenged to a return match in the spring, he had won it easily, "since he had broken the confidence of the Negro from Cienfuegos in the first match. After that, he had a few



matches and then no more. 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." He tried to arm wrestle with his left hand a few times, but "his left hand had always been a traitor and would not do what he called on it to do and he did not trust it."

Just before dark, his line is taken by a dolphin. He brings it into the skiff with his left hand, and clubs it to death. He decides to wait until later to butcher the dolphin later, to save the blood in the meat.

He assesses his situation and assets in comparison to the fish and is satisfied. Whereas the fish has had nothing to eat, he has eaten and has the dolphin that should last the night and next day. The cut on his right hand has closed, and his left hand has uncramped. The pain in his back worries him, but he does not have to pull a boat as the fish does. He speaks to the fish aloud, saying, "How do you feel fish? I feel good and my left hand is better and I have food for a night and a day. Pull the boat, fish."

He contemplates his next task, which is to create a permanent drag on the boat with his oars, thus making it more difficult for the fish to pull the boat. He decides to try to rest for a while, as he finds his thoughts wandering and his mind not sharp enough to make a decision and complete the chore.

He rests for a couple of hours, allowing the skiff to bear part of the weight of the fish pulling. He wishes he could tie the line to the skiff directly, but without the give of his body and hands against the line, the fish could break the line with one pull.

When he feels himself to be slightly more lucid, he works his way to the back of the boat. He guts the dolphin with his knife, finding two completely fresh flying fish inside the dolphin's stomach. He brings the dolphin meat, along with the flying fish, up to the front of the boat. He quickly eats half of one of the dolphin fillets, and a whole flying fish, and is pleased that he does not feel nauseated by his raw meal. He decides to allow himself some sleep while the fish is swimming calmly. He dreams vividly about a sea of porpoises mating, then of being in his village in bed. Finally, he dreams again of the golden beaches and of the lions.

When the moon is high in the sky he wakes suddenly to the line running quickly through his right hand. He gropes with his left hand, and finally finds the line, but is unable to completely stop the line from feeding through his cut hands. The fish leaps out of the water, and falls back with a splash. The first jump had thrown the old man off balance, and he is now lying face down in the remains of the dolphin. The fish continues to jump as he lies, immobile, thinking that he must make the fish pay for the line he is gaining, holding tight to the line. As the line cuts deeply into his hands, the old man wishes fervently once again that the boy was there to help him battle the great fish.

The old man regains his footing, and is able to hold the line more easily. He feels more confident, knowing that the fish has now filled his sacks with air, and cannot plunge into the depths of the sea, which would make it impossible for the old man to bring the fish



up again. He wonders what made the fish jump so suddenly after swimming so steadily for so long. He thinks that perhaps the fish suddenly felt his mortality, and recognizes once again that he himself must be at his strongest and most confident to beat this great fish.

He washes the dolphin smell from his face, afraid that it will nauseate him and make him weak. He assesses the damage done to his hands, and plunges his right hand, which has been cut badly by the line, into the water. He leaves it there for some time, allowing the salt to close his cuts. He then does the same with his left hand, talking to it all the while. "You did not do so badly for something worthless. But there was a moment when I could not find you... If he cramps again let the line cut him off." He thinks to himself that he must eat the dolphin, as his thoughts are becoming addled. He decides that the nausea it would cause him would be worse than the addled thoughts, but manages to eat the flying fish instead. Now he is ready and waits for the fish to start circling and the real fight to begin.

As the sun begins to rise for the third time since he set out, the fish starts to circle. The old man takes in line slowly but steadily. He thinks that the circle should be sufficiently shortened for him to be able to see the fish within one hour. Two hours later, the fish is still circling widely, and the old man is deeply tired. He promises up a hundred Hail Marys and a hundred Our Fathers. "Consider them said," he thinks, "I'll say them later."

He suddenly feels the line jerk strongly. It is the fish hitting the line with his tail, and the old man hopes that the fish does not shake the hook from his mouth. The old man assures himself that he can outlast the fish. He rests as the fish circles on the far side of the boat, then reels him in as he circles on the near side. He acknowledges that he is more tired than he has ever been, but tries to convince himself that he will survive. On the third turn, the fish is close enough for him to see. At first, he is sure he is not seeing the fish, it was certainly too big, and then he realizes that it is indeed his fish, huge and lavender, with a tail like a scythe blade. The man begins to sweat from anticipation and excitement certain that in two turns more he will be close enough to harpoon him. He tries to turn the fish on the next circle, and the fish turns slightly then rights himself. The same thing happens on the next circle, and the old man says aloud, "Fish, you are going to have to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?"

His thoughts begin to get hazy, his hands have long since turned to mush and he can only see well in flashes. The fish continues to turn in wide circles. During each circle, the man tries to turn the fish, and each time it is the same. The old man is finally at the point of complete exhaustion and delirium, and knows he has only one more strong pull in him. He summons all his might, and gives one last pull. The fish, exhausted, is pulled onto his side. The old man quickly steps on the line and picks up his harpoon. He holds it high over his head, and brings it down into the belly of the great fish. The fish comes alive, jumping out of the water, and then landing heavily with a splash that drenches the old man, reviving him slightly, along with the adrenalin of knowing that the final fight has arrived.



Finally the fish lies still in the water, beaten. The old man is beyond weariness, but knows he must finish the work he has begun. The tasks that lie ahead of him are to noose the fish and strap him to the side of his skiff, because the boat would never hold the weight of such a fish, and then to raise the sail and set out for shore. That done he is able to concentrate on nourishing and hydrating his body for the long ride home. He is able to catch some small shrimps, and chews and swallows them down quickly, along with one quarter of his remaining water.

The old man continually looks at his prize, as they sail together towards shore, to reassure him self that it is real, and not a dream, like his lions. They are sailing well, with a good breeze behind them. They sail for an hour before the first shark attacks the fish. The old man's head is instantly clear and his senses are alert as he reaches for his harpoon to defend his prize. He hits the shark squarely and determinedly between the eyes. He aims to kill, and is successful, but so large is the shark that he takes the harpoon down with him when he begins to sink down into the icy depths. Although the shark seems to have taken about 40 pounds of meat from the fish, the old man is proud that he has defended his fish so well. He realizes however, that there will be others.

To re-arm himself, the old man takes his knife from its sheath and straps it firmly to one of his oars. He thinks to himself that they will sail homeward faster now for the loss of 40 pounds of meat, and is once again hopeful. Armed and full of hope he awaits the next onslaught. While he waits, he pulls some meat from the fish where the shark had bitten and eats it. He notes the high quality of the meat and guesses that it would bring the highest price at the market.

Two hours later more sharks have caught the scent of the great fish. They are two shovel-nosed sharks, a hateful species to the old man, foul-smelling scavengers. The first one is easily speared in the head with the knife, and sinks down into the water. The second one is more difficult, as he has chosen to feast on the underbelly of the fish, away from the range of the old man's spear. The old man quickly maneuvers the boat to expose the shark, and spears him. The first spear does no damage, but he spears a second, third and fourth time, and finally the shark is dead. He speaks aloud to the fish. "They must have taken a quarter of him, and of the best meat. I wish it were a dream and that I had never hooked him. I am sorry about it, fish."

The next shark to come was another shovel-nosed shark. The old man let him take a bite of the fish, and then speared him. The hit was effective, but as the shark jerked back the knife snapped, leaving the old man and his fish defenseless in the open water. The old man goes back to steering without taking the satisfaction to watch the predator sink down into the water. He makes a mental note of the potential weapons he has to defend his fish, the gaff, the two oars, the tiller and the short club.

The next two sharks come right before sunset, and the man summons all of his strength to club them to death. They take much meat and much of the old man's energy before they sink.



He refuses to look at the fish anymore. The fish is half-eaten by sharks, and the old man is ashamed at the sight of the magnificent creature he has needlessly killed. He suddenly thinks groggily to himself that if he still had his knife he could have cut the great spear off the fish's head and strapped it to an oar, and they could have defended what little was left of their honor together. However, there was no knife, and they are all but defenseless as they sail towards the shore. As it gets dark, he wonders to himself how they will make it home alive. "Fight them," he answers. "I'll fight them until I die."

He receives no comfort from the lights he is expecting to see of the city when the sun has set. Darkness settles all around him, and he wonders if perhaps he is already dead. He tells himself not to be ridiculous, and the throbbing pain in his body is so severe that he is certain he is not dead. At what he calculates to be around ten at night, he begins to make out the faint lights of the city ahead. He is grateful, but is hit once again by sharks, a whole pack of them this time, and in the engulfing darkness he can only swing his club wildly at shapes and shadows. This he does, until in his weariness he accidentally drops the club. They continue to tear at the fish, and he jerks the tiller from the rudder, beating the sharks off until that too breaks. When it is broken, he has a sharp, splintering weapon, and as the last shark takes the last bite of the very head of the fish, the last remaining part of the fish, he stabs with his weapon and the shark lurks away. There are no more sharks now, as there is no more meat for them to eat. He fits the tiller back into the rudder, and thinks of nothing now except for getting home.

When he finally reaches the shore the lights of the Terrace are off, and everyone is in bed. He hauls in his boat, and ties her to a rock. He ties the sail, and hoists the mast onto his tired shoulders, beginning the long climb up the hill. His weariness hits him full force now, and he falls under the weight of the mast. His exhaustion crushes him, and he lies on the ground where he fell, the mast on top of him. After a while, he knows not how long, he regains his strength sufficiently to get up, but has to sit down to rest five times before reaching his hut. When he arrives, he finds a drink of water in the darkness, covers himself with a blanket, and falls asleep in his bed.

The next morning the boy finds him lying in the same position. He is breathing, but as the boy looks at his badly cut hands, he begins to cry. He goes to get coffee for the old man, crying softly as he walks to the coffee stand. In town, everyone has seen the skeleton of the great fish strapped to the old man's boat. The boy had seen it earlier, and wishes to speak to no one. He is told that the fish skeleton measured a full 18 feet long, and everyone sends their condolences to the old man for the loss of such a great fish. The boy answers only that Santiago is not to be disturbed, and he does not care that people see him crying.

The boy takes the coffee back to the hut, and sits by the old man's bed until he wakes. The boy waits patiently, and finally Santiago wakes. "They beat me, Manolin, they truly beat me," he says as he is drinking some of the sweet rich coffee that the boy has reheated for him. Manolin reminds him the fish did not beat him. The old man assents, and Manolin tells him that his boat is being taken care of, and asks him what he wants done with the head and tail, the last remaining parts of the fish. Santiago says that the head can be used as bait, and that Manolin could have the spear-like tail if he wanted it.



Manolin wants it, and swears that from that day forth they will only fish together. The old man asks about his family, and Manolin replies that he will bring his luck to Santiago's boat so that they can fish successfully together.

Manolin goes away, promising to return with food and the newspapers of the past few days. As he leaves, he begins to cry again.

That day some tourists happen upon the massive fish skeleton in the harbor. They ask one of the locals what it was, and are told "Tiburón," or shark, by way of explanation. They think that the local means that it is the skeleton of a shark, not understanding the 5 days of needless pain and suffering to which the one-word answer referred. On the other side of the town, Manolin is sitting by the bed of the old man, weeping as he watches him sleep. The old man sleeps peacefully, dreaming of lions.

Analysis

The unique relationship between the old man and the boy is one of the highlights of this novella. It seems as though the boy has more loyalty and love for the old man than even his own parents, who he refers to slightly disdainfully. They are not fishermen--it seems-- and the old man and the boy are joined by the bonds of the countless hours they have spent alone together at sea. When the boy offers the old man a beer, the old man replies, "why not? Between fishermen." It also seems that the boy is somewhat alone in his love for the old man, as the other fisherman and townspeople laugh at his misfortunes, thinking him unlucky and past the age of a successful fisherman. This creates a solitary figure in the old man, more so since the boy's parents forced him to stop fishing with the old man, and this solitary hero is a familiar figure in many of Hemingway's works.

The old man is described as "thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks...his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords. However, none of these scars was fresh. They were as old as erosions in a fishless desert. Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." This description sets up the theme of a multitude of battles that the old man faces. Old age is certainly one of these battles, along with sharks, sleep deprivation, hunger and thirst, and of course the fish itself. As with his cheerful eyes, shining hopefully in an old and decrepit body, the old man remains undefeated, until the very end of his battle with the sea.

The boy asks the old man if he feels up to catching another really big fish. The old man answers that what he lacks in strength he will make up for in his many years worth of tricks he has learned at sea. This question foreshadows what the bulk of the novella will be, an old man pitted against an enormous fish.



One of the main themes of this book is hope. After 84 days of unlucky fishing, Hemingway writes "his hope and confidence had never gone. But now they were freshening as when the breeze rises."

It is immediately evident that whereas once the old man had taken care of the young boy, the boy, now grown into a young man, is taking care of his old friend. As they are eating dinner together the boy thinks to himself, "I must have water here for him, and soap and a good towel. Why am I so thoughtless? I must get him another shirt and a jacket for the winter and some sort of shoes and another blanket."

After dinner, the great fish that may get the better of the old man is foreshadowed once again. The boy compliments the old man, saying that he is the greatest fisherman. The old man thanks him for the compliment, and says "You make me happy. I hope no fish will come along so great that he will prove us wrong." "There is no such fish if you are still strong as you say," the boy responds. This dialog, along with the various mentions of 85 being a lucky day, foreshadows that the following day something important will happen in the lives of the old man and the boy. Hemingway's taut journalistic style and staccato dialog makes us excited and ready for the events to come.

In the morning as they are drinking coffee the boy asks the old man how he slept, and he replies, "Very well, Manolin. I feel confident today." We have just now learned the boy's name, which is also indicative of Hemingway's sparse narrative style. Hemingway, in his own unique style, does away with all superfluous details, paring away names, emotions, and reactions to present the reader with a story that forces us to draw our own conclusions with regards to emotions and reactions, and rely on the hard-hitting, profound dialog that is Hemingway's trademark for his richly developed characters' thoughts and ideas.

The old man had always thought of the sea in the feminine, and calls her *la mar*, "which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her." Some of the younger fishermen refer to her as *el mar*, and thought of the sea "as a contestant or a place or even an enemy." The old man thought of her always as a woman, and "as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman." One aspect of Hemingway's writing that makes it distinctive is his evident love of and familiarity with the Spanish language. Hemingway spent a great deal of time in Spain and Cuba, and brings phrases and peculiarities of the Spanish language into his literature, although it is written in English.

Once he drops his lines into the deep waters, we find that the old man's sense of hope is more than simply blind hope, but is a mixture of skill as well. He looks at his lines, and observes that he keeps them straighter than any other fisherman does, so that at each level, the bait is there waiting where he wants it to be for the right fish. Other fishermen let them drift with the current, and that sometimes the bait lingers at sixty fathoms when they think they are at one hundred. "I keep them with precision," he says. "Only I have no luck anymore. But who knows? Maybe today. Every day is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." This



combination of precision and luck, along with an iron will, will assist him in his upcoming battle with the big fish.

During the night, the old man begins to think with sadness of the fish. He thinks, "he is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is...Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely. Perhaps he is too wise to jump. He could ruin me by jumping or by a wild rush. But perhaps he has been hooked many times before and he knows that this is how he should make his fight. He cannot know that it is only one man against him, nor that it is an old man...But what a great fish he is...He took the bait like a male and he pulls like a male and his fight has no panic in it. I wonder if he has any plans or if he is just as desperate as I am?" The old man has begun to feel a kinship with the fish, and feels that they are equally pitted in battle.

It is important to note at this point that Hemingway is a big fan of bull fighting, a subject which appears frequently in other works of his. It's possible that the old man admires his opponent of being worthy of his years of fishing skills in the same way that a seasoned bullfighter admires the bull he is fighting and respects him if he is a worthy opponent, regardless of the outcome of the battle. It is not only bull fighting that captures Hemingway's imagination, but heroes of all kind, including soldiers, revolutionaries, and baseball players. Baseball is a recurring theme in the novella, and Hemingway points repeatedly to DiMaggio as the greatest baseball player of all time, a legend in his world as Santiago was once a legend in his.

The old man remembers, as he is pondering the male strength of his fish, a time when he caught a marlin. It was a female, caught first because the male marlin will always chivalrously allow the female to feed first. Once she was caught and brought on board, the male marlin stayed by the boat, and even once jumped high in the air to see what had happened to his companion. The loneliness of the male marlin brought back thoughts of the boy, and he contemplates his choice to allow himself to be dragged by his fish out into the depths of the sea, into the unknown. These melancholy thoughts of the old man make it clear to the reader that this journey out to sea, beyond the everyday loneliness of living without his wife, of fishing without the boy, clearly symbolize the old man's journey towards death.

However, this is not a religious experience for him, but a test of his will against that of another living creature. Nonetheless, once he has seen the size of his opponent, he decides that he will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys, and promises aloud to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre should he manage to catch the fish.

This quest is also about proving his worth to the boy and his parents, so that the boy may come back and fish with him again, or so that at least he would not die without the respect of the person who most mattered to him in the world. "The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it."

The old man thinks about sleeping, and about the lions that constantly haunt his dreams. The lions are a symbol of his youth, and of a time when he was easily strong



enough to conquer the big fish, or at least had companions to help him. The fish is a symbol of himself in his old age. Perhaps the battle with the great fish is not so much a battle against a fish, but a battle against himself, and it is he himself that he must prove his own worth to.

When the fish has finally begun to circle, the old man is more tired than he has ever been. He thinks suddenly that the fish is so great an opponent that it does not matter if he kills or is killed by the fish. He says, "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. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who." Although we do not yet know who will kill whom, we know that the man is old and frail, and is nearing his time to die. Perhaps Hemingway tells us that the fish, in his courage, calmness and nobility, is providing a role model for the old man to follow into death, even if he is not the cause of it.

Once again, after the fish has been caught and harpooned, when the old man is sailing south-westward towards the shore, when his thoughts have become unclear through exhaustion, the old man is unsure whether he is bringing in the fish, or if the fish is bringing him in. He points to the position of the fish as the source of his confusion. He thinks to himself confusedly that if the fish were being dragged behind the boat, or if he were inside the boat, there would be no question. "But they were sailing together lashed side by side and the old man thought, 'let him bring me in if it pleases him. I am only better than him through trickery and he meant me no harm.'" Could Hemingway be pointing to the old man's eventual failure at his task, or even death, by this permission? On the other hand, are the old man's thoughts at this point simply confused past recognition.

After the old man has killed the first shark that attacked his fish, his mind once again begins to wander as he waits for the next shark to attack. Was it a sin to kill the shark? Was it a sin to kill the fish? Is it a sin to be a fisherman? The old man admits to himself that he did not only kill the fish to feed others. He also killed it for pride. Once again the theme of the old man feeling the need to prove himself one last time to the boy, to his fellow fishermen, and to himself.

The ending of the novella is marked by both sadness and a feeling of finality. The boy is sad, because the solitary journey of the old man has brought him to death's doorstep, and that it is just a matter of time before the old man's body is no longer able to withstand the hardships it has suffered in the past three days. He weeps shamelessly for the loss of his friend. However, the old man is content. He has not brought home even a single pound of fish flesh to sell at the market. He has come back empty handed, half starved, dehydrated, and completely exhausted. However, he has not returned without certain triumphs. He has conquered the fish, possibly the greatest fish that any man has ever been pitted against. He has conquered the sea, returning home to see the boy one last time before joining his great fish for eternity.



Characters

Bodega Proprietor

Although he is unnamed in the story, the bodega proprietor serves the important function of representing those in the village who show their respect and admiration of Santiago by supporting him—in this case, by giving Santiago free coffee and newspapers.

Female Tourist

Although she has only one line in the story, the unnamed female tourist is important since in her mistaking the carcass of the marlin as that of a shark, she acts as a foil for Santiago's extraordinary knowledge of the sea.

Manolin

Manolin is a young man, based on someone Hemingway knew in Cuba who was then in his twenties. In the story, however, Manolin is referred to as "the boy." Like Santiago, Manolin comes from a family of fishermen and has long admired Santiago as a masterful practitioner of his trade. Although Manolin's father has forbidden him to go fishing with Santiago because of the old man's bad luck, Manolin nevertheless continues to visit Santiago and to help him in whatever ways he can. Manolin shows great concern for Santiago's health, especially after he sees how Santiago has suffered in catching the big marlin. As a mark of his friendship and respect for Manolin, Santiago has given him certain responsibilities from an early age, such as fetching bait and carrying the lines. By contrast, Manolin's own father only belittles his son's relationship with Santiago.

Even though Manolin appears only at the beginning and the end of the story, he is an important character. Manolin's conversations with Santiago, and Santiago's longing for the boy's company when he is alone, reveal the character of both men. Santiago is seen as a loving, patient, and brave man, both proud and humble, who accepts and appreciates life, despite all its hardships. Manolin is shown to be someone who loves and respects Santiago, and who realizes that he can learn things from the old man that he cannot learn at home.

Manolin undergoes an important change between the beginning and end of the story. At the beginning he still defers to the wishes of his parents that he not accompany Santiago fishing since the old man's luck has turned bad. By the end of the story, however, Manolin has resolved to go with the old man, lucky or not, in spite of his parents' wishes.



Manolin's Father

Manolin's father forbids Manolin from going out with Santiago after the old man's fortieth day without a fish. By the end of the story Manolin decides to disobey his father out of his love for Santiago.

Old Man

See Santiago

Pedrico

As a friend of Santiago, Pedrico helps the old man by giving him newspapers. After the old man's return from the sea, despite his wounds and exhaustion, Santiago remembers to carry out his promise to give Pedrico the head of the fish carcass.

Santiago

Santiago is an old fisherman of undetermined age. As a young man he traveled widely by ship and fondly remembers seeing lions on the beaches of East Africa. His wife died, and he has taken her picture down because it makes him sad to see it. Now he lives alone in a shack on the beach. Every day he sets forth alone in his boat to make a living.

When the story opens, Santiago has gone eighty-four days without catching a single fish. As a result, he is pitied and regarded by the other fishermen as unlucky. Santiago is still respected by some, however, because of his age and his perseverance. He is a very experienced fisherman who knows well the tricks of his trade, including which fish to use as bait.

Santiago also loves baseball and occasionally gambles. He identifies with Joe DiMaggio, the great center fielder for the Yankees in the 1940s and 1950s. Santiago admires how DiMaggio, whose father was a fisherman, plays in spite of bone spurs in his feet that cause him pain whenever he runs. As an old man, Santiago must also cope with the physical demands of his job in the face of the infirmities of his aging body. Yet he suffers without complaining, and it is this stoic attitude that has won him much respect in the community.

Santiago is not a religious person, but he does think about the meaning of life, and his religious references show that he is very familiar with Roman Catholic saints and prayers. Through the author's revelation of Santiago's own thoughts, and the conversations between Santiago and his relatively young companion, Manolin, readers come to sense that despite his setbacks and shortcomings, Santiago remains proud of himself, and this makes his humility both touching and real. Though he strives to attain



the most he can for himself, Santiago also accepts what life has given him without complaint.

This largeness of vision also allows Santiago to appreciate and respect nature and all living creatures, even though he must kill some of these creatures in order to live. For example, the old man recalls how he once hooked, brought in, and finally clubbed to death a female marlin, while her faithful mate never left her side once during the ordeal. "That was the saddest thing I ever saw," the old man comments. "The boy was sad too and we begged her pardon and butchered her promptly."

Hemingway first wrote about the true incident upon which his story is based in an article entitled "On the Blue Water: A Gulf Stream Letter" for the April 1936 issue of *Esquire* magazine. The actual incident took only two days; the fisherman, "half crazy" and crying, was picked up by others after fighting the sharks; and half the carcass was still left at the end. Hemingway's intentions in creating the character of Santiago may perhaps best be seen in examining how the author altered the true events to shape his telling of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

In Hemingway's later version, Santiago's hooking the fish, hauling it to the boat, fighting the sharks, and then bringing it home takes three days and is completed in heroic fashion with no outside help. Nothing remains of the fish at the end except its skeleton. No mention is made of the fisherman's state of mind other than that he wants to fish again as soon as he can.

Hemingway's changes clearly make Santiago more of a single heroic and tragic figure who fights alone, loses almost everything, and yet still is ready to meet life again. Thus, after a night's sleep and a promise from Manolin that from now on they will fish together, Santiago is making plans not just to resume his life but to strive even harder next time. Similarly, Hemingway turned an anecdote about a piteous, helpless fisherman into a parable of man's tragic but heroic struggle not merely to survive but, as fellow Nobelist William Faulkner expressed it, to endure.

Setting

The narrative takes place in the 1940s.

Although the opening and closing scenes take place on land in a small Cuban fishing village, the dominant setting is the Gulf Stream off the coast of Cuba. Hemingway believes the sea to be the last great unexplored territory on earth, and this work travels deeply into the nature of this mysterious setting.



Social Concerns

The Old Man and the Sea is a profound exploration of humankind's relationship with nature, and the human place in nature. Santiago's role as a fisherman who must catch fish in order to live in no way diminishes his deep love of nature and his extraordinary sensitivity to his environment. In fact his natural piety is in large part a function of his identity as fisherman (outsiders, touristically concerned with the "beauty of nature," have no access to the depth of Santiago's hard-earned vision of nature.)

Another important social concern deals with the importance of exemplars for the young, and the role of an exemplar outside the family in a young man's maturation process, as seen in the Santiago-Manolin relationship.

Their relationship points to another social concern, the notion of respect and concern for the aged, and the loneliness of old age. More importantly, perhaps, a paramount social concern here is Hemingway's timeless portrayal of the ways in which the simplest and poorest of human beings may possess the greatest human dignity and richness of character.

Social Sensitivity

Few writers have been more sensitive to nature, to the depths and the strengths of human character, and to the tragedy and the glory of human experience than Hemingway. All of his work is grounded in basic timeless values: courage, precision, skill, honor, honesty, and dignity. Much of his writing is profoundly religious, deeply spiritual but never preachy. Hemingway always examines the truth of experience, however dark or violent it may be; he does not deny the reality of evil and suffering and death, but he is equally concerned with the human struggle to transcend difficulty through the values and conduct that provide redemption.

Many readers will approach Hemingway with reservations about the violent and "macho" reputation of his work. *The Old Man and the Sea* does depict the violence inherent in nature and also contains some passages that could be considered sexist. For example, in an extended metaphor comparing the sea to a woman, Hemingway writes: "...the old man always thought of [the sea] as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought." But overall Hemingway's vision and his values are positive and appropriate to all human beings.

Techniques

The Old Man and the Sea employs straightforward prose and conventional narrative form and technique. Technically speaking, it is perhaps Hemingway's most conventional fiction. None of the modernist techniques — indirection, implication, allusion, omission, unexplained juxtaposition — that Hemingway so elaborately deploys in *In Our Time* (1925; see separate entry) and other works are used in this parablelike tale, which helps to explain why it reaches the widest audience of any Hemingway work.

Consider, for example, his use of symbolism to suggest that Santiago is a Christ-figure or, at the very least, that Santiago's suffering is analogous to Christ's suffering. After the sharks attack his marlin, Santiago cries out "Ay"; then Hemingway writes that "there is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood." The many Christological associations in the novel are obvious, and spelled out, in a way that they would never be in Hemingway's earlier modernist fiction.

Another technical aspect of the book worthy of attention is the manner in which the novel functions as one long sustained exploration of the old man's character and consciousness, somewhat in the fashion that a traditional soliloquy or an interior monologue serves to reveal character. Overall, the plot, action, and story line are remarkably simple and direct; technical elements of pacing and timing are likewise handled in conventional but highly effective fashion. For example, the great marlin is first seen, leaping high out of the sea, at the exact midway point of the book. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, then, Hemingway's technical mastery dazzles the reader, not through formal experimentation and elaborate technique, but through clear, stunning imagery, poetic evocations of the sea and its creatures, and vivid characterization of the old man; and all of this is immediately accessible to any reader.

Literary Qualities

Hemingway focuses on Santiago's consciousness in this quest story. Very much in the way that a traditional soliloquy or an interior monologue serves to reveal character, this novella functions as one long exploration of the old man's character.

Hemingway's symbolism suggests that Santiago is a Christ-figure. After the sharks attack his fish, for example, Santiago says, "Ay"; Hemingway writes that "there is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood." At the end of the book, Santiago struggles up the hill with the mast on his shoulder, a symbolic echo of Christ carrying the cross. Many "religious" images contribute to this symbolic pattern, while other patterns of symbolism center on baseball and dreams of youth.

The book's simple plot contains some element of suspense, but above all, the book lives in its beautiful imagery, the poetic evocation of the sea, and the admirable character of the old man.



Thematic Overview

The novel's best-known and oft-quoted line sums up its most important themes: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." At the beginning of the story, Santiago has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish, but his sea-colored eyes remain "cheerful and undefeated." Variations on the theme of being undefeated abound, and point beyond mere physical endurance to a quality of the human spirit which endures and prevails in spite of suffering and loss. Hemingway's theme has the broadest possible application to general experience, suggesting that although a person may be stripped of everything in the process of living, may lose every thing and everyone, nevertheless a quest conducted with skill, courage, endurance, honor, and compassion can guarantee the ultimate triumph of the human spirit. Hemingway avoids the sentimental happy ending which would have Santiago bring home the great fish intact and sell it at market for a large sum of money. Instead, we see the materially impoverished but spiritually rich old fisherman bring only the bare skeleton of the marlin into port, earning no money yet cherishing a far greater prize: Rather than a mere triumph over nature, he has, with great dignity and humility, achieved atonement (at-onement), oneness with nature.

Other themes center on the apprentice-master relationship of Manolin and Santiago. The old man has taught the boy many important lessons — how to fish with skill and precision, how to live with wisdom and humility — but the old man in his aloneness also needs the boy, especially when he is alone at sea and takes the great marlin. He reiterates: "I wish I had the boy. To help me and to see this." This theme is poignantly crystallized in the statement: "No one should be alone in their old age."

Another important theme involves the sense of kinship of all creatures, and the apparent paradox of Santiago's love and respect for the fish he must kill. The old man expresses with difficulty the love he feels for the marlin: "I do not understand these things . . . but it is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers."

Themes

The Human Condition

In his novella about a fisherman who struggles to catch a large marlin only to lose it, Hemingway has stripped down the basic story of human life to its basic elements. A single human being, represented by the fisherman Santiago, is blessed with the intelligence to do big things and to dream of even grander things. Santiago shows great skill in devising ways to tire out the huge fish he has hooked and ways to conserve his strength in order to land it. Yet in the struggle to survive, this human must often suffer and even destroy the very thing he dreams of. Thus Santiago cuts his hands badly and loses the fish to sharks in the process of trying to get his catch back to shore. Yet the struggle to achieve one's dreams is still worthwhile, for without dreams, a human remains a mere physical presence in the universe, with no creative or spiritual dimension. And so at the end of the story, Santiago, in spite of his great loss, physical pain, and exhaustion, is still "dreaming about the lions"—the same ones he saw in Africa when he was younger and would like to see again.

Love

Against the seeming indifference of the universe, love is often the only force that endures. This force is best seen in the relationship of Santiago and Manolin, which has endured since Manolin's early childhood. Over the years, Santiago has taught Manolin to fish and given him companionship and a sense of self-worth that Manolin failed to get from his own father. Manolin in return shows his love for Santiago by bringing him food and by weeping for him when he sees how much he suffered in fighting the marlin. Manolin also plans to take care of Santiago during the coming winter by bringing him clothing and water for washing.

Santiago's love, of course, extends to other people as well. He loved his wife when they were married, though when she died he had to take down her portrait because it made him feel lonely. Similarly, even in his suffering he thinks of others, remembering his promise to send the fish head to his friend Pederico to use as bait. Santiago's love also extends to include nature itself, even though he has often suffered at its hands. His love for all living creatures, whether fish, birds, or turtles, is often described, as is his love for the sea, which he sees as a woman who gives or withholds favors. Some of the younger fishermen, in contrast, often spoke of the sea as a "contestant" or even an "enemy."

Youth and Old Age

The comparison and contrast of these two stages of human life runs throughout the story. Although Santiago is obviously an old man, in many ways he retains a youthful perspective on life. For example, he is a keen follower of baseball, and admires players



like Joe DiMaggio and Dick Sisler for their youthful skills and abilities. His friendship with Manolin is also based partly on Santiago's fond recollections of his own youth. For example, he recalls the time he saw the lions on the beach in Africa or when he beat a well-known player in a hand-wrestling match that lasted all day. His repeated wish that the boy were in the boat is not made just because that would make it easier to fight the fish. He also misses the boy as a companion with his own youthful perspective. Yet Santiago does not admire all youth indiscriminately. For example, he contrasts his own attitude toward the sea as a woman with that of "some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats and had motorboats," who think of the sea as a male enemy who must be defeated. By the same token, Santiago is aware that not everything about old age is attractive to youth. For example, he keeps from Manolin the knowledge that he doesn't care very much about washing or eating on a regular basis. Santiago is also very aware of the disadvantages of old age. Although he retains much of his youthful strength, for example, he knows that at his age he is no longer able to fight off the sharks that attack his fish. Yet in the end, despite his defeat, Santiago is still able to plan his next fishing expedition and to dream again of the lions who perhaps represent to him the strength and the freedom of youth.

Luck vs. Skill

Many people believe in the concept of destiny, a concept in which spiritual forces and luck are combined. When one is lucky, it is considered a sign that one has the spiritual qualities to succeed. By the same token, when one has been unlucky, as Santiago is considered after eighty-four days of not catching any fish, he is dismissed by Manolin's parents as *salao*, "which is the worst form of unlucky," and therefore someone to avoid. Santiago himself believes to some extent in the concept of luck. He senses that his eighty-fifth day of fishing will be a good one and wants to buy that number in the lottery. Later in the story, when his big fish has already been half-eaten by sharks, he says he would pay "what they asked" for some luck "in any form."

Earlier in the story, however, before he has caught the big fish, Santiago reflects that "It is better to be lucky [than unlucky]. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." In this reformulation of the luck-vs.-skill question, Santiago is clearly favoring skill. This preference is shown by his actions throughout the novel, from the way he gauges the strength of the fish by the pull on the line to the manner in which he calculates and conserves his own strength for the battle he knows lies ahead. After his defeat he says the boy should not fish with him because "I am not lucky anymore." Yet Santiago quickly changes his mind about going out with Manolin when the boy says that "we will fish together now, for I still have much to learn." Toward the end, Santiago asks himself "[W]hat beat you" and answers "Nothing. I went out too far." So in the end, Santiago finds that it is matters of judgment and skill that determine success, not luck.



Style

Point of View

All novels use at least one point of view, or angle of vision, from which to tell the story. The point of view may be that of a single character, or of several characters in turn. *The Old Man and the Sea* uses the omniscient, or "all-knowing," point of view of the author, who acts as a hidden narrator. The omniscient point of view enables the author to stand outside and above the story itself, and thus to provide a wider perspective from which to present the thoughts of the old man and the other characters. Thus at the beginning of the tale, the omniscient narrator tells us not only what Santiago and the boy said to each other, but what the other fishermen thought of the old man. "The older fishermen □ looked at him and were sad. But they did not show it□."

Setting

The Old Man and the Sea takes place entirely in a small fishing village near Havana, Cuba, and in the waters of the Gulf Stream, a current of warm water that runs north, then east of Cuba in the Caribbean Sea. Hemingway visited Cuba as early as 1928, and later lived on the coast near Havana for nineteen years, beginning in 1940, so he knew the area very well. The references to Joe Dimaggio and a series of games between the Yankees and the Detroit Tigers in which Dimaggio came back from a slump have enabled scholars to pinpoint the time during which the novel takes place as midSeptember 1950. As Manolin also reminds readers, September is the peak of the blue marlin season. The story takes three days, the length of the battle against the fish, but as Manolin reminds the old man, winter is coming on and he will need a warm coat.

Structure

Like the three-day epic struggle itself of Santiago against the fish, Hemingway's story falls into three main parts. The first section entails getting ready for the fishing trip; then the trip out, including catching the fish and being towed by it, which encompasses all of the first two days and part of the third; and finally the trip back. Another way of dividing and analyzing the story is by using a dramatic structure devised by Aristotle. In the opening part of the story, or rising action, the readers are presented with various complications of the conflict between the other fishermen's belief that Santiago is permanently unlucky and Santiago and the boy's belief that the old man will still catch a fish. For example, readers learn that some of the other villagers, like the restaurant owner Pedrico, help Santiago, while others avoid him. The climax of the story, when Santiago kills the fish, marks the point at which the hero's fortunes begin to take a turn for the worse. This turning point becomes evident when sharks start to attack the fish and leads inevitably to the resolution (or denouement) of the drama, in which Santiago, having no effective weapons left to fight the sharks, must watch helplessly as they strip



the carcass of all its remaining meat. Perhaps showing the influence of modern short story writers, however, Hemingway has added to the ending what James Joyce called an epiphany, or revelation of Santiago's true character. This moment comes when the author implicitly contrasts the tourist's ignorance of the true identity of the marlin's skeleton to Santiago's quiet knowledge of his skill and his hope, reflected in his repeated dreams of the lions on the beach, that he will fish successfully again.

Symbolism

A symbol can be defined as a person, place, or thing that represents something more than its literal meaning. Santiago, for example, has often been compared to Christ in the way he suffers. His bleeding hands, the way he carries the boat mast like a cross, and the way he lies on his bed with his arms outstretched, all have clear parallels in the story of Christ's crucifixion. In this interpretation of the story, Manolin is seen as a disciple who respects and loves Santiago as his teacher. In this context, the sea could be said to represent earthly existence. Humans, as stated in Genesis, have been created by God to have dominion over all other living creatures, including the fish in the sea. Yet humans like Santiago still suffer because of Adam and Eve's original sin of eating the apple from the tree of knowledge. Santiago, however, says he does not understand the concept of sin. Santiago can also be seen more broadly as a representative of all human beings who must struggle to survive, yet hope and dream of better things to come. Hemingway himself does not seem to mind if his characters, setting, and plot have different meanings to different readers. He once said that he "tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things."



Historical Context

Cuba and the United States in the Early 1950s

Relations between Cuba and the United States were generally friendly during most of the 1950s, as they had been since 1934. That year marked the end of the Platt Amendment, which had given the United States the right to intervene in Cuba's affairs. United States' ownership of many Cuban sugar mills, however, was a continuing source of dispute. In 1952, President Prío Socarras was overthrown in a military coup by General Fulgencio Batista y Zalvidar. Batista had previously ruled as dictator from 1933 to 1940, and would rule again until 1959, when he was overthrown by Fidel Castro. Despite Hemingway's move to Ketchum, Idaho, soon after Castro and his supporters overthrew the Batista regime, Hemingway had supported both the overthrow and what he called the "historical necessity" of the Castro revolution.

Cuban Culture

Cuban culture during the first half of the twentieth century was marked perhaps foremost by an ambivalent view toward the Catholic Church. Unlike other Latin American countries, church and state in Cuba were constitutionally separate during this period. Because of its long Spanish heritage, however, Cuba was still dominated by Catholic cultural influences. The result was a contradictory situation in which 85 percent of the population called itself Catholic, but only 10 percent actually practiced the faith. The effect of these circumstances are seen many times in *The Old Man and the Sea*. For example, when Santiago battles the marlin, he says, "I am not religious, but I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish, and I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre if I catch him." Later after he has killed the fish, Santiago wonders if it is a sin to hope that he will make it back to shore with the fish's meat intact, but he quickly dismisses the thought. "Do not think about sin," he thought. "There are enough problems now without sin. Also I have no understanding of it."

Cubans, like other Latin Americans, place a high value on the innate worth of the individual. Success in life is defined under the code of *personalismo* as the achievement of one's spiritual potential or personal destiny rather than one's financial or career status. Thus Santiago is respected as a skilled and unique individual even though he has not caught a fish in three months. As seen through the eyes of Manolin and the omniscient narrator, Santiago is a heroic and majestic figure who, like Odysseus or Christ, has undergone a great ordeal and provides a model to emulate.

Machismo, or maleness, is an important male goal in traditional Latin American society. *Machismo* is ideally developed in several ways, including military, athletic, and intellectual exercises, and sexual prowess. Most men are not expected to live up to the *machismo* ideal in practice. Yet by cultivating these powers, one can approach being the ideal man. Santiago, for example, is admired because of his physical power of

endurance. He takes great pride in having in his youth defeated a powerful Negro in an all-day hand-wrestling contest in Casablanca. Santiago also places a high value on mental qualities like his self-confidence and his vast knowledge of the "tricks" of fishing. Santiago is so confident of these qualities that he can bet "everything [the fish] has against only my will and my intelligence." It has often been noted that in his own life, Hemingway also strove to challenge himself intellectually through his friendships and writing, as well as physically, through boxing, war service, hunting, fishing, and bullfighting. Although Hemingway is sometimes criticized for what is interpreted as an attraction to violence for its own sake, it is not hard to understand why the Latin American belief in *machismo* appealed to the author.



Critical Overview

The early critical reception of *The Old Man and the Sea* upon its publication in 1952 was very favorable, and its reputation has been generally high ever since, notwithstanding negative reactions in the 1960s by critics like Kenneth Lynn and Philip Young. Yet what the critics have seen worthy of special note in the story has changed noticeably over the years.

The early reviews of Hemingway's first novel since the disastrous reception two years earlier of *Across the River and into the Trees* especially praised the central character, Santiago. In his original 1954 evaluation of the book which Gerry Brenner included in *The Old Man and the Sea: The Story of a Common Man*, Philip Young wrote, "It is the knowledge that a simple man is capable of such decency, dignity and even heroism, and that his struggle can be seen in heroic terms, that largely distinguishes this book." In his book *Ernest Hemingway: Critiques of Four Major Novels*, Carlos Baker noted that critic Clinton S. Burhans saw in Santiago "a noble and tragic individualism revealing what a man can do in an indifferent universe which defeats him, and the love he can feel for such a universe and his humility before it." *The Old Man and the Sea* won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953 and played a large role in Hemingway's being honored with the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

Though several posthumous volumes of his fiction would follow in the 1970s, Hemingway's suicide in 1961 was the occasion for a major, and perhaps less inhibited, reevaluation of his work. Philip Young's *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* was one of the most influential of these. According to Young's "wound theory," Hemingway's entire life and art was an attempt to master the traumatic event of his wounding in World War I. To do this, said Young, Hemingway evolved a "code" by which his heroes sought to live. As Young described this hero code, it was a "'grace under pressure' □ made of the controls of honor and courage which in a life of tension and pain make a man a man and distinguish him from the people who follow random impulses, let down their hair, and are generally messy, perhaps cowardly, and without inviolable rules for how to live holding tight."

In his life and his heroic struggle against the fish, Santiago fits Young's definition. His pride in his physical strength, still noteworthy in his old age, is shown in his fond recollection of the time he beat a "giant" in an all-day hand-wrestling match in Casablanca. In his mental suppression of physical pain, Santiago also reminds the reader of Jake Barnes in *The Sun Also Rises* and Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms*.

Young's "wound theory" and "code hero" concepts continued to influence much of Hemingway criticism in the 1960s and 1970s, despite the posthumous publication during this period of nine new volumes of Hemingway's fiction and nonfiction, including his Toronto newspaper dispatches, his high school literary efforts, his poetry, *A Moveable Feast* (a nonfiction collection of acid-witted accounts of Hemingway's days in Paris as a young writer in the 1920s), and *Islands in the Stream*. In fact, as Susan F. Beegel has pointed out, "the idea of the code hero would smother the originality of



lesser critics and stifle alternative views for a long time." The best source of basic facts about Hemingway's life, however, remains Baker's 1969 biography, *Ernest Hemingway*.

Though the Hemingway "industry" of posthumous publications, memoirs of old friends, and newsletters and annuals of Hemingway critics continued to mount, it was not until after 1986, with the publication of *The Garden of Eden*, that Young's theory began to be replaced in most critical readers' minds by Kenneth Lynn's "theory of androgyny," or the state of having both male and female characteristics, as described in Lynn's influential psychoanalytic biography, *Hemingway*. According to Lynn, Hemingway's androgyny was partly the result of his mother's having dressed Ernest as a toddler in girl's clothes that were identical to his older sister's. In *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny*, Mark Spilka sees Santiago's androgyny as a typical example in Hemingway's late fiction of the "return of the repressed" female side of the author's personality.

The androgyny theory allows readers to view Santiago, and indeed Manolin, from a wider perspective. Many people see, for example, that while women themselves play only a small role in the novel, nevertheless, the sea itself is regarded as feminine in Santiago's eyes, unlike some of the other younger fishermen in the story, who regard the sea as a male enemy to be conquered. Santiago describes the sea (*la mar*), like a woman, as "something that gave or withheld great favours." Hemingway also describes how Manolin cries not once, but twice, after seeing the old man's condition soon after he returns to shore. This is perhaps more significant than it may appear, because Manolin, although called "the boy," is actually at least twentytwo years old as noted by Bickford Sylvester in "The Cuban Contest of *The Old Man and the Sea*." A critic laboring under the more rigid notion of the code hero would probably expect Manolin, as a full-grown man, to keep his emotions held in check.

No matter through which prism the reader analyzes Hemingway's great sea story, it seems there will always be new revelations to find. Beegel notes that new areas for study may be found in Hemingway's ecological consciousness or the multicultural background of several of his novels. And with the increased use of the computer to analyze prose text and style, who knows what other discoveries await the Hemingway scholars of the future.

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3



Critical Essay #1

*In the following essay, Davis, an associate professor of English at Northeast Louisiana University, describes *The Old Man and the Sea* as a brilliant, deceptively simple work that expresses the author's most fundamental beliefs about what it means to be a person. The work might also be seen as an expression of the author's personal struggle with thoughts of suicide.*

From its publication in 1952, *The Old Man and the Sea* has played an important role in defining and confirming Ernest Hemingway's position as a major voice in twentieth-century fiction. Long famous for his short stories and the early novels *The Sun Also Rises* in 1926 and *A Farewell to Arms* in 1929, Hemingway built his public image upon that of his wounded, isolated heroes. His passion for bull fighting, fishing, and big game hunting inevitably led him to dangerous places and activities. He covered the Spanish Civil War as a reporter and later served as a war correspondent during World War II. By the 1950s, he was at the height of his fame, living on a small estate or *finca* in Cuba and playing out his role as "Papa" Hemingway, the white-haired, white-bearded symbol of virility and intellectual heroism. With the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*, a taut, technically brilliant short novel, his reputation as a master craftsman of prose narrative was reaffirmed. More importantly, however, the story of Santiago, the isolated old man who fights a great fish for three days, seemed to bring together all the major elements of Hemingway's life and work. Indeed, it remains a concise expression of what it means for Hemingway to live and act as an individual in the modern world.

On first glance the most striking aspect of *The Old Man and the Sea* is its combination of compression and depth. Like many of Hemingway's early stories, the novel takes full advantage of the author's widely imitated prose style—a mixture of simple sentence structures, limited adjectives, and spare but suggestive description. As he himself explained in his examination of bullfighting in *Death in the Afternoon*, good writing should move like an iceberg, only one-eighth of which appears above the water. The writer who truly knows a subject should be able to leave much of the content unstated, and the reader will "have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them." Accordingly, *The Old Man and the Sea* offers a deceptively simple surface story of an aging fisherman who catches a great fish only to lose him to marauding sharks. The fable-like simplicity of the plot, however, suggests that the story may yield broader symbolic meanings.

One such symbolic interpretation of the novel focuses upon the ancient and often repeated pattern of a hero confronting a natural force. In this reading, Santiago the fisherman is more than just a poor Cuban hoping to break his streak of eighty-four days without a fish. He represents the skillful, courageous individual who willingly undergoes a test of character against an equally worthy opponent. The sea, the feminine and possibly maternal "la mar," becomes the site of his encounter with nature itself. Far away from the other fishermen and even further from any sort of civilized society, Santiago must test his own strengths alone and without help. Not even the boy he has taught to fish can be present at such a moment. Like the bullfighter or the soldier in



battle, the old man struggles as though against his own death. However, to catch his "brother," as he calls him, is not to prove himself better than the fish, only its equal. Indeed, Santiago's failure to save the dead marlin from the sharks serves to reaffirm his limits as an individual and remind him of the need for humility in the face of nature's power.

Santiago's actions suggest that he is more than just a courageous individual, however. He also shows great concern for the quality of his work and the precision of his actions. As tutor to the boy, he fills the archetypal or mythic role of the master craftsman who not only represents the height of artistic skill but also upholds the ethical standards of heroic action. He stands above the other fishermen both in terms of experience and skill, but he is also marked, set apart as the one for whom fishing has become more than just a livelihood:

"Who is the greatest manager, really, Luque or Mike Gonzalez?" "I think they are equal." "And the best fisherman is you." "No. I know others better." "Que va," the boy said. "There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you."

Like the "great DiMaggio" whose father was also a fisherman, Santiago stands alone in the level of his commitment to his craft and in his role as the hero who must test himself against his own frailty. His defense against the randomness of experience is precision. Unlike the other fishermen who let their lines drift with the current, Santiago keeps his "with precision. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready." The value of such a method is confirmed by the presence of the great fish. Just as Santiago goes "far out" beyond the lesser ambitions of the other fishermen, he finds the great fish not simply because he is a better fisherman but because, in a symbolic sense, he deserves it. His "religious" devotion to the precision of his craft has made it difficult for him to catch ordinary fish, reserving him instead for the extraordinary, mythic creature whose quality equals Santiago's "purity."

Such a deep concern with the quality of Santiago's actions reflects Hemingway's own concern with style, both in writing and in behavior. In much of his work, heroic characters face dangerous and even impossible situations as a test of their devotion to an unwritten code or method of behavior. The more courageous the act, the greater its beauty, clarity, and ethical purity. The same can be said of Hemingway's own prose style, which aims to reproduce the uncluttered grace and control of the bullfighter or the boxer. In fact, Santiago's struggle with the great fish may also reflect Hemingway's own difficulties in writing the story itself. The act of catching the great fish only to lose it in the end may suggest the combination of triumph and failure that comes with attempts at artistic perfection.

This fundamentally religious dimension to Hemingway's thinking appears even more forcefully in the novel's many allusions to Christianity and Christ in particular. The name, Santiago, for instance, is Spanish for Saint James, himself a fisherman, like Christ, the symbolic "fisherman" for souls. Also like Christ, Santiago undergoes a test and a type of "crucifixion" when the sharks attack the marlin: "'Ay,' he said aloud. There is no translation for this word and perhaps it is just a noise such as a man might make,



involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands into the wood." Yet Santiago's suffering does not appear to lead to any sort of traditionally Christian resurrection. At the novel's end he is not reborn, literally or spiritually. Though he admits his fault in going too far out, he is simply tired and empty. He acknowledges his weaknesses but upholds the quality of his actions and his "brotherhood" with the fish: "'Half fish,' he said. 'Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went out too far. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and ruined many others. How many did you ever kill, old fish? You do not have that spear on your head for nothing.'"

The combination of triumph, endurance, and loss that *The Old Man and the Sea* offers says a great deal about the Hemingway of 1950s. Shortly after the novel's publication Hemingway was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953. The following year, he received the Nobel Prize for literature for his life's work, though many acknowledge that the success of *The Old Man and the Sea* played a crucial role in the decision. About this same time, however, Hemingway suffered serious injuries in two separate plane crashes in Africa and was even reported dead by many newspapers. For the next seven years he lived in deteriorating health on his ranch in Ketchum, Idaho. In 1961, his ability as a writer severely compromised by his physical problems, Hemingway killed himself. Whether viewed as an act of courage or surrender, such a choice by the author of *The Old Man and the Sea* was no surprise. As the critic Earl Rovit speculates, "Having chosen to do battle with nothing less than eternity on a day-to-day basis, it may have been his way of complying with the rules insofar as the rules required the unconditional surrender of one of the combatants."

Viewed in light of Hemingway's long-held interest in suicide, *The Old Man and the Sea* might also be the author's way of thinking through the ethical and philosophical problems of taking his own life. In this respect, the fish, already a symbol of death in general, becomes the representation of the writer's self, his identity as a living thing. To wrestle with and conquer this "other" identity suggests a measure of self-control, a way of reaffirming your strength as an individual. To lose such a conquest to the attacks of voracious sharks undermines any certainty the individual might have gained from such a victory. Thus suicide, as a method, suggests the ultimate sort of self-control, a removal to safety beyond the mouths of the sharks, an ironic self-taking that precludes the attacks of others.

It is in the context of such crucial issues that *The Old Man and the Sea* continues to evoke comments and questions from its readers. It presents a fundamentally human problem in graceful form and language, proposing not an answer to the limits of individual existence but a way of facing those limits with dignity and grace.



Critical Essay #2

In this excerpt the critic examines the novel's characters, particularly Santiago, noting that these portraits are the most powerful elements of the novel.

[In] the portrayal of Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* there is no uncertainty of being, no confusion of self and values. The old man is presented from beginning to end as one who has achieved true existence. His response to every situation is the response of a spiritually fulfilled man. The story, then, is not concerned with the familiar Hemingway search for values; rather it is concerned with the depiction of conflicting values.

Throughout five carefully delineated sections of the novel, the center of focus is always on the image of the old man. The first section concerns the old man and the boy; the second, the old man and the sea; the third, the old man and the marlin; the fourth, the old man and the sharks; the fifth section returns to the old man and the boy.

In the opening section Santiago is shown to be something of a pathetic figure. He is old, alone, except for the friendship of a young boy, and now even dependent to a degree upon the charity of others for his subsistence. His situation is symbolized by the condition of his sail which was "patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat." For eighty-four days he had fished without success and had lost his apprentice because the boy's parents had considered him "salao," "the worst form of unlucky."

But almost at once the tone of the writing changes. Only in external appearances is the old man pathetic. Hemingway reverses the attitude toward the old man in a single stroke:

Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

The contrast in meaning is evident: To be defeated in the business of fishing is not to be a defeated man. The theme begins and ends the novel; never, after the opening lines, does the reader regard Santiago as defeated. The point is made emphatic in the final conversation between the old man and the boy:

"They beat me, Manolin," he said "They truly beat me." "He didn't beat you. Not the fish."

And the old man, whose thoughts have been on a much more profound level of contesting, replies,

"No. Truly. It was afterwards."

The novel's concern, then, is with success and failure, more precisely, with kinds of success and kinds of failure. The central contrast is between the two fundamental levels



of achievement: practical success and success in the achievement of one's own being. Similarly the novel posits two kinds of defeat: Failure to compete successfully in a materialistic, opportunistic world where this only is the measure of a man and failure to maintain one's being regardless of external defeat. Thus the real story concerns the meaning, in terms of fundamental human values, of human existence.

Almost at once we become aware that the misleading initial depiction of the old man as a somewhat pathetic figure is the direct result of viewing him only from the standpoint of his recent prolonged ill luck. Had Hemingway continued to present Santiago through the eyes that measure a man's worth merely in terms of his practical success or failure, the novel would necessarily have been a naturalistic one. Santiago's skill, determination, and nobility of spirit would simply have contributed to the greater irony of his finally catching a prize fish only to worsen his lot by losing it.

But the key to all of Hemingway's major characters is never to be found □ in merely what happens to them. Rather it is to be found in what they essentially are. This is not to discount the importance in Hemingway of environmental forces, both man-made and cosmic, acting to condition and even to determine human destiny. In fact, those whose values do not follow from the shaping forces of environment are few in number, rarely to be encountered. Santiago is one not determined by environment. And in his age and wisdom and simplicity he constantly reminds himself and the boy, who is learning from him, of the distinction. It is a subtle but vital distinction, one which Santiago never loses sight of. When the boy complains to Santiago about the attitude of his new master, Santiago's response is central to the underlying theme of the novel. The boy points out:

"He brings our gear himself. He never wants anyone to carry anything." "We're different," the old man said.

The real story of *The Old Man and the Sea* begins with this distinction. In the first section two indistinct characters are introduced who embody the values of the practical world, the boy's father and the successful fisherman to whom the boy is assigned. In the old man and the boy's discussion of their enforced separation, we see the old man's simple recognition of the problem.

"Santiago," the boy said to him as they climbed the bank from where the skiff was hauled up. "I could go with you again. We've made some money." "The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him." "No," the old man said. "You're with a lucky boat. Stay with them." "But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks." "I remember," the old man said. "I know you did not leave me because you doubted." "It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him." "I know," the old man said. "It is quite normal."

But the old man's response means something more than that it is quite normal for a boy to obey his parents; it means the acknowledgment that materialism is the central criterion for action and values in the practical world. And the passage also suggests that the boy has been taught something more than how to fish; he has been taught love and respect, values which he now finds conflicting with the practical demands of his parents.



The successful fisherman, the unnamed "he" who is the boy's new master, is, in spite of his success at catching fish, totally without respect in the boy's eyes. When Santiago promises to awaken the boy in time for his day's work with his new master, the boy declares,

"I do not like for him to waken me. It is as though I were inferior."

The missing quality in the boy's new relationship is evident: The old man wakens the boy in order to share living with him; the impersonal 'him' wakes the boy in order to use him.

Both the old man and the boy are keenly aware of their loss of each other, and both plan ways to regain their former partnership.□

The novel's second section presents the full significance of what it means to possess the sense of true existence. Just as the "he" who wakes the boy to use him is blocked by his practical ends from the experience of love so also the "younger fishermen" whose intention is to exploit are prevented from regarding the sea as anything more than "a contestant or a place or even an enemy." Again the distinction is one of individual values:

He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. Sometimes those who love her say bad things of her but they are always said as though she were a woman. Some of the younger fishermen, those who used buoys as floats for their lines and had motorboats, bought when the shark livers had brought much money, spoke of her as el mar which is masculine. They spoke of her as a contestant or a place or even an enemy. But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought.

The passage is an important one in the development of the novel. Hemingway's theme is clear: Success in the achievement of being carries with it the most valued of man's possessions, the capacity for love. And Santiago's capacity is everywhere evident. Once far out in the Gulf the old man takes his place as a true inhabitant of his true environment. He responds to the sea and the sky and the birds and the fish with the pure response of his achieved being:

He loved green turtles and hawkbills with their elegance and speed and their great value and he had a friendly contempt for the huge, stupid loggerheads, yellow in their armour-plating, strange in their lovemaking, and happily eating the Portuguese men-of-war with their eyes shut.

One is reminded of the philosopher's statement, "Being consents to Santiago's being responds to the creatures about him."

During the night two porpoises came around the boat and he could hear them rolling and blowing. He could tell the difference between the blowing noise the male made and



the sighing blow of the female."They are good," he said. "They play and make jokes and love one another. They are our brothers like the flying fish."

Nowhere in all of Hemingway's works can be found such a direct treatment of genuine sentiment. One is reminded of Pound's statement that the writer in our time must necessarily be ironic and indirect to be effective. But in the simple image of the old man's identification with the creatures of the sea we have a rare instance of positive values being directly and effectively presented. Yet perhaps it is because there is everywhere present the lurking dangers of the dark water and the old man's realistic awareness of those malevolent forces that his love emerges fully as realistic as the ever-present threats which surround him.

Santiago's struggle with the marlin is the principal subject of the long third section. From the moment he feels the fish touch the bait, his feeling is one of joy for the anticipated contest:

Then he felt the gentle touch on the line and he was happy."It was only his turn," he said. "He'll take it."He was happy feeling the gentle pulling and then he felt something hard and unbelievably heavy.

Throughout the long contest his attitude toward the fish remains constant:

"Fish," he said. "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends."Let us hope so, he thought.

The events of the struggle are dramatic: From the time the fish is hooked, about noon of the first day, until the fish is killed, about noon of the third day, the old man is forced to place his own body between the fish and boat. Fastening the line to the boat would result in the breaking of the line by any sudden lurch or swift motion by the fish. Thus the contest means for Santiago the summoning of his greatest efforts in skill and endurance. He carefully plans his strategy: Constant maximum pressure on the line must be maintained in order to wear down the resistance of the fish and to encourage him to surface in an attempt to dislodge the hook. Santiago knew that once having surfaced, the fish would be unable to dive deep again. Nourishment and rest must be systematically apportioned to his body so that he would not lose the battle prematurely through physical exhaustion. All effort must point to the final struggle which would involve not merely skill and physical endurance but will, his own will in mortal contest with the will of the marlin.

But the real power of the novel's impact does not lie merely in the events of the old man's dramatic struggle. It lies, I believe, in Hemingway's successful creation of a new dimension in dramatic portraiture. In each of the five carefully delineated sections of the novel, the reader's attention is always on Santiago. But in each, Hemingway alters with subtle but masterful strokes his changing image of the old man. In each he modifies the dramatic focus to isolate, intensify, and thereby magnify the novel's central and controlling image, the portrait of Santiago.



In the setting of the simple fishing village we are presented with the aged fisherman, initially pathetic in his meager existence, but admirable in his determination to break his run of bad luck, at once lovable in his touching relationship with a young boy and quaint in his concern for American baseball. But as a solitary figure on the sea, against a backdrop of cosmic nature, the image of the old man takes on new and greater proportions. He becomes a being among the beings of the sea, a human force among the forces of the natural world. But it is at the point at which the old man engages the great marlin that a more profound level of meaning is reached. Hemingway marks the shift with characteristic restraint. The change is simple but unmistakable:

The boat began to move slowly off toward the North West.

It is here, I think, that the reader becomes aware that he is experiencing the achievement in prose which Hemingway had tried vaguely to explain in *Green Hills of Africa*. He had referred there to "a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten." And in speaking of the complexity of such writing, he had declared, "Too many factors must combine to make it possible." He had called such prose "much more difficult than poetry," but "one that can be written, without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards." In the amazing combination of simple realism of narrative and complex symbolism of image at once contained in *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway has, I believe, constructed his closest approximation to his goal.



Critical Essay #3

In this excerpt the critic explores the various levels of the novel, focusing on individualism and interdependence.

In *Death in the Afternoon*, Hemingway uses an effective metaphor to describe the kind of prose he is trying to write: he explains that "if a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water."

Among all the works of Hemingway which illustrate this metaphor, none, I think, does so more consistently or more thoroughly than the saga of Santiago. Indeed, the critical reception of the novel has emphasized this aspect of it: in particular, Philip Young, Leo Gurko, and Carlos Baker have stressed the qualities of *The Old Man and the Sea* as allegory and parable. Each of these critics is especially concerned with two qualities in Santiago—his epic individualism and the love he feels for the creatures who share with him a world of inescapable violence—though in the main each views these qualities from a different point of the literary compass. Young [in *Hemingway*] regards the novel as essentially classical in nature; Gurko [in *College English*] sees it as reflecting Hemingway's romanticism; and to Baker, [in *Hemingway*] the novel is Christian in context, and the old fisherman is suggestive of Christ.

Such interpretations of *The Old Man and the Sea* are not, of course, contradictory; in fact, they are parallel at many points. All are true, and together they point to both the breadth and depth of the novel's enduring significance and also to its central greatness: like all great works of art it is a mirror wherein every man perceives a personal likeness. Such viewpoints, then, differ only in emphasis and reflect generally similar conclusions—that Santiago represents a noble and tragic individualism revealing what man can do in an indifferent universe which defeats him, and the love he can feel for such a universe and his humility before it.

True as this is, there yet remains, I think, a deeper level of significance, a deeper level upon which the ultimate beauty and the dignity of movement of this brilliant structure fundamentally rest. On this level of significance, Santiago is Harry Morgan alive again and grown old; for what comes to Morgan in a sudden and unexpected revelation as he lies dying is the matrix of the old fisherman's climactic experience. Since 1937, Hemingway has been increasingly concerned with the relationship between individualism and interdependence; and *The Old Man and the Sea* is the culminating expression of this concern in its reflection of Hemingway's mature view of the tragic irony of man's fate: that no abstraction can bring man an awareness and understanding of the solidarity and interdependence without which life is impossible; he must learn it, as it has always been truly learned, through the agony of active and isolated individualism in a universe which dooms such individualism.



Throughout *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago is given heroic proportions. He is "a strange old man," still powerful and still wise in all the ways of his trade. After he hooks the great marlin, he fights him with epic skill and endurance, showing "what a man can do and what a man endures." And when the sharks come, he is determined "to fight them until I die," because he knows that "a man is not made for defeat. □ A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

In searching for and in catching his big fish, Santiago gains a deepened insight into himself and into his relationship to the rest of created life—an insight as pervasive and implicit in the old fisherman's experience as it is sudden and explicit in Harry Morgan's. As he sails far out on the sea, Santiago thinks of it "as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them." For the bird who rests on his line and for other creatures who share with him such a capricious and violent life, the old man feels friendship and love. And when he sees a flight of wild ducks go over, the old man knows "no man was ever alone on the sea."

Santiago comes to feel his deepest love for the creature that he himself hunts and kills, the great fish which he must catch not alone for physical need but even more for his pride and his profession. The great marlin is unlike the other fish which the old man catches; he is a spiritual more than a physical necessity. He is unlike the other fish, too, in that he is a worthy antagonist for the old man, and during his long ordeal, Santiago comes to pity the marlin and then to respect and to love him. In the end he senses that there can be no victory for either in the equal struggle between them, that the conditions which have brought them together have made them one. And so, though he kills the great fish, the old man has come to love him as his equal and his brother; sharing a life which is a capricious mixture of incredible beauty and deadly violence and in which all creatures are both hunter and hunted, they are bound together in its most primal relationship.

Beyond the heroic individualism of Santiago's struggle with the great fish and his fight against the sharks, however, and beyond the love and the brotherhood which he comes to feel for the noble creature he must kill, there is a further dimension in the old man's experience which gives to these their ultimate significance. For in killing the great marlin and in losing him to the sharks, the old man learns the sin into which men inevitably fall by going far out beyond their depth, beyond their true place in life. In the first night of his struggle with the great fish, the old man begins to feel a loneliness and a sense almost of guilt for the way in which he has caught him; and after he has killed the marlin, he feels no pride of accomplishment, no sense of victory. Rather, he seems to feel almost as though he has betrayed the great fish; "I am only better than him through trickery," he thinks, "and he meant me no harm."

Thus, when the sharks come, it is almost as a thing expected, almost as a punishment which the old man brings upon himself in going far out "beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world" and there hooking and killing the great fish. For the coming of the sharks is not a matter of chance nor a stroke of bad luck; "the shark was not an accident." They are the direct result of the old man's action in killing the fish. He has



driven his harpoon deep into the marlin's heart, and the blood of the great fish, welling from his heart, leaves a trail of scent which the first shark follows. He tears huge pieces from the marlin's body, causing more blood to seep into the sea and thus attract other sharks; and in killing the first shark, the old man loses his principal weapon, his harpoon. Thus, in winning his struggle with the marlin and in killing him, the old man sets in motion the sequence of events which take from him the great fish whom he has come to love and with whom he identifies himself completely. And the old man senses an inevitability in the coming of the sharks, a feeling of guilt which deepens into remorse and regret. "I am sorry that I killed the fish," he thinks, and he tells himself that "You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman."

Earlier, before he had killed the marlin, Santiago had been "glad we do not have to try to kill the stars." It is enough, he had felt, to have to kill our fellow creatures. Now, with the inevitable sharks attacking, the old man senses that in going far out he has in effect tried "to kill the sun or the moon or the stars." For him it has not been "enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers"; in his individualism and his need and his pride, he has gone far out "beyond all people," beyond his true place in a capricious and indifferent world, and has thereby brought not only on himself but also on the great fish the forces of violence and destruction. "'I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish,'" he declares. "Neither for you nor for me. I'm sorry, fish.'" And when the sharks have torn away half of the great marlin, Santiago speaks again to his brother in the sea: "Half-fish," he said. "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both."

The old man's realization of what he has done is reflected in his apologies to the fish, and this realization and its implications are emphasized symbolically throughout the novel. From beginning to end, the theme of solidarity and interdependence pervades the action and provides the structural framework within which the old man's heroic individualism and his love for his fellow creatures appear and function and which gives them their ultimate significance. Having gone eighty-four days without a catch, Santiago has become dependent upon the young boy, Manolin, and upon his other friends in his village. The boy keeps up his confidence and hope, brings him clothes and such necessities as water and soap, and sees that he has fresh bait for his fishing. Martin, the restaurant owner, sends the old man food, and Perico, the wineshop owner, gives him newspapers so that he can read about baseball. All of this the old man accepts gratefully and without shame, knowing that such help is not demeaning. "He was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it and he knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride."

Santiago refuses the young boy's offer to leave the boat his parents have made him go in and return to his, but soon after he hooks the great marlin he wishes increasingly and often that the boy were with him. And after the sharks come and he wonders if it had been a sin to kill the great fish, the old man thinks that, after all, "everything kills everything else in some way. Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive." But then he remembers that it is not fishing but the love and care of another human being that keeps him alive now; "the boy keeps me alive, he thought. I must not deceive myself too much."



As the sharks tear from him more and more of the great fish and as the boat gets closer to his home, the old man's sense of his relationship to his friends and to the boy deepens: "I cannot be too far out now, he thought. I hope no one has been too worried. There is only the boy to worry, of course. But I am sure he would have confidence. Many of the older fishermen will worry. Many others too, he thought. I live in a good town." In the end, when he awakens in his shack and talks with the boy, he notices "how pleasant it was to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to himself and to the sea." This time he accepts without any real opposition the boy's insistence on returning to his boat, and he says no more about going far out alone.

This theme of human solidarity and interdependence is reinforced by several symbols. Baseball, which the old man knows well and loves and which he thinks and talks about constantly, is, of course, a highly developed team sport and one that contrasts importantly in this respect with the relatively far more individualistic bullfighting, hunting, and fishing usually found in Hemingway's stories. Although he tells himself that "now is no time to think of baseball," the game is in Santiago's thoughts throughout his ordeal, and he wonders about each day's results in the *Gran Ligas*.

Even more significant is the old man's heroworship of Joe DiMaggio, the great Yankee outfielder. DiMaggio, like Santiago, was a champion, a master of his craft, and in baseball terms an old one, playing out the last years of his glorious career severely handicapped by the pain of a bone spur in his heel. The image of DiMaggio is a constant source of inspiration to Santiago; in his strained back and his cut and cramped left hand he, too, is an old champion who must endure the handicap of pain; and he tells himself that he "must have confidence and be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel."

But DiMaggio had qualities at least as vital to the Yankees as his courage and individual brilliance. Even during his own time and since then, many men with expert knowledge of baseball have considered other contemporary outfielders—especially Ted Williams of the Boston Red Sox—to be DiMaggio's equal or superior in terms of individual ability and achievement. But few men have ever earned the affection and the renown which DiMaggio received as a "team player"—one who always displayed his individual greatness as part of his team, one to whom the team was always more important than himself. It used to be said of DiMaggio's value as a "team player" that with him in the line-up, even when he was handicapped by the pain in his heel, the Yankees were two runs ahead when they came out on the field. From Santiago's love of baseball and his evident knowledge of it, it is clear that he would be aware of these qualities in DiMaggio. And when Manolin remarks that there are other men on the New York team, the old man replies: "Naturally. But he makes the difference."

The lions which Santiago dreams about and his description in terms of Christ symbols further suggest solidarity and love and humility as opposed to isolated individualism and pride. So evocative and lovely a symbol is the dream of the lions that it would be foolish if not impossible to attempt its literal definition. Yet it seems significant that the old man dreams not of a single lion, a "king of the beasts," a lion proud and powerful and alone, like the one from which Francis Macomber runs in terror, but of several young lions who



come down to a beach in the evening to play together. "He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy." It seems also significant that the old man "no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife"—that is that he no longer dreams of great individualistic deeds like the one which brings violence and destruction on him and on the marlin. Instead, the lions are "the main thing that is left" and they evoke the solidarity and love and peace to which the old man returns after hunting and killing and losing his great fish.

These qualities are further emphasized by the symbolic value of the old fisherman as he carries the mast crosslike up the hill to his shack and as he lies exhausted on his bed. His hands have been terribly wounded in catching the great marlin and in fighting the sharks, and as he lies sleeping "face down on the newspapers with his arms out straight and the palms up" his figure is Christlike and suggests that if the old man has been crucified by the forces of a capricious and violent universe, the meaning of his experience is the humility and love of Christ and the interdependence which they imply.

Such, then, are the qualities which define man's true place in a world of violence and death indifferent to him, and they are the context which gives the experience of the old fisherman its ultimate significance as the reflection of Hemingway's culminating concept of the human condition—his tragic vision of man. For in his understanding that "it is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers," the fellow creatures who share life with us and whom he loves, the old man is expressing Hemingway's conviction that despite the tragic necessity of such a condition, man has a place in the world. And in his realization that in going alone and too far out, "beyond all people in the world," he has ruined both himself and also the great fish, the old man reflects Hemingway's feeling that in his individualism and his pride and his need, man inevitably goes beyond his true place in the world and thereby brings violence and destruction on himself and on others. Yet in going out too far and alone, Santiago has found his greatest strength and courage and dignity and nobility and love, and in this he expresses Hemingway's view of the ultimate tragic irony of man's fate: that only through the isolated individualism and the pride which drive him beyond his true place in life does man develop the qualities and the wisdom which teach him the sin of such individualism and pride and which bring him the deepest understanding of himself and of his place in the world. Thus, in accepting his world for what it is and in learning to live in it, Hemingway has achieved a tragic but ennobling vision of man which is in the tradition of Sophocles, Christ, Melville, and Conrad.

It is not enough, then, to point out, as Robert P. Weeks does [in the *University of Kansas Review*], that "from the first eight words of *The Old Man and the Sea* ...we are squarely confronted with a world in which man's isolation is the most insistent truth." True as this is, it is truth which is at the same time paradox, for Santiago is profoundly aware that "no man was ever alone on the sea." Nor is the novel solely what Leo Gurko feels it is—"the culmination of Hemingway's long search for isengagement from the social world and total entry into the natural." If the old man leaves society to go "far out" and "beyond all people in the world," the consciousness of society and of his



relationship to it are never far out of his thoughts; and in the end, of course, he returns to his "good town," where he finds it pleasant "to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to himself and to the sea." To go no further than Santiago's isolation, therefore, or to treat it, as Weeks does, as a theme in opposition to Hemingway's concern with society is to miss the deepest level of significance both in this novel and in Hemingway's writing generally.

For, surely, as Edgar Johnson has shown, the true direction of Hemingway's thought and art from the beginning and especially since 1937 has been a return to society—not in terms of any particular social or political doctrine, but in the broad sense of human solidarity and interdependence. If he began by making "a separate peace" and by going, like Santiago, "far out" beyond society, like the old man, too, he has come back, through Harry Morgan's "no man alone," Philip Rawlings's and Robert Jordan's "no man is an island," and Santiago's "no man is ever alone on the sea," with a deepened insight into its nature and values and a profound awareness of his relationship to it as an individual [a development found in Hemingway's "*Nobody Ever Dies!*"].

In the process, strangely enough—or perhaps it is not strange at all—he has come back from Frederic Henry's rejection of all abstract values to a reiteration for our time of mankind's oldest and noblest moral principles. As James B. Colvert points out [in *American Literature*], Hemingway is a moralist: heir, like his world, to the destruction by science and empiricism of nineteenth-century value assumptions, he rejects equally these assumptions and the principle underlying them—that intellectual moral abstractions possess independent supersensual existence. Turning from the resulting nihilism, he goes to experience in the actual world of hostility, violence, and destruction to find in the world which destroyed the old values a basis for new ones—and it is precisely here, Colvert suggests, in reflecting the central moral problem of his world, that Hemingway is a significant moralist.

But out of this concern with action and conduct in a naturalistic universe, Hemingway has not evolved new moral values; rather, he has reaffirmed man's oldest ones—courage, love, humility, solidarity, and interdependence. It is their basis which is new—a basis not in supernaturalism or abstraction but hard-won through actual experience in a naturalistic universe which is at best indifferent to man and his values. Hemingway tells us, as E. M. Halliday observes, that "we are part of a universe offering no assurance beyond the grave, and we are to make what we can of life by a pragmatic ethic spun bravely out of man himself in full and steady cognizance that the end is darkness [in *American Literature*]."

Through perfectly realized symbolism and irony, then, Hemingway has beautifully and movingly spun out of an old fisherman's great trial just such a pragmatic ethic and its basis in an essentially tragic vision of man; and in this reaffirmation of man's most cherished values and their reaffirmation in the terms of our time rests the deepest and the enduring significance of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Adaptations

The Old Man and the Sea was adapted as a feature film starring Spencer Tracy as Santiago and Felipe Pazos as The Boy, Warner Brothers, 1958. This film has been praised for some of its visual effects, and the score won an Academy Award.

It was also the source of a made-for-TV production in 1990 starring Anthony Quinn, Gary Cole, Alexis Cruz, Patricia Clarkson, and Francesco Quinn.

The novel is also available on a two-cassette sound recording narrated by Charlton Heston.



Topics for Further Study

Throughout *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago expresses his feelings about nature. Today, the protection of our natural environment is often in the news. Do some research on environmental issues and write an essay comparing Santiago's attitude about nature to modern theories of environmentalism. Would Santiago be considered an environmentalist today?

Manolin undergoes a change between the beginning and the end of the novel. What do you think causes this change? Find specific examples from the story to support your opinion. Then write an essay comparing the "old" Manolin from the beginning of the story to the "new" Manolin who has emerged by the end.

Most of Ernest Hemingway's heroes are young men, but Santiago, as the title reveals, is an old man. Why do you think the author chose to tell this story from an older person's perspective? How might the story have been different if the hero had been a young man? Present your ideas in an essay and use examples from the text to support your conclusions.



What Do I Read Next?

Youth (1903) and *Typhoon* (1902), both by Joseph Conrad, are sea stories with intriguing parallels to Hemingway's work. It is believed that Hemingway, who read all of Conrad in Paris and Toronto during the twenties, may have consciously or unconsciously used the "central strategy" of *Youth* when writing *The Old Man and the Sea*.

For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940) was Hemingway's last successfully received novel before *The Old Man and the Sea*, and the only previous Hemingway novel in which a Hispanic background plays a major part. It depicts the struggle of Robert Jordan, an American fighting against the Fascists in the Spanish Civil War, to live up to his political and personal ideals without becoming narrowly partisan.

Islands in the Stream, published posthumously in 1970, is the book, as edited, of which *The Old Man and the Sea* was originally envisaged by Hemingway as the fourth part. The first three sections were originally called "The Sea When Young," "The Sea When Absent," and "The Sea in Being."

The Nick Adams Stories (1972) are all Hemingway's short stories, plus a few story fragments, about this recurring fictional character, from the time he first appeared in the early 1920s as a young boy, to his last appearance as an adult and father in 1933. Although written and published at different times in Hemingway's life, they are arranged here by Hemingway scholar Philip Young to illustrate Nick's unfolding life.



Topics for Discussion

1. Discuss the baseball imagery in the book. What does the "great Dimaggio" symbolize? What does the "bone spur" symbolize?
2. When Santiago was a boy, he saw "lions on the beaches" in Africa. What do these lions symbolize? Why does he dream about Africa and the lions every night?
3. What is the difference, according to Santiago, between those who think of the sea as "la mar" and those who speak of it as "el mar"?
4. Discuss some of the things Santiago knows about nature, and the details he reads in the behavior of the birds and fish. How did he learn these things?
5. When Santiago catches the albacore, he "hit him on the head for kindness." Discuss this scene and Santiago's "kindness" in general.
6. Santiago says he is "not religious," but he says his prayers regularly and promises to make a pilgrimage if he catches the fish. Discuss Santiago's religious feeling, both his natural piety and his Catholic piety.
7. Why is "no one worthy of eating" the great marlin?
8. In one of the book's most important passages, Santiago thinks, "But it is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers." How do you interpret this statement?

Ideas for Reports and Papers

1. Analyze in detail the relationship between Santiago and Manolin.
2. The main theme of the book is summed up in the single sentence: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Discuss in detail the meaning of this theme and the ways in which the book develops and illustrates the idea.
3. Compare Santiago's feeling about the sharks with his feeling about all the other creatures in the book.
4. Analyze in detail the old man's relationship with the marlin. Discuss his love, respect, and pity for it, and his determination to kill it. In how many ways are the man and fish "joined together"?
5. Discuss Santiago as a Christ-figure. Be sure to note the specific details that link Santiago with Christian imagery. The pattern of Santiago's experience is suffering and endurance; is it also somehow redemptive?

Literary Precedents

If the reader accepts the apparent critical consensus, there are very few literary precedents for *The Old Man and the Sea*. *Moby Dick* (1851), another great sea-centered novel involving a quest for a great creature, is sometimes cited as a precedent, but the resemblances are superficial. Others have noted the Biblical qualities of Hemingway's story. Also, for the evocation of the sea and the human place in the design of nature, Stephen Crane's "The Open Boat" (1898) provides a certain resonance, and we know that Hemingway admired Crane's work. Perhaps more directly to the point would be precedents which involve characters of great simplicity and dignity who interact reverently with nature. The most compelling instance here — and Hemingway may well have had it in mind when he wrote *The Old Man and the Sea* — may be William Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942). In particular, consider the portions of that novel which deal with Sam Fathers — who is a direct analogue of Santiago — and hunting.

Faulkner's "The Old People" (1942) and "The Bear" (1942) depict an exemplar-apprentice relationship between a wise and simple, humble and proud old man (Sam Fathers) and a young boy (Ike McCaslin), a quest for a noble creature (the bear), and a rich and reverential evocation of nature.



Further Study

Clifford Burhans, "*The Old Man and the Sea: Hemingway's Tragic Vision of Man*," in *American Literature*, January, 1960, p. 447.

Burhans relates *The Old Man and the Sea* to Hemingway's earlier work and finds it a mature statement of the author's philosophy.

Clinton S. Burhans Jr., "*The Old Man and the Sea: Hemingway's Tragic Vision of Man*," in *Hemingway and His Critics: An International Anthology*, edited by Carlos Baker, Hill and Wang, 1961, pp. 259-68.

The critic describes the novel as Hemingway's "mature view of the tragic irony of man's fate."

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Novels for Students (NfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's □For Students□ Literature line, NfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels



frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of NfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of NfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel; and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of "classic" novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board members—educational professionals—helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized



Each entry, or chapter, in NfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- **Introduction:** a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- **Author Biography:** this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- **Plot Summary:** a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- **Characters:** an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed—for instance, the narrator in *Invisible Man*—the character is listed as "The Narrator" and alphabetized as "Narrator." If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name "Jean Louise Finch" would head the listing for the narrator of *To Kill a Mockingbird*, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname "Scout Finch."
- **Themes:** a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- **Style:** this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- **Historical Context:** This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- **Critical Overview:** this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- **Criticism:** an essay commissioned by NfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).



- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an "at-a-glance" comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

NfS includes "The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature," a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Novels for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the NfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.



Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Novels for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Novels for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from NfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Novels for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Novels for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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