

The Old Man and the Sea

1. 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. 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.

2. Character Analysis

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.

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.

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.

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.

3. Themes

1. *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.

2. *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."

3. *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.

4. 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.

4. Style

1. 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....”

2. 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 mid- September 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.

3. 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.

4. 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."

5. Some Questions:

Q1/ What are the codes of values in Santiago and the boy on one hand, and in the other villagers on the other hand?

Santiago and Manolin value human relationships over materialism. This code is different according to the other villagers. Manolin's father and the other villagers put material considerations first. They believe that a man is successful only if he has made money (must catch fish). The other villagers view the old man and the boy as not really men because Santiago is old and catches no fish, and the boy is still young, unable to catch by himself. But Santiago and Manolin are men since they have the codes of honour. For them, fishing is more than an occupation. The code of fishing is an ideal view for life besides making money .For the other villagers, fishing is only a source of money making. The old man and the boy are conscious of the moods of the weather, they are sensitive to sunrise, the far hills and the contest between man and the sea. Thus, their code is based not on competition with one another, as it is according to the villagers, but on love, loyalty and respect. The old man's code of failure is a kind of victory. The other villagers' code of failure is of defeatism. The old man and the boy do not have the code of defeatism. Santiago thinks that defeatism is not defined by catching no fish, defeat is relative according to one's values, not according to the codes of the community. The other fishermen consider Santiago tainted with bad luck.

Q2/What is the nature of relationship between the old man and the boy?

The old man and the boy's relationship is based on some principles such as faith, help, respect, caring, and understanding. The boy is important to the old man for he has faith in the old man. They are joined by faith and friendship. They value human relationships over materialism. Their relationship is very much like that between Christ and one of his disciples. The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy love him. The boy loves the old man spontaneously. Manolin is sensitive enough to realize that the old man may be different, wiser and more humane than the other men. The old man shows respect for the boy when talking to him as though he were an adult. He is taking care of the boy on sea when teaching him all the tricks about fishing, offering him a philosophy about fishing and living. The boy takes care of the old man on land in response. He brings him food, water, baits, newspapers and clothes. This is part of various aspects of help the boy offers the old man, materialistic help. The boy also offers spiritual help for him when mostly making the old man talk about the past because the boy wants him to stay energetic and strong. Thus, the old man's past is a good source of energy and the boy is clever to help the old man forget his

cruel present. Another way of making the old man forget the killing present is through drinking beer the boy is fetching from time to time. The boy also cares whether or not the old man has eaten, drank, or slept. Further, the old man shows understanding when the boy told him that it is his father who has prevented him to accompany the old man. The old man shows respect for the boy and for all other villagers. He respected the boy's needs and encourages him to be confident in himself. The boy also shows respect for the old man in many situations. For example, the boy does not start eating till the old man finishes.

Q3/ Show the old man's attitudes towards the elements of nature.

The old man's begins his journey in darkness. He is alone. The beautiful scene of the sea is presented in this journey such as the phosphorescent of sea weed, the swirl of the ocean's many fish, the concentrations of shrimp, bait fish, and the schools of squid. He first describes the flying fish leaving the water and their hissing as they cross the boat. He is very fond of those fish. He considers them brothers. They play and make jokes with one another. He is also sorry for the birds, especially the small terns that are always flying. He wonders that such delicate birds live in such cruel sea. There is also the large bird which Santiago sees circling in the sky, using it as a portent. This bird is also unlucky, like the old man, for it is trying to catch fish but the dolphin make the other fish escape. He has just cursed that bird for he is fond of the flying fish. He further considers the sea as a source of living and should be respected and treated with a sense of dignity. He is different from the other fishermen who see the sea as enemy and try to defy it, but he views it as a source of contest. He also gives justifications for the sea's capricious moods for it is under the control of the moon. He does not blame the sea for his unluckiness though he passed eighty four days without catching fish. All in all, the old man has a feeling of brotherhood with all the creatures of nature.