



A Comprehensive Study of Ernest Hemingway: Old Man and The Sea

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Abstract- Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is a study of man's place in a world of violence and destruction. It is a story in which Hemingway seems to suggest that, at least in the natural order, man can find his own dignity and beauty in learning to understand the mystery of human power that is at the heart of so much that appears violent and cruel. This paper deals with the concept of courage, but courage is objectified in the narrative and the novelist seems to have had much faith in either concepts or ideals. Hemingway seems to have simply turned his back on a sick society and all sociological, metaphysical and spiritual efforts to cure it. *The Old Man and the Sea* presents a world in which man and beast survive and are at their best only when acting courageously in a bad world where there is no love nor mercy nor charity nor justice unless man can keep his courage. In the exercise of the physicality of both man and fish, Hemingway demonstrates a kind of nobility that exists only in this world when two creatures achieve brotherhood in a trial of endurance which demands every ounce of strength and every skill they possess.

Keywords: *Power, courage, The Old Man and the Sea; old fisherman, Santiago.*

I. INTRODUCTION

The novella starts simply with "Santiago, the old fisherman who fished alone in a boat in the Gulf Stream and had spent eighty-four days without getting even one fish", it is simple but yet, it is about life and death where an old fisherman fights proudly against a huge fish to get his good name back. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated", this is one of some special quotes in Hemingway's novella. This had to do with a man continuing to try till he fulfills what he wanted to get done even though all misfortunes, barbs and difficulties to turn collapse into victory, thereby showing the pride of human spirit to beat life's problems and dominate one self-turning into a victory. There are questions about this statement, how and why can man be broken but not defeated? Reading "The Old Man and The Sea" can be easily done because of its simple words but these words have symbolism make the novel deep in meaning and lesson for life ,not just in its time , but for every time and place . Victory and Defeat in Hemingway's novella "The Old Man and The Sea" these two opposite terms need to be explained in this paper , and how can we understand that the old man even the sharks attacked him and eat his fish he had the feeling of triumph [1] .



Literature is the part of the art which uses language as its medium. It recreates the sense of life, its weight and texture. Furthermore, literature recreates the experiential wholeness of life: the life of the emotion, the life of the mind, the individual life and social life. One kind of literary work written in prose is a novel. A novel is considered as an expression of human life such as human ideas, human trends, and emotion. It can give insight into the minds and disposition of people in the real life. It can emphasize great moral truth by dramatizing the consequences of good or bad action of fictitious people. In reading a novel we often come to understand ourselves better. Therefore, analyzing literature, whether in the form of prose or poetry is an attempt to identify the characteristic of human being which distinguishes one human from another. Literature is one of the sources of information in our life. There are many kinds of information from one literature, include through a novel. One of important information from a novel is lesson. There are many lessons that can be learned through the parts of the novel, either from the characters, setting, and theme as intrinsic element or social reality and author biography as extrinsic element. It is clear that literature is very profitable. The benefit of literary work is to guide and to assist members of a society with more critical thoughts and ideas towards human problems and life-values. In other words, the benefit of literary work is to make human beings become wiser in facing reality of life [2].

II. BRIEF MAPPING OF THE NOVELA

Prologue to the Voyage:

“The Old Man and the Sea” has a cadence and rhythm which is distinctly recognizable as Hemingway’s own style. Santiago the old man had fished for eighty four days without success. His companion Manolin, a boy was ordered by his parents to join a luckier boat, was sad at the old man’s failure. Having made some money with the other boat, the boy offered to accompany the old man again. He returned to the old man’s poor shacks. The boy said that he would take the cast net and obtain some bait. Santiago said that he would eat a bowl of rice while the boy has gone, although they both knew that there was no bowl of rice and that the cast net had been sold. The boy returned with a meal and two beers given to him by Martin the owner of the Terrace, while eating Manolin, the boy declared that the old man was the best fisherman, Santiago disagreed.

The Voyage Begins

As leaving the harbor on the darkness the oldman heard the trembling sound of flying fish. He always thought of the sea as “la mar” i.e, related to the capricious mood of a women. Before it was light, Santiago had his baits out and was drifting with the current. His preparations were



precise, when the sun was two hours higher, he saw the circling of a man-of-war bird. Santiago realized that the bird must have watched fish. So he gently rowed towards it. Flying fish broke the surface of the water, and Santiago concluded that they were being pursued by a dolphin. The dolphin moved out too fast and too far for the old man, but he contented himself with the thought that he might pick up a stray dolphin for bait and that his big fish might be somewhere near [3].

Glory in optimism

In the first attempt Santiago came to know that hundred fathoms down a marlin (the extra ordinary fish, its length is 18 ft) was eating from the hook. Twice, the fish nibbled at the bait. The third time, the fish took the bait and Santiago realized that he hooked the fish. He prayed that marlin would swallow the hook so that it would pierce his heart. Santiago could not move the fish which began to pull the boat off slowly towards the North West, Santiago was towed slowly and steadily by the fish which was pulling the boat out to sea even after four hours. During the night Santiago felt that he had never before hooked one that was so strong or behaved so strangely. He also wished that if he had the boy Manolin, to help him. At day light, suddenly the great fish lurched again and the bird flew off. Santiago was pulled down into the bow and he cut his right hand on the rope, he was annoyed at his own carelessness in injuring his working hand, he resolved to pay attention to his work. He came to know that without help and far from land he had hooked a fish that was bigger than any other he had ever seen or heard of, still his left hand was gripped by cramp. He was determined to kill the fish [4].

Vain glory

Santiago lashed the first securely to the side and prepared to return to the harbor. The skiff sailed well in spite of the attached weight. Towards the end of his battle when he had been feeling so badly it had all seemed like a dream. Now looking at the fish and at his cut hands and by the feel of his back, he realized that it has truly happened. The first sharks struck an hour later, attracted by the spilled blood of the fish. The sharks tore into the dead fish, the old man pierced the attacker's brain with the harpoon. The shark was killed but not before it had torn forty pounds of meat from the great fish. After two hours he saw two more sharks [5].

Epilogue

When everyone was in the bed the old man somehow dragged the boat on shore. After reaching home he took a drink of water and threw himself down to sleep. Manolin came next morning before Santiago was awake and wept at the sight of the fisherman's injured hands, he left to bring coffee. Everyone including the proprietor of the terrace, tourist, fishermen stated that there



had never been such a fish. Manolin's only concern was that they should not bother Santiago. Manolin was crying for him. When he awoke Manolin offered him Coffee and said that in spite of his family's unwillingness he would sail with Santiago. Everyone was surprised at the height of the great fish (18 feet long). At the shack Santiago slept, dreaming about Lions, while the boy sat by him [6].

III. THE CONCEPT OF OPTIMISTIC LIFE

Optimistic life is performing the life by practicing values and attitudes which is described as the characteristic of optimism. The Optimist is someone who has several characteristics that bring him or her into the great life. The optimists are the ones who know what they desire and hope and believe they are able to get it successfully then they attempt to obtain it confidently and achieve it. They believe in God who is very near and presents in every pure and impulse of their hearts. Heart as the source and centre of all minds compasses all truth and converts the shadows to realities. With their spirit they can see the whole world, from this they reach their confidence and trust that can protect them from doubt and fears. A man must understand evil and be acquainted with sorrow before he can write himself an optimist and expect others to believe that he has reason for the faith that is in him. With the knowledge he can chase the evil away. Then the struggle is one of great blessing that makes them to be strong, patient and helpful men or women. The optimists will use every time and circumstances to break away the obstacle that blocks their desires. Their soul will beat a glad march to every new discovery, for them every fresh victory comes over difficulties and every success adds to human knowledge and happiness adds the optimists know when to let go although they are the strong in personality and perseverance, and they believe that perseverance is powerful but when they meet something which can't be changed, they will be able to let it go and are willing to move on [7].

IV. SYMBOLISM: A GENERAL OVERVIEW

Among the major literary devices, symbols grab the attention of the readers, because of its ability to broad the thinking capacity of the people. This chapter deals with the notion of symbolism as a movement and as a literary device and tries to introduce some theories of symbolism which are attributed to Whitehead, Langer, Frye and Saussure. Symbolism: Symbol also a major figure of speech in which something [object, person, situation or action] means more than what it is. Symbolism started as a reaction to the naturalism and realism movements. At the end of the nineteenth century, symbolism lost its popularity in France. Then the popularity increased and spread to the continental European countries such as England, Russian, the United States, and South America. The symbolists' experimental methods appealed to many English, Irish and



American poets such as William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), T.S Eliot (1888-1965), and Wallace Stevens (1879- 1955).According to Perrine (1974), the meaning of the literary symbol should recognize from its context. That means the meaning of symbols should be identified inside the text, not in outside [8].

V. MAJOR THEMES IN THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

1. **Perseverance:** Perseverance is the major theme of the novel. In spite of the old age, Santiago prepares to fight the giant marlin. He eventually succeeds in catching the fish and also kills and hauls it to the seashore. Above all, he shows his perseverance against the heavy odds of the sharks among which he kills many while they tear most of the marlin's flesh. Despite this, he continues fighting them until he brings the skeleton of the marlin to the shore.
2. **Suffering:** The Old Man and the Sea story also shows the sufferings a man can go through. Santiago couldn't keep himself awake for three days and three nights and then continue fighting a giant fish. He proved that he could suffer without regret for that great prize. The sufferings of Santiago show his power of endurance and his perseverance, the reason that it is the central idea of the novel.
3. **Strength and Skill:** The story encourages the readers to be courageous through the character of Santiago and Manolin. Strength is not enough for fishing but one must be skillful. Any other person having less experience than the old man in the face of such a giant marlin would have cut down his line to let the fish go. However, the old man has skills as Manolin testifies that other fishermen have guts and strength but not the required skills.
4. **Pride:** The novel shows pride through the old man, Santiago. However, it does not stay until a backup is there, which in the case of Santiago is the boy, Manolin. He constantly reminds Santiago that he is the best fisherman in the world in terms of skills, and he feels pride at it. Therefore, when he comes to the shore even with a skeleton, he is proud that his teacher has demonstrated excellence in his skills [9].
5. **Memory and Past:** Memory and past stayed fresh with Santiago. He has a picture of his wife in his shack that is a relic of the past. He also remembers his exploits of the past in the hand-fighting game and fishing including his visits to the African beaches. These memories of the past continue to rejuvenate his spirits during his tough times with the marlin.
6. **Defeat:** Defeat is another theme of the novel. The character of Santiago experiences defeated in form of delay and also loss of his prized hunt, marlin. However, the defeat only leads to hope and determination. The old man refuses to accept defeat as he demonstrates in the face of the marlin, saying that a man can be destroyed but not defeated.



7. **Respect:** The old man, Santiago, comes to know through fishing in the expanse of the sea that if there is respect in profession and skill, then its execution becomes an enjoyment as well as satisfaction. The old man clearly states that he respects the fish but he will have to kill it as it is his profession.
8. **Luck:** The novel shows the role of luck in a person's life. However, the old man, Santiago, defies the traditional notions about luck, saying that it is better to be exact than lucky, for when luck comes, a person is ready to grab it at that moment.
9. **Friendship:** The novel also shows the theme of friendship through Manolin and Santiago, as other fishermen only talk about the old man and his bad luck. It shows that he has not a permanent friend which often happens in the case of professionals.

VI. THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA: A CRITICAL REVIEW

American literature has passed through a lot of periods by familiarizing number of masterpieces to vanish the literary thirsty of those who are fond of reading. So among many writers in nineteenth century, Ernest Hemingway is significant for his style. This chapter introduces an overview about American Literature in 19th century, Hemingway's major works, focusing on his masterpiece *The Old Man and The Sea* (1951) and its analysis [10-12].

Hemingway's style, themes and works

Ernest Miller Hemingway who is well known as a writer commences his writing for the first time as a reporter for —The Kansas City Star. The experiences that he got as a journalist make him famous among the readers for his style. He avoided complicated syntax in his writings. About 70 percent of the sentences are simple sentences—a childlike syntax without subordination. See the statements of some people and the institutes about his style. The New York Times wrote in 1926 of Hemingway's first novel, "No amount of analysis can convey the quality of *The Sun Also Rises*. It is a truly gripping story, told in a lean, hard, athletic narrative prose that puts more literary English to shame. And also when Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, it said that this is for "his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style." As many of the American writers, Hemingway also deals with popular themes of American literature such as love, war, wilderness and loss. The theme of women and death is evident in stories as early as "Indian Camp". The theme of emasculation is prevalent in Hemingway's work, most notably in *The Sun Also Rises*. Emasculation, according to Fiedler, is a result of a generation of wounded soldiers; and of a generation in which women such as Brett gained emancipation. Any how some critics have characterized Hemingway's work as



misogynistic and homophobic. However he is famous among the readers for his masterpieces such as "Indian Camp" (1926), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber" (1935), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1951).

VII. NARRATIVE TECHNIQUE

The stories arising out of his African safari, viz. "The Short Happy life of Francis Macomber" and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro", demonstrate this change in the artist's technique. The most important development is the employment of the third-person viewpoint of the narration. In a sustained narrative like the novel, Hemingway does not use the third-person viewpoint in his pre-safari novels and we find him using it invariably in each of the post-safari novels. He must have become acutely conscious of the limitations of the first-person method and the advantages of the third-person method. Hemingway answered one of John Atkin's questions, on this subject, as follows: When I wrote the first two novels I had not learned to write in the third-person. The first person gives you great intimacy in attempting to give a complete sense of experience to the reader. It is limited however and in the third-person the novelist can work in other people's heads and in other people's country. His range is greatly extended and so are his obligations. I prepared myself for writing in the third person by the discipline of writing *Death in the Afternoon*, the short stories and especially the long short stories of „*The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber*“ and „*The Snows of Kilimanjaro*“. (John Atkin, P. 72-73)

VIII. IRONY AND PARADOX AS MATRIX

Hemingway superimposes a paradox over the obvious ironic pattern of this novel. Santiago catches a giant marlin after eighty-four days of unsuccessful fishing on the high seas only to lose most of him to the sharks. His great triumph is reduced to a miserable failure and what he brings home is only the skeleton of the magnificent fish lashed to his skiff. But this basic irony is transformed into a paradox when we consider how the old man fights the sharks with an indomitable will and brings home a prize, though in a bad shape, realizes his "hubris," takes the punishment and achieves true humility, admitting to himself as well as to the boy that he is beaten (p.131, 136). Material failure is transmuted into moral and spiritual triumph and Santiago suffers a victorious defeat. The prize that he brings home finally is humility. The novel presents the spirit of man struggling not only against the marlin and the sharks, but against pride which is ultimately overcome. The contra punctual framework of the old man contending against the vast sea and her denizens far out "Beyond all people in the world" helps in giving a powerful expression to this thematic paradox. Hemingway makes a skilful use of the techniques of point of



view and interior monologue in giving an effective expression to his subject. The Old Man and the Sea may be described as a composite expression of Hemingway's basic contrapuntal theme and presents the narrative technique of the post – Green Hills of Africa fiction at its best. The story yields to a variety of symbolic interpretations but these are all new dimensions which the perceptive critic sees. Even if we are prejudiced against symbolic writing and dislike the habit of reading all kinds of meanings into a writer's work, we still find that the story, by itself, has an absorbing interest and a powerful appeal.

IX. CONCLUSION

Considering the above findings the researcher takes a conclusion that every selected symbols taken from Hemingway's novel The Old Man and the Sea has values of optimistic life. The values implied in this novel can be used for guidance in our life to be a successful men. The values of optimistic life which Hemingway wants to share is in line with the theme of this novel.

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