



## EARNEST HEMINGWAY'S THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA AS A WORK OF LITERARY SYMBOLISM: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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### **Abstract**

*This paper is an attempt to lay focus on the usage of symbolism in the novel **the old man and the sea**. Hemingway's personal and artistic quests for truth were related with one another. The popularity of Hemingway's work depends on its themes of love, war, wilderness and loss which are strongly evident in the work. The public acquaintance with the personal life of Hemingway was perhaps greater than with any other modern novelist **The Old Man and the Sea** is classical with an emphasis on simplicity of theme and language and its compactness of structure. This novel is a precious symbolic novel which reflects the ability of the writer to employ images and symbols in order to give an artistic quality of the content.*

**Key Words:** *Symbolism, Confidence, Suffering, Guest, Loveliness.*

Hemingway's name will live forever in the annals of literary history for his revolutionary role in the domain of the twentieth century American fiction. His outstanding contributions to the said century are his creation of heroes like Santiago in a world dominated by mediocrity, his use of the colloquial speech for literary purposes, and his vision which visualized man as a lonely figure who has to create his own values in a valueless world and thus make his life and work distinctive. One who reads the novels of Hemingway finds in him a superb craftsman, a great story-teller and also a thinker who has striven to give artistic expression to his views on life and human destiny. But Hemingway did not set down any systematic and definite system of philosophy. What Hemingway was consistently doing is to give almost poetic expression to some of the hard facts of modern life. He is said to have pictured the modern man's dilemma and in doing this he has unearthed some of the basic facts of modern life. His novels bear witness to the author's strange preoccupation with war and death.

One modern critic says, "Hemingway writes of what he knows, from his experiences, to be true; and he writes it as honestly, directly and clearly as he can. His literary output is not as massive in bulk as that of many other writers. Yet one wonders he found time to write even that much in a life packed full of shooting, big-game hunting, fishing, and about as much physical punishment in war, road and air accidents as the human body can take". Though his range of subject-matter is not wide, he has explored it rather honestly and thoroughly. He took for his themes some of the central experiences of his own generation and the generation that followed, which were bred in an age of devastating war and violence, when the traditional values were disrupted and the meaning of existence obscured for many people. To this kind of world, Hemingway brought his own vision.

Ernest Hemingway began his literary career as a poet. His first work entitled, **Three Stories and Ten Poems** was well-received. Experiences, however, taught him that poetry was not his main domain and he was really cut out to be a writer of fiction. With the publication of **The Torrents of Spring**, he felt that he had come of age. He gave up imitating the style of Sherwood Anderson who had been his ideal guide in his early stories and struck out an independent line of his own. The important works of his that deserve the readers' attention are; 1.**In Our Times**, 2.**The Torrents of Spring**, 3.**The Sun Also Rises**, 4.**A Farewell to Arms**, 5.**Death in the Afternoon**, 6.**Green Hills of Africa**, 7.**To Have and Have Not**, 8.**The Fifth Column**, 9.**For Whom the Bell Tolls**, 10.**Men at War: An Anthology**, 11.**Across the River and into the Trees**, 12.**The Old Man and the Sea**, 13.**A Moveable Feast**, and 14.**Islands in the Streams**. The life of an author is conditioned by influences which are too many to enumerate. As such, the genius of Hemingway was molded by parental, cultural and literary influences. No doubt, his life, his outlook and his fiction were conditioned by his experiences of war, violence and death. Hemingway deals with war, violence and death to show that a person may sustain himself with the primary pleasures – sex,



alcohol and sport but the nobler thing will be to put up a stoical resistance to pain and suffering and ward off the terror of death with courage and fortitude.

The novel **The Old Man and the Sea** was published in the year 1952. It won for Hemingway the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. It is without any shadow of doubt, Hemingway's greatest achievement in his career as a novelist. The novel is classical in its simplicity of theme and language and its compactness of structure. When the story opens, Santiago the Old Man has been fishing in the gulf stream of the coast of Ravana for eighty four days without any look. Manolin the boy who helps him had been with him during the first forty eight days but the boy's father made him leave Santiago for he wanted the boy to work with the successful fisherman. The old man's bad luck continues and he returns home every day with his skirt empty. The boy desires to serve the old man in some way when he cannot accompany on his fishing trips. He fetches him sardines for the next Day's fishing. He brings him goods from the terrace which is owned by the kind-hearted Martin. The boy plans to arrange for the requirement of the old Man:

"I must have water here for him,  
I must get him another shirt and a  
Jacket for the winter and some sort of  
Shoes and another blanket". (P 42)

The boy's affection and concern for Santiago is touching. "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated. The old man is, however, active and strong". (PP 5-6). The boy's affection, sympathy, and encouragement keep him ever confident of his powers as a fisherman, Sunset finds the fish still skimming steadily out to sea and the old man has yet to see the Look a fish. The valour of the fish elicits his admiration. He pities to see it so that he might know what he has against him. He pictures the fish for its condition but is fall of praise for its great endurance. But what a great fish he is, and what he will bring in the market if the flesh is good. 'Fish' he said, 'I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends'. At the end of the second day, the old man is still towed by the strange fish which shows no signs of exhaustions after hours of towing. He admires it for its pluck "The punishment of the hook is nothing. The punishment of hanger, and that he is against something that he does not comprehend is everything" (OS 75). The old man rests a while, again dreams of the long yellow African beach and the lions. He wakes with a start when the fish begins to jump suddenly in the water and the speed of the line cuts his hands badly. The fish once again becomes quiet and he bears he pain calmly thinking that pain does not matter to a man" (P 84).

On the third day, nothing, nothing he realizes that her strength is gradually ebbing. Towards noon, the fish coming out makes its way towards the boat. At one stage in the fight he becomes desperate and says, "Come on, kill, me, I do not care who kills who? (P 92). But he pulls himself up and strikes at the fish with his harpoon and kills it. Now the fish is killed. As it gets dark, more and more shorts attack the dead marlin. The old man fights with them heroically. The great marlin is mutilated and reduced to its skeleton by the deadly sharks. Exhausted and sore with injuries, the old man stumbles ashore, drags himself to his shock and falls asleep. Thus, **The Old Man and the Sea** is a structure of two symbolic variations. It is firstly a movement of man against nature. Here the old fisherman makes a predatory attempt against the Sea by hunting out its noble creature, the prize fish. Man is able to destroy Nature's fecundity but is incapable of defeating its endurance. Nature reasserts its control over man and here is the beginning of the second movement.

The story of Santiago, the fisherman is a parable of human life. A man strives and sweats in order to accomplish something noble but fails through no fault of his. In the struggle of life, man's heroic behaviour and the great endurance stands. The old man has shown about how the spirit of man is capable of and to what heights it can rise. He also has proved that man although made for destruction, can never be defeated. The defeat of Santiago can, of course, be explained on moral grounds. His love for the fish is mingled with his pride that he is a greater fisherman.



The old man is Christ-like in his capacity to endure physical pain and take any amount of suffering with fortitude. The picture of Santiago leaning against the thwart of the skiff and enduring pain remind us of the great sufferings of Jesus. After his defeat in the fight with the sharks, the old man comes ashore and goes to his shock. He lies down with his hands straight out and the pains turned upwards. The posture he assumes has unmistakable similarity with that of Jesus Christ on the cross. By using Christian symbolism, Hemingway has made his novel universal and timeless in its appeal. His mastery over the symbols enables him to present facts as more than facts and in truth transmutes them into values. Manolin, the boy, serves a double purpose in the novel. Firstly, he heightens our sympathy for the old man. Secondly, he is a symbol of Santiago's innocence and youth. **The Old Man and the Sea** illustrates the meeting of innocence and experience in a masterly way, viewed as a traditional American theme. **The Old Man and the Sea** becomes the story of the American Adam grown grey with experience, but essentially youthful in spirit and characteristically accommodative to any crisis in life. Hemingway's **The Old Man and the Sea** is "an idyll of the seas as sea, as un-Byronic and un-Melvillian as Homer himself and communicated in a prose as calm and compelling as Homer's verse. No real artist symbolizes or allegorizes and Hemingway is a real artist-but every real work of art enables symbols and allegories. So does this short but not small masterpiece" (505).

Hemingway's **The Old Man and the Sea** as Berson said is "an idyll of the sea. No part of Hemingway's work in Donni's words that stands at the beginning of **For Whom the Bell Tolls** is only an island entire in itself, every piece is a part of continent a part of a man created in a new prose for a new world establishing a clear symbolic connection between the boy and the lions" (Carlos 10). Santiago no longer dreamed "of storms, nor of woman, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. 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" (308). In his old age and the time of his suffering Santiago is supported by his memory of his youth and the strength of his young life so in the past he is happy. But there is the further realization that the child is the father to the man. Where pride and love exist together, the pride must be burned out as by the canter of fire. Love will remain as the natural concomitant of true humility. His humility and simplicity will not allow entry to any taint of conscious martyrdom. 'Man is not born for defeat' he says at one point. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated" (P 316). In this tragic process, he achieved the moral strength. It is not necessarily a Christian victory. Yet it is clear that "Hemingway has artfully enhanced the native power of his tragic parable by enlisting the further power of Christian Symbols" (319). **The Old Man and the Sea** may well appear to be not only a moral fable but a parody.

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