


<p>THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA, THE BATTLE OF LIFE FOR ALL HUMAN KIND</p>		<p>Literature</p> <p>Keywords: Hemingway, Old Man, sea, symbolism, Santiago, Manolin, Marlin, sharks, lions, fish, humankind, struggle, universal.</p>
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<p>Abstract</p>	<p>The Old Man And The Sea, by Ernest Hemingway, went in printing in 1952, a year later was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for fiction. In 1954, Hemingway was given the Nobel Prize in Literature. After such a big success and a long and well accomplished career, a few years later, on a Sunday, the morning July 2nd 1961, Hemingway committed suicide. The paradox of the author’s ending with the ending of his most famous novel The Old Man And The Sea is that Ernest Hemingway, the man, gave up, whereas his character in the novel Santiago never gave up, was never defeated, emerging triumphant with the struggle against larger forces. This paradox raises the question: is The Old Man And The Sea a reflection of the author’s personal life and agony, as most commentators believe, or is it much more than that? A novel that depicts and represents the constant struggle of human kind in every era? Why was Hemingway in agony? Ernest Hemingway was a writer that belonged to the Lost Generation. One can imagine living the horrors of WWI, known as the Great War, being a personal witness in the Civil Spanish War, then WWII, living the entire adult life in and between wars. One loses hope and only dwells in the despair of loss, and agonizing in every breath. But as painful as his life was, Hemingway wrote this novel not just like a reflection of his own agony, not just as an expression of his own voice, but more than that, he portrayed the constant human struggle throughout the centuries, speaking in the voice of all humanity, past, present and future. This approach is the key what makes the novel so great. And the style and symbolism used in it make it a masterpiece therefore reading it a very thrilling experience. In this paper I will analyze the symbolism used in The Old Man And The Sea as well as make a comparison with a flow of historical and literary memory and conscience of the human kind, the world at large and of its author Ernest Hemingway. The purpose of this paper is to present an analysis on why this novel goes beyond the voice of the author. It is a universal work that represents the struggle and calling of humanity throughout the ages.</p>
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Introduction

The Old Man and the Sea, by Ernest Hemingway, was published in 1952 and was awarded the 1953 Pulitzer Prize for fiction. A year later, in 1954, Hemingway was given the Nobel Prize in Literature. After such a big success and a long and well accomplished career, a few years later, on a Sunday, the morning July 2nd 1961, Hemingway put two shells in the Boss shotgun then lowered the gun butt carefully to the floor, leaned forward and with the barrels of the gun in his mouth depressed the triggers. He committed suicide.

The paradox of the author’s ending with the ending of his most famous novel *The Old Man And The Sea* is that Ernest Hemingway, the man, gave up, whereas his character in the novel Santiago never gave up, was never defeated, emerging triumphant with the struggle against larger forces. This paradox raises the question: is *The Old Man And The Sea* a reflection of the author’s personal life and agony, as most commentators believe, or is it much more than that? A novel that depicts and represents the constant struggle of human kind in every era?

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Why was Hemingway in agony?

Ernest Hemingway was a writer that belonged to the Lost Generation. A generation of writers that was “lost” in the sense that its inherited values were no longer relevant in the postwar world. (Britannica)

One can imagine living the horrors of WWI, known as the Great War, being a personal witness in the Civil Spanish War, then WWII, living the entire adult life in and between wars. One loses hope and only dwells in the despair of loss, and agonizing in every breath.

But as painful as his life was, Hemingway wrote *The Old Man And The Sea* not just like a reflection of his own agony, not just as an expression of his own voice, but more than that, he portrayed the constant human struggle throughout the centuries, speaking in the voice of all humanity, past, present and future.

This approach is the key what makes the novel so great.

And the style and symbolism used in it make it a masterpiece therefore reading it a very thrilling experience.

In this paper I will analyze the symbolism used in *The Old Man and the Sea* as well as make a comparison with a flow of historical and literary memory and conscience of the human kind, the world at large and of its author Ernest Hemingway.

This paper conveys a thorough analysis on how this novel goes beyond the voice of the author. It is a universal work that represents the struggle and calling of humanity throughout the ages.

Analysis

A. The continuous struggle of humanity and the inherited knowledge of history.

The title *The Old Man and the Sea* was in fact the author’s second choice. Hemingway had considered “The Dignity of Man” as a title, but thought it too pompous. (Harold Bloom, p.100)

The story of the book is set in Cuba. The main protagonist is Santiago, a fisherman who has not caught a fish in eighty-four days. Desperate and with his pride hurt he goes too far at sea to restore his reputation as a great fisherman, and his pride. He manages to catch a giant fish, an enormous marlin. For days the fish pulls Santiago’s boat further at sea, until it is killed. The old fisherman ties the giant fish at the side of his boat and heads home, but the second part of his ordeal begins when he has to cope with shark attacks. The sharks eat all the marlin’s flesh and

Santiago returns at bay only with the skeleton of the giant fish. He lost the fish, but triumphed in his battle, restoring his reputation and winning his personal battle.

The story of the book is the embodiment of the continuous struggle of humanity and a reflection of the inherited knowledge of history.

It is a modern representation of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, the legendary Greek king of Ithaca, a hero of the Trojan War, who went through immense struggles and adventures to return home.

Hemingway was a modernist, and modernists turned simple people into heroes and ordinary things and events into great importance, therefore Santiago is the modern Odysseus.

Santiago is David facing Goliath, the small shepherd boy battling the philistine giant.

The story is parallel to Joshua's conquest of Jericho, Virgil's account of the Trojan Horse from the *Aeneid*, along with historical accounts of the Crusades. (Bloom, p. 96)

The serene acknowledgment of Santiago's responsibility inevitably recalls that of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, (Bloom, p. 33)

In the story one finds symbols of Christology, but depicted from a human perspective and not in a religious approach. All Santiago's struggles seem to identify with Christ's suffering on the cross and then his victory. (Bloom, p.23). His ability to take punishment and the Christological references continue to the end. These references originate from his sense of identity with the marlin. He considers a sin to kill the fish. (Hemingway, p. 52)

It is on the third day that Santiago finally stabs the Marlin with his harpoon, and this is not accidental, since it refers to the resurrection of Christ. This is a resonance of Christ's crucifixion. At the end of the novel, as depicted in the text, bearing many injuries on his body, he falls asleep in the cruciform position.

The symbol of baptism or purification are also found in the novel, it is evident when Santiago pours sea water on his head (Sakshi Jain, p.4) as well as the apostolic parallelism with Santiago that is the Spanish form of St. James, the Galilean fisherman apostle of Jesus, and martyr. In this collective memory of human kind and on the constant struggle against bigger forces we find a resemblance with earlier literature such as Dante Alighieri's *Divine Comedy* and Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*.

Hemingway dedicates much attention to the stars just as Dante did in the three books of the *Divine Comedy: Inferno, Purgatory, and Paradise*.

“I saw the lovely things the heavens hold, and we came out to see once more the stars,” writes Dante at the end of Canto XXXIV. The stars are present in the three parts of the Divine Comedy representing deity and universal justice, therefore Santiago looks at them throughout his journey of suffering and redemption.

Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick* is a novel published a century earlier than *The Old Man and the Sea* but very similar in plot, in which we read about Captain Ahab’s obsession with killing the whale, Moby Dick.

At the center of both novels is the big fish. In his pursuit Ahab brings about his own death and almost all of his crew, different from Santiago who returns alive, however at the end of the novel Santiago admits to himself as well as to the boy that he is beaten.

They beat me, Manolin,” he said. “They truly beat me.” (Hemingway, p.6)

Hemingway’s depiction of human struggle with death and the battle with bigger forces in this novel appears to also be an homage of the American romantic poet Robert Frost, who in his famous poem *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening* describes the conflict of the author with death. In this famous poem Frost concludes that he must move on, continue the journey of life before he sleeps, i.e. die. (Norton Anthology, p.1133)

Here the woods symbolize death, and Frost, was a man marked by huge personal tragedies, such as the deaths of many of his children, the suicidal of his son, and other tragedies. And “the miles to go” of Frost, resemble in Santiago’s determination to go further at sea, to winning the battle.

But I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures. (Hemingway, 31)

Despite parallelisms of perseverance from the past, Hemingway includes in his novel a figure from his present, and in the spirit of modernism, that figure is Joe DiMaggio, a fisherman’s son, the baseball hero who played the game despite the pain he endured due to a physical handicap. (Britannica)

His bone spur on his heel made him comparable to Achilles. (Michael Hollister, p.4) And here is another name that adds to the stream of the human collective memory, who was offered the choice to stay at home, live a long life and die nobody, or go to Troy where he would die and be remembered for thousands of years.

Santiago, David, Joshua, Oedipus, Odysseus, Achilles, Christ, James, Virgil, Dante, Ahab and Moby Dick, Frost and Joe DiMaggio, they all represent human aspiration, struggle, and transcendence.

To enforce his universal message Hemingway used his unique style and a rich symbolism.

B. Symbolism as a tool to depict human aspiration, struggle, and transcendence.

The use of symbolism in *The Old Man and the Sea* gives the novel a deeper and universal meaning. The whole book is filled with major symbols and Hemingway's iceberg style of writing makes the reader think at every sentence.

The Sea

The setting of the novel is at sea. It is a symbol of Universe, Nature and Life. The sea is the beginning of life on earth. Life originates from the sea. Santiago refers to the sea as a woman, both beautiful and cruel. (Hemingway, p.12)

The sea is the mother of life and Hemingway uses it as a symbol of life itself, not only his own but that of human kind throughout the ages. The sea is life and all human beings in it.

Hemingway depicts it as a desert, as a path of human journey, and the emphasis on the number eighty-four, reminds us of the tests of history and the personal drought of each of us.

Santiago

Santiago is the main character of the novel. The name is the Spanish version of Saint James, the apostle of Christ, called a "fisher of men." The choice of such a name is not accidental. It gives the man a mission.

Santiago bears the mark of a divine mission, the mission of winning the battle of life, but in fact he is any man, any tired and vulnerable man, who has to bear his/her burden all alone in the path of life.

He looked across the sea and knew how alone he was now. (Hemingway, p.28)

"You're tired, old man," he said. "You're tired inside." (Hemingway, p. 56)

This is the reason why Hemingway gave Santiago a saint's name but based this character on a real fisherman, Gregorio Fuentes, who inspired Hemingway for this character and novel.

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles on the back of his neck. He had many injuries on his body and hands. Most of all he was alone and desperate.

No one should be alone in their old age, he thought. But it is unavoidable. (Hemingway, p. 22)

But Santiago is not only Saint James, Saint Francis, Hemingway himself, or Fuentes; he is every human in all our history, struggling in the battles of life, with the perseverance to triumph over any difficulty. He is old and poor, a failure in the eyes of others, but he has dignity and pride. He is the symbol of determination and dignity of human kind.

Manolin

Manolin is the young protégé of Santiago. He represents the future and symbolizes hope and continuation, just like the new generations bring hope and continuation to human race.

Santiago's triumph is indeed moral: he loses the marlin but not his belief in the worth of his task. The lesson is clear; if Manolin inherits his master's pride and tenacity, he will also become a well-armed warrior in the struggle that is life. (Harold Bloom, pp, 78-79)

Manolin is not only the old man's future life. He is the future of all of us. That is why Santiago repeats several times in his journey: "I wish I had the boy. I wish I had the boy with me. Next time I will bring the boy with me." (Hemingway, p.20)

Lions

Lions appear in many passages. The novel begins with the words old man, sea, fish and ends with lions. In fact the very last word of the novel is "the lions."

The old man was dreaming about the lions. (Hemingway, p. 64)

Why such a surreal combination of words and symbols?

The lion is a symbol of power and strength. Santiago thinks and dreams of lions. They remind him of youth, (Sandamali K.P.S, p.4) courage, energy and dignity, the spirit of the entire human race.

The old man's dreams of lions are symbolic. The dream gives us an idea of how Santiago sees his part in life. He fought hard; he resisted and managed to protect his fish. But his hopes and dreams don't end, to being empowered with strength and be back on his feet. Rising again just like the humans have done throughout the ages and through the most difficult times of history. Humanity is brave and courageous and overcomes any struggle. This is the message that Hemingway transmits in this novel.

Marlin

Marlin, the big fish, is the worthy adversary of Santiago. He calls it "my friend and my brother."³⁶ Marlin is used as the symbol of redemption, purification and transcendence.

The killing of the marlin marks the climax of the novel. The end of the marlin's life is the most vital of moments. The fish seems to surpass his own death, because it invests him with a new life.

This notion of transcendence is important, for it resounds within Santiago's story. Like the fish, the old man suffers something of a death on his way back to the village. He is exposed of his

twist and, given his age, will likely never have the opportunity to land such a magnificent fish again. (Khan, and Bhuiyan, p. 110)

But Marlin serves not only as a symbol of redemption for Santiago he is used also as a symbol of natural order, facts of life, the battles and struggles of all of us.

Sharks

Sharks are used as a symbol for the destructive forces in life. If Marlin was Santiago's brother they are his enemies. They are described as the enemies of any human attempt and endurance, calling upon himself to fight them until he dies. (Hemingway, p. 58)

In the story they are also used to play an important role in separating the material from the moral outcome of the events. The sharks eat the whole Marlin's flesh but not the skeleton. They deprived Santiago from food and material gain, but not from his moral victory and triumph. Hemingway has clearly made a distinction on this issue and has given the readers a clear universal message on the importance of moral and human dignity over materialism.

And to further emphasize this message Hemingway uses the voice of people in the Terrace before and after Santiago goes fishing. At the very beginning of the novel he writes how people made fun of him.

And at the last page he again uses people on the terrace, but this time as a means to emphasize the moral triumph of the old fisherman, who was still poor and weary, but victorious.

Conclusion

In conclusion *The Old Man and the Sea* is not a merely a reflection of the author's personal life and agony but a novel that depicts and represents the constant struggle of human kind in every era. This novel goes beyond the expression of the author's own voice but portrays the continuous human struggle throughout the centuries, speaking in the voice of all humanity, past, present and future. Combined with a distinguished style and symbolism this novel is a modern summary of the human journey in which we find ancient traces of Homer's epic poem the *Odyssey*, character of the Bible, such as David, Joshua, Christ and his disciple James, but not as religious figures but example of human endurance. We find the traces of Dante, parallelism of Ahab and Moby Dick, Frost and the baseball player Joe DiMaggio, all representing human aspiration, struggle, and transcendence. It is not a personal novel. It is a universal work written in a unique style and filled with a rich symbolism that serves as a tool to depict a universal message and the endurance of human race. In this novel the sea symbolizes universe, nature and life. The main character Santiago represents any man from the past, present and future. He represents the human nature and the journey of life. Manolin, the young protégé of Santiago represents the future and symbolizes hope and continuation of life and of the new generations. He is present only in the beginning and at the end of the story, symbolizing the circle of life. The lions are the courage of every one of us.

They represent power and strength. They remind the author as well as every reader of youth, courage, energy and dignity, the spirit of the entire human race. Marlin, the big fish, is the worthy adversary of Santiago, not also his friend and his brother. Marlin is the brotherhood of men. A symbol of redemption, purification and transcendence. Sharks are depicted as the destructive forces in life. The enemies in everyone's lives. The hindrance of any human attempt and endurance. *The Old Man And The Sea* is a universal work that embodies the human journey throughout the ages.

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