

## ERNEST HEMINGWAY “ THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA”

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[sitoram948@gmail.com](mailto:sitoram948@gmail.com)**Abstract**

This article discusses Ernest Hemingway’s “The Old Man and the Sea” as a story about struggle, endurance, and human dignity. The novella tells the story of Santiago, an old fisherman who fights a giant marlin in the open sea. Although he loses the fish to sharks, Santiago does not lose his honor or courage. The article explains how the sea, the marlin, and other elements of the story symbolize life’s challenges and human strength. It argues that true success in the novel is not material gain but inner victory and self-respect. Through Santiago’s experience, Hemingway shows that people can face hardship with courage and dignity. The study concludes that “The Old Man and the Sea” presents a powerful message about perseverance and the strength of the human spirit.

**Keywords**

Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea, human endurance, dignity, man and nature, perseverance, symbolism, resilience, existential struggle, moral victory.

**Introduction.** American journalist, short story writer, and novelist Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) has written extensively. He is one of the most influential writers of twentieth century. His genres include journalistic writings, short stories, drama and many novels. His major novels include “The Sun Also Rises”, “For Whom the Bell Tolls”, and “A Farewell to Arms”. His novella “The Old Man and The Sea” published in 1952, is considered one of his most important works. This novel’s protagonist is an old fisherman called Santiago whose sail is patched and gives the impression of permanent defeat. His whole body is wrinkled and leaves an impression of oldness and tiredness. But his eyes are full of brightness, cheerfulness, and undefeatedness. His shoulders are old but still powerful. “The Old Man and the Sea” explores the relationship between human beings and nature, showing both conflict and respect. Santiago’s long battle with the marlin represents life’s challenges, while his calm acceptance of suffering reflects inner courage. Even when Santiago loses the fish to sharks, he maintains his pride and self-respect. This shows that success in the novella is measured not by material achievement, but by moral strength. This article aims to examine the main themes of endurance, struggle, and dignity in “The Old Man and the Sea”. By analyzing Santiago’s experiences and the symbolic elements of the story, the study highlights how Hemingway presents the strength of the human spirit in the face of hardship.

**Santiago: The Image of the Struggling Human Being.** Santiago is presented as a simple fisherman, yet his character carries deep symbolic meaning. Physically, he is old, thin, and weakened by age. His hands are scarred from years of fishing, and his body suffers greatly during the struggle with the marlin. However, mentally and spiritually, Santiago is strong, disciplined, and determined. He does not allow failure to define his identity or diminish his self-



worth. The long period without success has caused other fishermen to view Santiago as “salao,” the worst form of bad luck. Even the boy Manolin is forced by his parents to leave Santiago’s boat. Nevertheless, Santiago does not surrender to despair. He continues to rise early, prepare his equipment carefully, and go to sea with quiet confidence. His behavior demonstrates resilience and self-respect, qualities that define him as a heroic figure. Santiago’s endurance during the battle with the marlin reveals his inner strength. He tolerates physical pain, hunger, thirst, and exhaustion without complaint. He speaks to himself to maintain focus and courage, reminding himself of his past achievements and his love for fishing. Through Santiago, Hemingway suggests that human greatness lies not in avoiding suffering, but in enduring it with dignity.

**The Sea as a Living Presence.** The sea plays a central role in the novella and is portrayed as a powerful yet familiar force. Santiago refers to the sea as “la mar,” a feminine term that reflects affection and intimacy. To him, the sea is not an enemy, but a source of life, challenge, and meaning. This perspective distinguishes Santiago from younger fishermen, who view the sea as something to be conquered and exploited. The sea represents the larger world in which human beings must struggle to survive. It provides both opportunity and danger, reward and loss. Santiago’s deep respect for the sea reflects a balanced relationship between humanity and nature. He understands that nature cannot be controlled, only faced with humility and skill. Hemingway uses the sea to emphasize Santiago’s isolation. Alone in his boat, far from shore, Santiago must rely solely on his experience, strength, and faith. This isolation intensifies the emotional and philosophical depth of the story, transforming Santiago’s fishing trip into a symbolic journey of self-discovery and endurance.

**The Marlin: A Worthy Opponent.** The marlin is one of the most important symbols in “The Old Man and the Sea”. It represents strength, beauty, and dignity in nature. Unlike an ordinary fish, the marlin is described with admiration and respect. Santiago calls it his brother and acknowledges its nobility and courage. The struggle between Santiago and the marlin lasts several days, becoming a test of endurance for both. Santiago does not hate the marlin; instead, he respects it as a worthy opponent. This respectful relationship elevates the conflict beyond a simple act of survival and turns it into a meaningful confrontation between two equal forces. By presenting the marlin as noble and powerful, Hemingway emphasizes that true struggle involves respect and understanding rather than domination. Santiago’s victory over the marlin is not a celebration of conquest, but a recognition of shared suffering and strength. This reinforces the novella’s theme that dignity exists even in conflict and loss.

**Suffering, Loss, and Moral Victory.** One of the most significant aspects of the novella is its treatment of loss. After finally killing the marlin, Santiago ties it to his boat and begins his journey home. However, sharks are attracted to the blood and attack the fish, gradually destroying it. Santiago fights back with all his remaining strength, but he is ultimately powerless against them. On the surface, Santiago’s journey ends in failure. He returns with only the skeleton of the marlin, exhausted and wounded. However, Hemingway challenges traditional ideas of success and failure. Santiago understands that although he has lost the physical reward, he has not lost his dignity or self-respect. The famous line, “A man can be destroyed but not defeated,” summarizes the philosophical message of the novella. Santiago is physically destroyed, but his spirit remains undefeated. His acceptance of loss without bitterness demonstrates true heroism. Hemingway suggests that moral victory is more important than material achievement, and that dignity can survive even in defeat.

**Manolin and the Theme of Hope.** Manolin, the young boy who admires Santiago, plays a crucial role in reinforcing the novella’s message. He represents loyalty, compassion, and hope



for the future. Although he no longer fishes with Santiago, he continues to care for him, bringing food and listening to his stories. Manolin's respect for Santiago grows stronger after the old man's return. He recognizes Santiago's greatness not through success, but through endurance. At the end of the novella, Manolin decides to fish with Santiago again, despite his parents' objections. This decision symbolizes the continuation of values such as courage, dignity, and perseverance. Through Manolin, Hemingway suggests that struggle is meaningful when it inspires others. Santiago's endurance becomes a lesson for the younger generation, ensuring that his moral victory extends beyond his personal experience.

**Loneliness and Inner Strength.** Loneliness is a recurring theme in "The Old Man and the Sea". Santiago spends most of the novella alone, both physically and emotionally. His isolation reflects the reality of human existence, where individuals often face life's challenges on their own. However, Santiago's loneliness is not portrayed as weakness. Instead, it becomes a source of inner strength. He talks to himself, the fish, and the sea, revealing his thoughts and emotions. These moments show his deep connection to the world around him and his ability to find meaning even in solitude. Hemingway presents loneliness as an inevitable part of the human condition, but also as an opportunity for self-reflection and growth. Santiago's solitude allows him to confront his fears, test his limits, and reaffirm his values.

**Key Parts of the Story.** Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is structured around several key events that illustrate the novella's central themes of endurance, dignity, and the human spirit. Understanding these main parts is essential for analyzing the story's meaning and Santiago's character development without catching a fish. Villagers consider him unlucky, and even his young apprentice, Manolin, is forced by his parents to leave Santiago's boat and fish with more successful fishermen. Despite these challenges, the novella begins by presenting Santiago, an elderly Cuban fisherman who has gone 84 days without catching a fish. This introduction sets the stage for Santiago's struggle and establishes his character as resilient and determined. On the 85th day, Santiago decides to sail far into the Gulf Stream, seeking better fishing grounds. He prepares his equipment carefully and approaches the sea with respect and strategy, highlighting his experience and deep connection to nature. This decision marks the beginning of his most significant trial. Santiago hooks a giant marlin, the largest he has ever encountered. A long and exhausting struggle ensues, lasting several days and nights. Throughout the battle, Santiago admires the marlin's strength and beauty, referring to it as his "brother." This part of the story emphasizes endurance, courage, and patience, illustrating Santiago's physical and mental fortitude as he faces one of life's greatest challenges. After intense effort, Santiago finally succeeds in killing the marlin. He ties the fish to his boat to take it back to shore. This moment represents physical victory, but Santiago treats the marlin with humility and respect, recognizing the nobility of his opponent. The event demonstrates that the true value of his effort lies not merely in the catch itself but in the struggle and skill required to achieve it. On the return journey, sharks are drawn to the marlin's blood and attack it. Santiago fights them bravely using all his remaining strength, but he is ultimately unable to save the fish. By the time he reaches shore, only the skeleton remains. This part highlights the inevitable losses of life and the limits of human control, while reinforcing the idea that moral and spiritual victory remains intact, even in apparent defeat. Santiago returns home, exhausted but undefeated in spirit. He rests and dreams of lions on the beaches of Africa, symbolizing youth, strength, and hope. The story concludes by emphasizing that true success is measured not by material gain but by endurance, courage, and personal integrity. Santiago's journey demonstrates that human dignity and resilience persist, even in the face of adversity.



**Symbolism.** Symbolism plays a significant role in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, enriching the narrative with deeper philosophical and emotional meaning. Through symbols such as the sea, the marlin, the sharks, and the lions in Santiago's dreams, Hemingway transforms a simple fishing story into a universal reflection on human struggle, endurance, and dignity. These symbols help readers understand the inner world of the protagonist and the broader message of the novella. The sea is one of the most important symbols in the story. Santiago refers to it as "la mar," showing his respect and affection. The sea represents life itself—full of beauty, danger, opportunity, and uncertainty. It provides Santiago with both hope and suffering, reflecting the unpredictable nature of human existence. The sea also symbolizes isolation, as Santiago faces his greatest challenge alone, emphasizing the individual nature of human struggle. The marlin symbolizes an ideal opponent and the ultimate challenge in life. It is described as strong, graceful, and noble, and Santiago admires it deeply. Rather than viewing the marlin as an enemy, Santiago sees it as his equal, calling it his brother. The struggle with the marlin represents humanity's confrontation with life's greatest challenges. By respecting the marlin, Santiago shows that dignity exists not only in victory, but also in the struggle itself. In contrast, the sharks symbolize destruction, loss, and forces beyond human control. Unlike the marlin, the sharks are not admired or respected; they represent meaningless destruction that follows human achievement. Their attack on the marlin illustrates how success can be taken away by external forces, regardless of effort or merit. Through the sharks, Hemingway suggests that loss is an unavoidable part of life, and that endurance is tested most severely after apparent success. The lions in Santiago's dreams symbolize youth, strength, and hope. They remind Santiago of his younger days and provide him with emotional comfort and motivation. Even at the end of the novella, when Santiago is physically exhausted, he dreams of lions, suggesting spiritual renewal and continuity. The lions represent the enduring spirit within Santiago that remains strong despite age and hardship. Together, these symbols deepen the meaning of *The Old Man and the Sea* and reinforce its central themes. Hemingway uses symbolism to show that while human beings may suffer loss and defeat, they can still preserve dignity, courage, and hope. The symbolic elements of the novella transform Santiago's personal struggle into a timeless representation of the human condition.

**Discussion.** The analysis of "The Old Man and the Sea" demonstrates that Ernest Hemingway presents struggle as an inevitable and meaningful part of human existence. Santiago's experience shows that hardship and loss do not necessarily lead to defeat; instead, they can become sources of inner strength and moral growth. The findings of this study support the idea that Hemingway redefines traditional notions of success by emphasizing dignity, perseverance, and self-respect over material achievement. Santiago's struggle with the marlin and his later loss to the sharks highlight the fragile nature of human effort in the face of uncontrollable forces. However, rather than portraying this fragility as weakness, Hemingway presents it as a defining aspect of humanity. Santiago's calm acceptance of suffering and loss suggests that true heroism lies in maintaining one's values under pressure. This perspective aligns with broader interpretations of the novella as a reflection on the human condition, where meaning is found not in victory, but in endurance. The relationship between Santiago and Manolin further strengthens this interpretation. While Santiago appears to fail in practical terms, his struggle inspires the boy and ensures the continuation of his values. This suggests that human actions gain significance when they influence others positively. From this point of view, Santiago's journey extends beyond personal experience and becomes a moral lesson for the community and future generations. Moreover, the novella's continued relevance in modern society can be attributed to its universal message. In a world marked by uncertainty, competition, and repeated challenges, Santiago's story resonates with readers who face failure and loss in their own lives. Hemingway's portrayal of quiet courage and perseverance offers a timeless



reminder that dignity can survive even in the most difficult circumstances. The discussion confirms that “The Old Man and the Sea” is not merely a story about fishing or personal struggle, but a broader meditation on human resilience. The novella encourages readers to reconsider the meaning of success and to recognize the value of effort, integrity, and endurance in shaping human identity.

**Conclusion.** In conclusion, “The Old Man and the Sea” is a profound literary work that explores endurance, dignity, and the resilience of the human spirit. Through the character of Santiago, Ernest Hemingway presents a vision of humanity that is defined not by success or failure, but by courage, perseverance, and moral integrity. Santiago’s struggle with the marlin and his loss to the sharks illustrate that suffering is an essential part of life, yet it does not diminish human worth. The novella’s lasting appeal lies in its universal message. Readers from different cultures and generations can relate to Santiago’s struggle and draw inspiration from his endurance. “The Old Man and the Sea” ultimately affirms that even in defeat, a person can achieve greatness by remaining true to oneself and facing adversity with dignity.

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