The Symbolism in “The Old Man and the Sea” influenced how the readers understanding

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Abstract

This research paper is about the symbolism of the novel “The Old Man and the Sea” by Ernest Hemingway since 1953. This story is about the old man who got isolated from social. Other people looked at him as a bad luck fisherman. He went to the sea far out with a hope to catch a big fish and take his pride back from went to fishing for eighty-four days without getting any fish. Then he achieved his hope by caught a big fish; anyways, on the way back the sharks was attacked him and take away his pride left behind the sea. They are four main symbols which the narrator kept mentioned in the story that is the power, the kinship, the failure, and the pride. TOMATS is a very strong symbolic text which entice a potential from the readers and make them completely understand the hidden meaning of the story.

Hemingway had a huge success on the novel “The Old Man and the Sea” Published in 1953. It is very strong symbolic text, which could help the understanding of the readers. This story was about the old fishing man who was left the land far out and focused on his goal by getting a good fish since he did not catch the fish for eighty-four days. He got isolated from social as pariah. Other fishermen see him as bad luck and poor fisherman. After he came back for two days and two nights, he did not come back only himself but he came back with the big skeleton that no one had ever seen this big of fish. The symbolism is used in the novel of Hemingway, “The Old Man and the Sea” to helps deeper understanding about the text. Therefore, this novel was mentioned the main symbolic as the power, kinship, failure, and pride.

The symbols of power are very important in this story. The desire for power has led the old man to become a successful fisherman. They are many symbols for the power and the most evidence represented the power is the lions that the old man used to dreams when he want the motivation or want some strength. Because the lions are represented to hope of the old man which lead to gained power according to the novel, when he tired of pulled the marlin and he started to dream about the lion, “he saw the first of the lion come down onto it in the early dark and then the other lions came and he rested his chin on the wood of the bows” (p. 40). This dreams made we know that the old man need helps such a strong person as the lions on his dream in the terrible situation. In additional, the lions, as we all knew that they are the most powerful in the jungle and being a monarch of all animals, so the lions is the most well-known  symbol for the power. Another symbol which represented the power is the hands. The hands of the old man are the one of the most often mentioned from the beginning to the end of the story. When the old man pulled the line against the marlin, Santiago thinks about the time he was in Africa and played the hand game against Negro who was the strongest man on the docks for one day and one night. Which same as when he pulled the line against the marlin. Then the narrator started to mention the hands again and again when Santiago got hurt and got cramped, “He felt the line carefully with his right hand and noticed his hand was bleeding” (p. 26) by pulling the great fish. Then his left hand started to cramp, “He could feel the steady hard pull of the line and his left hand was cramped” (p. 27) from pulled very tight the heavy cord by one hand. Because the strong hands of the Santiago made him caught the marlin and achieve his wish.

The power is very important in this story that motivated Santiago to achieve his wish by caught the great fish as marlin. We can feel the extreme emotion on the story by those symbols of the power.

The kinships also have the huge role in this story such as Man VS. Nature, the line, and the marlin. Everyone might have this question in our mind “Did the old man are crazy?” that he likes to talking to himself along while fishing. How could you imagine how lonely he is that he need to go fishing alone every day and have no family and friend other than a boy that he has in his life.

The first symbol of the kinship can be man vs. nature, Santiago always mentioned the nature as his friend and his family including the marlin that he killed, “The fish is my friend too” (p. 36). And at the same time the old man also mentioned the fish as brother, “Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother” (p. 45). However, he still need to kill the fish to be alive and do the right thing as he was born as fisherman although it may have someone die. San Pedro has mentioned that, “You did not kill the fish only

to keep alive and to sell for food. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you love him after. If you love him, it is not sin to kill him” (p. 52). As the lonely old man, he keeps talking to himself and talking to the living thing such a bird or anything else. His true friend is the birds, he thought, because birds made he caught the fish by observing the nature from dipping and hunting of the birds. He used everything surrounded to become valuable as the part of the story when the old man got cut by the line, “The old man would have liked to keep his hand in the salt water...and braced himself and held his hand up against the sun” (p. 27). He tried to make the right-hand heal as fast as possible to use the right-hand again because the line was cut on the working part of his hand. The second symbol of the kinships is the fishing line, the old man need to be a part of it and need to be conscious to the line all the time otherwise the line might do something bad to him as when he was talking to a small bird, “How did I let the fish cut me with that one quick pull he made?...perhaps I was looking at the small bird and thinking of him. Now I will pay attention to my work” (p. 26). Or maybe, if he did not pay attention to the line all the time he might lose his wish entire of his life because the fish might pull the line until it runs out. As I said he need to be in the part of the line and he are. He can feel how deep the fish was and how heavy they were. The last symbol of the kinship is the marlin, as we all know the marlin is the ultimate opponent he could not imagine. He stayed in touch with the fish for two days and two nights. While they are pulled against each other, the old man was changed from talk to himself to talk with the fish by showing how strong they are. The fish are jumping and showing how great he was, but he never know who he was fighting to, “He is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is, he thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely...he cannot know that it is only one man against him,

nor that it is an old man.” (p. 22). He feels very sorry for the fish after the sharks came by nowhere and take a quarter of marlin, he said, “I shouldn’t have gone out so far, fish,...neither for you nor for me. I am sorry fish” (p. 55).

We can see how amazing the old man was by his actions that the kinship was very important for living thing and he still attachment to the fish although he was already dead.

The failure of the old man while goes far out with the hope. They are many symbols for failure such as hands, marlin’s skeleton, and unprepared to lead the complete understanding. First, the hands, in this situation the hands is a failure by lack of power; even through, the old man was a champion of hand game before, but now he is very old and left those memories far behind. That why he likes to dreams about the lion which presented the youths, the happiness, the strength, and the hope. As my observe, I  noticed that the old man likes to said “I wish I had the boy” (p. 22) that absolutely mean he needs help because he did not have enough power to pulled the fish. Also, the cause of failure in his hands came from the injuries that he got while pulled the fish. Second, the marlin’s skeleton, it is the obvious failure symbol which we can see the gaping wound and the only skeleton was left. It is all the old man have and the hope of the old man was got destroyed in front of him and he cannot do really much about it. He just watches his hope left behind the sea and came back with the sadness.

Santiago fails because of his lack of preparation, it is the main reason that lead him to the failure. At the beginning of the story, the boy was asked him to go to fishing with him but he does not allow a boy to go. If he let a boy come with him, he might not end up with came back with nothing except the ashes of the marlin’s skeleton that emphasized the failure of himself. He also unprepared for the raw material to have better taste when he eat the fish. Santiago has

mentioned that, “I will never go in a boat again without salt or limes” (p. 39). He also said that, “If I had brains I would have splashed water on the bow all day and drying, it would have made salt. But then I did not hook the dolphin until almost sunset. Still it was a lack of preparation” (p. 39).

The biggest failure of the old man would be the unprepared which we can see in the story that the old man keep mentioned that, “I wish I had a boy” (p. 22) to help him opposed the terrible situation. Santiago has said after he was destroyed that, “I wish it had been a dream now and that I had never hooked the fish and was alone in bed on the newspapers” (p. 51). He feels sorry for both himself and the fish that he just tried to do everything to achieved his hope, but  only one thing just come and take away all he have. All his effort was meant nothing.

Symbols relating to the pride as the resistance and the braveness of the old man are important for the profoundly understanding for the old man and the sea. There are two main symbolic of the pride as the resistance and the braveness of the old man are the sea and the hands of the old man after the fight. The first symbol of the pride as the resistance and the braveness is the sea. According to Trent Lorcher, he has said that, “The sea made the old man left the land far behind and he need to prove how great he are by facing the ultimate opponent as the marlin without any help. The sea is the worthy place for him which can represent the universe of the old man who got isolated from other fisherman” (2012). It is only place where he has friends and family. The sea also gives him many things that lead him being a better fisherman from other people's perspective and got acceptance from many people. The second symbol of the pride as the resistance and the braveness of the old man is the hands. The hands of the old man show how much efforts he give to his hope without any determination. His hands got cut by the line and got cramped because of pulled the massive fish. He comes back in ruined situation and the boy came to see him in his house while he lay down on the bed. The boy saw the old man’s hands and he asked the old man according to the story, “how much did you suffer?” (p. 63) and the old man answered the boy “Plenty” (p. 63). Which we can tell that the old man is more than suffer, now he is the enlightenment of the suffering. When the first shark was coming the old man had two short statement that “he was full of resolution but he had little hope” (p. 50) then statement later he hit it “without hope but with resolution” (p. 50) which the place that the old man hit is the location of the brain. “The old man meets every challenge with the same unwavering determination” (Durham University, 2015). All his efforts such as to be alive, to fight, and to never give up just for avoid defeat as this statement that the old man has mentioned in the story that, “A man can be destroyed but not defeated” (p. 51). Although he returns to Havana without any goods but he came back with more valuable thing in his life which is the pride of successful and how he insistent with the braveness on struggle with the extremely opponent. Durham University has written that, “Hemingway seems to suggest that victory is not a prerequisite for honor” (2015).

We can see from the texts that the old man is a determination man who never give up to do things. He has a great experience and problems solving skills to resist those barriers that come through him all his long trip. His efforts lead him went to the peak point as a fisherman who has appreciated and acceptance from society and being a greatness fisherman. However, his pride was not so long. He still dreams about the lions, according to the end of the story, the narrator has mentioned that, “The old man was dreaming about the lions” (p. 64). His dream can tell that

he still has nostalgia to the past how he being strength, happiness, youngness, and back to the beginning when he does not go too far out.

This novel “The Old Man and the Sea” has many symbols to make the reader completely understand the real meaning about the texts that the narrator try to say in an indirect way. There are four main topic symbols which are power, kinship, failure, and pride. This story keep mentioned about the power such as while the old man was struggle with the marlin, when he fight with the sharks, his lacking of power, and etc. The second symbolic of kinship also has the huge roles on the story. The narrator always talking about how the old man was talking to himself and talking to nature as his friends and family. He definitely accessible to the nature, for example, when he feel sorry for the marlin after the sharks have attacked. Third main symbol of TOMATS is the failure. The narrator has mentioned an obvious symbols of his failure as hands and marlin’s skeleton. He came back to the Havana with a weary body and sleep on his bed immediately. His hands were full of wound and swell. The hands of the old man show how he dedicated on what he doing that led him to reached his goal and consciously focused on his job. The other symbol of the failure is marlin’s skeleton which can conclude that he did not get anything from his long trip and all his hope has taken away from him far behind the sea by the sharks. The last symbolic of the story is the pride of the old man who tried to do everything to made his hope come true, he never think about the past and he will do his best on the present like  he has mentioned in the story that, “The thousand times that he had prove it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it” (p. 31). But anyways at the end, his hope was taking away by the sharks. However, he still has the pride of his resistance to never give up to do things and fighting with

the braveness to those ultimate opponents manfully. If someone has the atrocious situation like him, they might leave their hope in the sea and come back to their house. Most people could see him as an unsuccessful man, but for him he know that he already tried his best to defense the attack of the sharks. Without those symbolism, this story might be very boring and does not have the hidden meaningful which made the readers interested more about the texts.

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