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HEMINGWAY;S THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA AS AN IDYLL OF THE SEA

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Hemingway's later novel *The Old Man and the Sea* won him the Pulitzer Prize. It was also responsible for his getting the Noble Prize for literature. Hemingway had outlined the essence of the story in a paragraph of 'On the Blue Water' which appeared in *Esquire* in April 1936. Most critics fell over each other in praising the work. Most of them shared the enthusiasm of Bernard Berenson, who exclaimed, in a public pronouncement that the great are called upon to make: 'Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is an idyll of the sea as sea, as un-Byronic and un-Melvillian as Homer's verse. No real artist symbolizes or allegorizes-Hemingway is a real artist- but every real work of art exhales symbols and allegories. So does this short but not small master-piece.¹ The novel has epic structure, and a folk theme. Faulkner said, 'it is Hemingway's best. 'In Delmore Schwartz's view the novel is about 'the undefeated.'

The novel begins beautifully: "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish. In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst form of unlucky, and the boy had gone at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week. It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty and he always went down to help carry either the coiled lines or the gaff and harpoon and the sail that was furled around the mast. The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat."²

The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks. 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 and the boy walked up the road together to the old man's shack and went in through its open door. The old man leaned the mast with its wrapped sail against the wall and the boy put the box and the other gear beside it. The mast was nearly as long as the one room of the shack. The shack was made of the tough bud-shields of the royal palm which are called *guano* and in it there was a bed, a table, one chair, and a place on the dirt floor to cook with charcoal. On the brown walls of the flattened, overlapping leaves of the sturdy fibred *guano* there was a picture in colour of the sacred Heart of Jesus and another of the Virgin of Cobre. These were relics of his wife. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt.

The old man did not have enough food though he said to the boy that he had it. In a little leisure time, the old man was Santiago read a paper and admired the Yankee sport star Dimaggio whose father was a fisherman, and Santiago had once met him. When the boy came back the old man was asleep in the chair and the sun was down. The boy took the old man's shoulders.

The boy bought him from Martin's hotel in terrace, some food, some beers. Then Santiago said when he was at Manolin's age, he was in Africa, hunting lions. When he appreciated Laque and Mike Gonzalez as best sports people, the boy said 'Santiago is the best fisherman'. The boy went out. They had eaten with no light on the table and the old man took off his trousers and went to bed. He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. The old man got up and woken the boy.

The boy was back now with the sardines and the two baits wrapped in a newspaper and they went down the trail to the skiff, feeling the pebbled sand under their feet, and lifted the skiff and slid her into the water. 'Good luck old man.' 'Good luck,' the old man said. He fitted the rope lashings of the oars onto the hole pins and, leaning forward against the thrust of the blades in the water, he began to row out of the harbour in the dark. This is how we find that Santiago

treats the boy affectionately. Carlos Baker, Hemingway's best biographer thinks, The relationship between Santiago and the boy Manolin is of a special and memorable kind.³

The old man knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean. He saw the phosphorescence of the gulf weed in the water.

He always thought of the sea as la mar which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her. The iridescent bubbles in the sea and the old man loved to see the big sea turtles eating them. He had no mysticism about turtles although he had gone in turtle boats for many years. Now the old man looked up and saw that the bird was circling again. 'If the others heard me talking out loud they would think that I am crazy,' he said aloud. 'But since I am not crazy I do not care. And the rich have radios to talk to them in their boats and to bring them the baseball.' 'Yes,' he said. 'Yes,' and shipped his oars without bumping the boat.

Covered the point and the shank of the hook where the hand forged hook projected from the head of the small tuna. He was happy feeling the gentle pulling and then he felt something hard and unbelievably heavy. Eat it so that the point of the hook goes into your heart and kills you, he thought. Come up easy and let me put the harpoon into you. All right. Are you ready? Have you been long enough at table? Nothing happened. The fish just moved away slowly and the old man said aloud. Then he looked behind and saw that no land was visible. The fish never changed his course nor his direction all that night as far as the man could tell from watching the stars No one should be alone in their old age, he thought.

During the night two porpoise came around the boat and he could hear them rolling and blowing. Then he began to pity the great fish that he had hooked. But what a great fish he is and what he will bring in the market if the flesh is good. 'Fish,' he said softly, aloud, 'I'll stay with you until I am dead.' I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it. Slowly and conscientiously he ate all of the wedge-shaped strips of fish. He looked across the sea and knew how alone he was now. He thought how some men feared being out of sight of land in a small boat and knew they were right in the months of sudden bad weather. He's coming up,' he said. Come on.

The line rose slowly and steadily and then the surface of the ocean bulged ahead of boat and the fish came out. He is two feet longer than the skiff, the old man said. He is a great fish and I must convince him, He thought. I must never let him learn his strength nor what he could do if he made his run. If I were him I would put in everything now and go until something broke. But, thank god, they are not intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble more able.

The old man had seen many great fish. He had seen many that weighed more than a thousand pounds and he had caught two of that size in his life, but never alone. An aeroplane passed overhead on its course to Miami and he watched its shadow scaring up the schools of flying fish. Just before it was dark, as they passed a great island of Sargasso weed that heaved and swung in the light sea as though the ocean were marking love with something under a yellow blanket, his small line was taken by a dolphin.

It was dark now as if it becomes dark quickly after the sun sets in September. He lay against the worn wood of the bow and rested all that he could. The first stars were out. The fish is my friend too, he said aloud. I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill him. The sun was rising for the third time since he had put to sea when the fish started to circle. He could not by the slant of the line that the fish was circling. It was too early for that. He just felt a faint slackening of the pressure of the line and he commenced to pull on it gently with his right hand.

The fish was coming in on his circle now calm and beautiful looking and only his great tail moving. The old man pulled on him all that he could to bring him closer. 'fish,' the old man said. 'fish, you are going to die anyway. Do you have to kill me too?' Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width all his power and his beauty. He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff. Then he fell into the water with a crash that sent spray over the old man and over all of the skiff.

The old man looked at the fish constantly to make sure it was true. It was an hour before the first shark hit him. The shark was not an accident. He had come up with the creep down in the water as the dark cloud of blood had settled

and dispersed in the mile-deep. 'He took about forty founds, 'the old man said aloud. 'But man is not made for defeat, 'he said. 'A man can be destroyed but not defeated. 'I am sorry that I killed the fish, he thought.

He leaned over the side and pulled loose a piece of the meat of the fish where the shark had cut him. He chewed it and noted its quality and its good taste. It was firm and juicy. He had sailed for two hours, resting in the stern and sometimes chewing bit of the meat from the marlin, trying to rest and to be strong, when he saw the first of two sharks. They came. But they did not come as the Mako had come. One turned and went out of sight under the skiff and the old man could feel the skiff shake as he jerked and pulled on the fish.

I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish' he said. 'Neither for you nor for me. I'm sorry, fish. 'The next shark that came was a single shovel-nose. He came like a pig to the trough if a pig a pig had a mouth so wide so you could put your head in it. The old man left him hit the fish and then drove the knife on the oar down into his brain. But the shark jerked backwards as he rolled and the knife blade snapped. Now they have beaten me, he thought. I am too old to club sharks to death. Many fisherman were around the skiff looking at what was lashed beside it and one was in the water, his trousers rolled up, measuring the skeleton with a length of line. The boy did not go down. He had been there before and one of the fisherman was looking after the skiff for him. 'How is he?' one of the fishermen shouted.

'Sleeping,' the boy called. He did not care that they saw him crying. Let no one disturb him. 'He was eighteen feet from nose to tail.' The fisherman who was measuring him called. 'I believed it,' the boy said. He went into the Terrace and asked for a can of coffee. 'Hot and with plenty of milk and sugar in it. "Anything more?" No. Afterwards I will see what he can eat. 'What a fish it was,' the proprietor said. 'There has never been such a fish.

Harold Bloom observes. Santiago's ordeal, first in his struggle with the big fish, and then in fighting against the sharks, is associated by Hemingway with Christ's agony and triumph. Since it is so difficult to disentangle Santiago and Hemingway, this additional identification is rather unfortunate in its aesthetic consequences, because it can render a reader rather uncomfortable. There is a longing or nostalgia for faith in Hemingway, at least from *The Sun Also Rises* until the end of his career. But if *The Old Man and the Sea* is a Christian allegory, then the book carries more intended significance than it can bear. The big fish is no Moby-Dick or Jobean adversary; Santiago loves the fish and he sees it as his double ⁴.

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