

CHAPTER 9 ANALYSIS OF THE SELECTED ENGLISH NOVELS

ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

Background of the Author

Earnest Miller Hemingway is an American novelist and also a short story writer. He was born in Oak Park, Illinois, United States of America in 1899. After graduating from high school, he became a reporter in 1917. A year later, he was enlisted in the Army during the First World War. He served as an ambulance driver before he joined the Infantry. He almost lost his life during the war. It was perhaps his experiences during the war that provided the background to one of his most famous novels, *A Farewell to Arms*, written in 1929.

However after the war, he went to England and became associated with prominent literary writers such as Ezra Pounds, Scott Fitzgerald and Gertrude Stein. Apart from *The Old Man and the Sea*, written in 1952, his earlier works include *The Sun Rises* (1926), *Men Without Women* (1927), *Death in the Afternoon* (1932) and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). Hemingway's works had a profound influence on many other writers and his works are classified as part of the American literature. He won the Nobel prize for literature in 1954, but committed suicide in 1961.

Subject Matter

The novel revolves round the sad story of an old fisherman, Santiago. He had gone out to the sea in search of fish for eighty-four days, but catches nothing. As a result of this, other fishermen and the people believe that he is cursed, referring to him as a *Salao*, a name associated with the worst form of ill-luck. He is therefore avoided like a plague. Only a boy, (no name), who was initially his assistant, remains steadfast to him and often helps him gather his empty nets whenever he returns from the sea.

The need to work hard rather than beg inspires him to keep going to the sea in spite of the disappointing streak at sea. He refuses to give up until he finally catches a great Marlin which ought to have been his price for hard work and persistence. However, his effort ends in futility because several sharks attack his catch until there is nothing left except the skeleton of the great fish.

Plot

The plot of the story is linear and the action in the story progresses from one incident to the other. The story is divided into five days and there is no unnecessary use of suspense but the circumstances that surround the old man's struggle sustain the reader's interest. The novel begins with a conversation between Santiago and his boy, Manolin. For eighty-four days, Santiago has set out to sea and returned empty-handed. His ill-luck makes the parents of his young apprentice, Manolin, to withdraw him forcefully from the old man in order to fish in a more prosperous boat. Nevertheless, the boy continues to care for the old man upon his return each night. Santiago is confident that his unproductive streak will soon come to an end, and he resolves to sail out farther than usual the following day.

On the eighty-fifth day, Santiago sails his skiff far beyond the island's coastal waters, venturing into the Gulf Stream. He prepares his lines and drops them. At noon, a big fish, which he knows is a Marlin, takes the bait that Santiago has placed one hundred fathoms deep in the waters. The old man expertly hooks the fish, but he cannot pull it in. Instead, the fish begins to pull the boat. It swims steadily north-west until at last it tires and swims east with the current. The entire time, Santiago endures constant pain from the fishing line. Whenever the fish lunges, leaps, or makes a dash for freedom, the cord cuts Santiago badly. Although wounded and weary, the old man feels a deep empathy and admiration for the Marlin.

Gradually, the fish becomes weak likewise the old man, who has been denied a lot of sleep. He manages to pull the Marlin in close enough to kill it with a harpoon thrust. The dead Marlin is the largest Santiago has ever seen. He lashes it to his boat, raises the small mast, and sets sail for home. But as Santiago sails home, the blood of the fish leaves a trail in the water and attracts sharks. The old man fights off the successive vicious predators as best he can but by the time night falls, Santiago's effort proves useless. He arrives home before daybreak, stumbles back to his shack, and sleeps very deeply.

The next morning, a crowd of amazed fishermen gathers around the skeletal carcass of the fish, which is still lashed to the boat. Manolin, who has been worried over the old man's absence, is moved to tears when he finds Santiago safe in his bed. When the old man wakes, the two agree to fish as partners once more. The old man returns to sleep and dreams of lions at play on the beaches of Africa.

Setting

The story is partly set in a village in Havana, Cuba. The rest of the story takes place on the Gulf Stream. The sea plays a very important role as the setting of the story. It embodies the creatures that become a significant part of the old man's observation and struggle in the story. He observes the birds and the marine life while he is out at sea. His character is basically defined by his activities on the sea. Santiago expresses his connection to the sea with his idea of the sea as an unstable lover. The sea reveals the depth of Santiago's knowledge in his comments about the wind, the current, and the friction of the water reside an entire lifetime of experience, skill, and dedication. The sea essentially provides the frame and the place for the actions in the story to play out.

Themes

The main themes of the novels include struggle, dignity in labour, survival, courage and determination and value of companionship.

Struggle

The novel dwells on the struggles of an old fisherman, Santiago. There are three principal forces that the old man had to grapple with. First, he endures the harshness and insults of his fellow men, who believed that he is past his prime. He also has to strive against nature, represented by the cruel, raving and mysterious sea. And finally, he has to struggle against himself, as his old age became his enemy while he tries to survive the ordeals of fighting off the ravaging sharks that came after his magnificent Marlin fish. It is therefore a story of the fall and rise of a fisherman in a very hostile environment.

Dignity in labour

Santiago is a hardworking old man and he exemplifies dignity and reward of hard work. In spite of several failed attempts, the old man believes in going back to fish. He did not resign to begging to make a living. On the eighty-fifth day, he still goes ahead farther into the sea and he landed the biggest catch of his life. He holds his head high and fights to keep his prize. Even though the fishing ends up as a failure, the old man did not lose his face. He returns with the skeleton of the marlin and other fishermen as well as tourists admire his courage and determination. This proves that there is always a reward for hard work.

Survival

Survival is one of the major themes in this story. It is this need that keeps Santiago on the move to sail on the sea hoping to catch a fish. In his bid to survive, he makes several attempts until he gets one fish. Throughout the course of the story, the old man battles for the catch of his life and even fantasizes about what the fish would bring him materially. However, his dream is soon shortened by the Mako sharks who are also out to survival by all means.

Hemingway points out the reality of the society that every living thing is motivated by the principle of survival. In fact, many will stop at nothing to ensure they survive, like the shovel-nosed sharks. Hemingway seems to suggest that the powerful, the rich and the mighty will always prey on the weak to survive. This unpleasant truth runs through the fabric of the society.

Courage and determination

Santiago's determination is another main theme in this novel. This motivates his desire to rise above the destructive forces of nature. Throughout the novel, no matter how deadly his situation becomes, Santiago does not relent. He remains resolute in catching the Marlin and bringing it to shore. Santiago's tenacity is repeatedly emphasized with the arrival of the sharks. He knows that there is no hope of saving the fish. Yet, he is still relentless in fighting to keep away the predators. This is indeed a lesson to all that with courage and determination, one would surely excess in life.

Values for companionship

The close relationship between Santiago and the boy is a stimulus to the final breakthrough of the old man. Through the constant help and support of the boy, the old man is able to win back his respect. Although it is not clearly stated, it appears that the boy is the motivator for Santiago not to give up. Despite that the fact that the old man lost his catch, he finds comfort in the end through the care and understanding the boys shows him.

Characterisation

Santiago

Santiago is the major character in the story. He declares his own strangeness to Manolin when he says "I am a strange old man"(14). The strangeness of his character is seen throughout the narrative as he faces strange situations and his reactions to them. He is a baseball enthusiast and he is a fan of Joe DiMaggio who is a baseball player and the old man's model of a determined and courageous sportsman. Much of the story is centered on him at sea where he tries to land an eighteen-foot, fifteen-hundred pound Marlin.

He is a humble Cuban fisherman who exhibits a justified pride in his abilities. His knowledge of the sea and its creatures, and of his craft, is unparalleled and helps him preserve a sense of hope regardless of circumstance. Throughout his life, Santiago has been presented with contests to test his strength and endurance. Although

Santiago ultimately loses the fish, the Marlin is also his greatest victory because the skeleton of his catch draws admiration from other fishermen for his bravery. He is viewed as a tragic hero who, in spite of his pride and determination to be successful fails in the end to reap the benefit of his labour.

Manolin

Manolin is Santiago's apprentice and friend. He is the young boy and the second human character in the story. He is taught how to fish by Santiago from the age of five. Due to Santiago's recent tough luck in landing a catch for eighty-four days, the boy's parents forced him to go out on a different fishing boat. In spite of this, Manolin remains steadfast to the old man and he sees Santiago as a mentor.

He did not just learn how to fish, he imbibed the old man's character about honour and character. Manolin's love for the old man is not in doubt, as the young man mobilises the villagers to help improve the old man's impoverished conditions.

Pedrico

Pedrico owns the Bodega in Santiago's village. He did not appear in the novel, but he plays an important role in Santiago's life by providing him with newspapers that report the baseball scores. This act establishes him as a kind man who helps the old man.

Sharks

The Mako shark and the other shovel-nosed sharks could be said to be the villain characters in the story. They are the predators that preyed on the old man's catch. The struggle of the old man to protect his catch from these sharks give another picture of life as where the powerful suppresses the poor and vulnerable. They exemplify the saying that life is all about survival of the fittest. To a large extent, they represent the destructive laws of the universe.

Marlin

The Marlin measures eighteen feet. As result of the marlin's great size, Santiago is unable to pull the fish in, and the two become engaged in a kind of tug-of-war that often seems more like an alliance than a struggle. The Marlin represents man's achievements in life. The fishing line serves as a symbol of the fraternal connection Santiago feels with the fish. When the captured Marlin is later destroyed by sharks, Santiago feels destroyed as well. The Marlin symbolises the fact that man's accomplishment in life can be futile.

Language and Style

The author makes use of simple words to express his ideas. The language is simple but the ideas in the story are profound. Hemingway's prose style ensures that the novella is written in plain simple diction that can be read and understood easily. However, the story represents many dimensions of life's reality. The author focuses on the immediate action and therefore makes use of images to convey the depth of his idea. The economy of space is used by the author to avoid unnecessary and irrelevant details. The whole story is just 26,531 words! The book is bigger than a short story and smaller in comparison to a novel. This is why it is called a novella.

Narrative Devices

Omniscient Point of View: The story is told from the omniscient point of view. Here, the author assumes the all-knowing position because he is the sole narrator of the story. Every detail of the story comes from his perspective. He reads the minds of the characters and tells the reader. Hemingway gives the reader a picture of the struggle and what goes on in the mind of Santiago before, during and after the catch. He reports the actions of other events as well even though the characters, especially Santiago, also speak for themselves. The inclusion of the first narrative point of view by the author is also an attempt to validate his description of the events from the all-knowing point of view.

Flashback: A flashback introduces a past event into the current sequence of events in a narrative. Hemingway uses flashback to establish cause and effects connections between the past events and the central narrative in the story. Two detailed flashbacks include his recall of the mated Marlin, his fishing separates and his arm-wrestling with “great negro from Cienfuegos” in order to boost his confidence after catching the Marlin.

Revision Questions:

Essay Questions

1. How would you describe the significance of the sea in *The Old Man and the Sea*?
2. Discuss the character of Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*.
3. Santiago, after the first shark attack, says that “But a man is not made for defeat...A man can be destroyed but not defeated”. At the end of the story, is the old man defeated? Why or why not?
4. Discuss the role of Manolin in the novella. Is he necessary to the book? Support your answer with illustrations and examples from the narrative.
5. Explain with copious illustrations from the novella, the Old man’s philosophy that life is all about the survival of the fittest.

Multiple Choice Questions

1. The Old Man and the Sea is a story set in _____.
 - A. Portugal
 - B. Cuba
 - C. Brazil
 - D. Puerto Rico
2. _____ is the name of the major character.
 - A. Marlin
 - B. San Diego
 - C. Joe DiMaggio
 - D. Santiago
3. Reference to the character of Jesus Christ referred to as _____.
 - A. Literary allusion
 - B. Biblical allusion
 - C. Bibliographical reference
 - D. Historical allusion

4. "Everything kills everything else" is a statement made by _____.
A. Manolin
B. Marlin
C. DiMaggio
D. Santiago
5. The old man is able to catch a _____ on the eighty-fifth day.
A. Manolin
B. Mako shark
C. Marlin
D. Mackrel
6. _____ wrote *The Old Man and the Sea*.
A. Ernest Hemmingway
B. Earnest Hemingway
C. Ernest Hemingway
D. Earnest Hermingway
7. The author of *The Old Man and the Sea* uses _____ to bring past events into the current sequence of the story.
A. Suspense
B. Thriller
C. Flashback
D. Style
8. _____ is not a character in *The Old Man and the Sea*.
A. Manolin
B. Santiago
C. Marlin
D. Montague
9. *The Old Man and the Sea* can be regarded as a _____.
A. novel
B. short story
C. novella
D. biography
10. Santiago's statement that "I try not to borrow. First you borrow. Then you beg" points to the old man's _____.
A. stupidity
B. agility
C. pride
D. honesty

Answers to the Objective Questions

1. B 2. D 3. B 4. D 5. C 6. C 7. C 8. D 9. C 10. C