



## **SYMBOLISM IN EARNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA***

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The Old Man and the Sea* is one of the masterpieces of Hemingway. The story though is a fiction is based on real event and thus holds much truth. Hemingway while wandering in Cuba heard of this event and wrote an amazing book inspired by it. The writer has used many symbols in this novel which increases the artistic value of the book. It is a book full of powerful emotions and depicts a true picture of every man's struggle in life.

**Keywords-Symbols, Earnest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea, Manolin, Old man, Sea, Fish, Fishing, Marlin, Mast, Harpoon, Shark.**

### **INTRODUCTION**

*The Old Man and the Sea* is considered the magnum opus of Earnest Hemingway and is critically well acclaimed. The characters in the book are much real and have been beautifully portrayed by Hemingway. The old man, the boy, the sea, the fish are all real. "If I made them good and true enough," said Hemingway, "they would mean many things." The almost real portrayal of the old man's long, daring and patient journey, his never ending troubles, his fight with his fate, the simple and catchy flow of narration are the few amazing features of this novel. A reading of this novel reveals how aptly Hemingway has portrayed the heard story into words, Time and again critics have researched on this masterpiece of Hemingway. The multi level meaning and subtlety of the novel attracts the critics the most. A novel presenting struggle between man and nature, a novel full of magnificent symbols, a novel

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with deep religious implications, a novel presenting a special bond between a young soul and an old soul, an adventurous but tragic story *The Old Man and the Sea* leaves its readers spellbound for these and many more reasons. Henrich Straumann, in his book *American Literature in the Twentieth Century* comments on the novel, “Whatever special meaning on a personal level may be attributed to the story, it undoubtedly reflects Man’s lonely and exhausting struggle for a belief in some achievement as a value, which after being obtained, will be torn to shreds by a hostile world but keep its significance for him who fought for it. It would not be easy to find a more impressive, precise and relevant symbol for an experience common to the second post-war generation if not to the whole of western mankind. The theme of haunting so essential to Hemingway’s entire work has ultimately become the most comprehensive metaphor of his beliefs.”

## The Marlin

Marlin is one of the most important characters in this novella. It holds different symbolic values at different points in the story and yet, how they all merge into one “ideal opponent” has left the readers spellbound.

It has been painted with strokes of glory and magnificence. Courage never wishes to be martyred at the hands of an unequal and hence, “whenever something kills everything else in some way,” what more could have Santiago dreamed for than having to match his strength against Marlin in his final battle – nothing less than his best would suffice.

Marlin has captivated Santiago to such an extent that the struggle between the two no longer remains a battle of strengths but a battle of endurance – Santiago would not accept defeat at any cost. Thus, Marlin goes on to represent Santiago’s alter-ego where the latter is striving hard to overcome his own weakness.

Marlin has also projected Christian values throughout its part in the novella – determination, kindness and patience. When Marlin is hooked by Santiago, it does not try to escape in panic but challenges Santiago to overpower it. Also, as it is devoured by the sharks, it has sacrificed itself to feed many others.

## Shovel Nosed Sharks

The shovel nosed sharks have been portrayed as destructive and brutal laws of nature which can only be cut across when there is a battle between equals. They seem to represent distracting, disturbing elements of nature laying obstructions in the face greatness.



Most of these sharks are killed by Santiago but not before they have torn Marlin's body apart leaving Santiago distressed.

Hemingway has used Christianity symbols throughout the novella to drive across his themes - thus, the similarity between the sharks and the people of Jerusalem. It was because of these people – their nugatory jealousies and indifferences, that Christ got crucified.

Although Santiago defeats them, yet that does not add to his glory as these sharks are base predators.

### **Joe Dimaggio**

Amidst the serious and ancient references, it is refreshing to see a more recent and relatable character symbolizing fortitude.

Dimaggio is a baseball player who was hit by a bone spur at the time the novella was being penned down by Hemmingway. In spite of the handicap, DiMaggio went on to defeat his rivals much in the same fashion as Santiago overpowers his adversaries despite the injuries. Dimaggio's image gives Santiago the necessary strength and vigor to overlook his pain and take up the challenge head-on.

### **The Lions**

Santiago is an old man. He has lost his strength, family and friends. Thus the dreams of the Lions on the African beach seem to represent his younger fearless self.

At a level, Santiago's particular fondness for the lions, which are fierce predators, seems to mirror the relationship he has with Marlin – he loves it but feels that its death is necessary unto his own survival, thus putting Santiago at the heart of nature.

Santiago is reminded of Manolin when he sees the lions in his dream as they appear to be mere cubs playing in the dusk which are a symbol of youthful possibility and also a good luck sign for better things to come. Their appearance always make him happy as just like Manolin they are a good company. Now when the lions appear in the adult age they give strength to Santiago as they are a symbol of power, nobility and courage. They give him a sense of purpose and inspiration to fulfill his goals. More often than not, the old man dreams of the boy and the lions almost simultaneously. The thought of Manolin always fills Santiago with this urgent need and want to succeed and on the other hand whenever he thinks of the lions he is filled with courage and confidence to do better in life. They inspire him to achieve



everything he dreams of and also deserves. Because the lions in his dreams always appear out of their natural environment and on the beach, they suggest that there is a harmony in all of life.

In the end Santiago once again dreams of the lions which now are a symbol of eternal life. He fought for what he wanted and what he deserves. He tried his best to save the Marlin from the attack of the sharks. He caught the biggest fish of his life and defended with almost risking his life. He won over the Marlin which is suggestive of his win over himself.

### **The Mast**

The mast is an obvious allusion to the cross of Jesus. Santiago suffers while fishing on in the sea. He mostly suffers standing on his skiff where stands the mast. Just like crucified Jesus he mostly gets injured on his palms which again is a reference. This makes the mast symbol really obvious and resembling to the cross. Santiago does not lose hope even after so many fruitless days in the sea. He fights and fights no matter how much loss he suffers. He is calm and determined.

### **Manolin**

Manolin, the young boy represents hope. He is at true companion and a friend to Santiago and the best thing that can happen to him. After going fishless for 84 days Manolin's parent's detest him from going for fishing with Santiago and instead force him to join a more prosperous boat. Manolin under pressure has to leave Santiago but he could never totally abandon him. Every evening he talks to him about baseball and makes sure that Santiago eats well before sleeping. Manolin is one of those people which inspire us to be a better man in life. He does everything he could as a young boy and loves Santiago with all his heart and soul. In the course of all the hard luck that Santiago was facing, Manolin was the best that could happen and he was the only hope of the coming good days.

### **The lost harpoon**

Once Santiago catches the biggest fish of his life he gets no time to celebrate his victory as the Marlin still remains in danger because of the sharks attacking it. He tries a lot to defend the Marlin by attacking the sharks with his harpoon. Even after continuous efforts he is unable to defend the Marlin and loses his harpoon. Santiago's loss of harpoon is symbolic of people who lose their faith when life attacks them with all the problems. Very much like Santiago without a harpoon, those without faith are defenseless.



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