

## THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA: A STUDY OF INTERDEPENDENCE OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIP

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### ABSTRACT

The Nobel Laureate of 1954 in the field of Literature, Ernest Hemingway, has made significant contributions in the literary world through his diversified writings. He led an inconsistent life, the former of which was rather illusionary until he was injured in the war field. Thereafter he returned home and slowly took to writing as a career. He gave a wonderful collection of literature to the world but his magnum opus, *The Old Man and the Sea*, won him the stature most befitted to him. *The Old Man and the Sea* attracted attention from all quarters of the world. It has been most debated for its portrayal of characters and its themes. From amongst the variable themes like struggle of an individual, role of natural forces in one's life, biblical allegories, etc., this paper explores the theme of human relationship with reference to Santiago and Manolin and their interdependence on each other. It focuses on how they both share a bonding which keeps them struggle better in life.

**KEYWORDS:** Interdependence, Bond, Age, Struggle, Luck

### INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway, has been a highly acclaimed American novelist, short story writer and journalist. Many of his works revolve around the war times. He worked as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross during the first world war. He was wounded, thereafter which he returned to America and worked as a correspondent. War remained a major theme in many of his earlier works. Soon he left for Paris where he worked as a foreign correspondent for some time. By now he was under the influence of the modernist writers. Here he met Gertrude Stein who introduced him to the expatriate writers whom she referred to as 'The Lost Generation', a term popularized in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*.

Hemingway wrote a number of novels and short stories which received all sorts of reviews and criticism. some of his major works include *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *For Whom The Bells Toll* (1940), short stories, some of which are collected in *Men without Women* (1927) and *The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories* (1938).

It was believed for a time that Hemingway had been exhausted of all his literary endowment, an opinion which was soon invalidated by his greatest literary launch, *The Old Man and the Sea* published in 1952 which won him the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and made room for his next acclamation as the Nobel Prize recipient for Literature in 1954. Hemingway After a painful life due to plane crashes, Hemingway committed suicide in 1961.

Although most of the works of Hemingway earned him recognition from all over the world but his masterpiece is undoubtedly his novella *The Old Man and the Sea*. He once reported, "Whatever I learned is in the story but I hope it reads simply and straight and all the things that are in it do not show but only are with you after you have read it." (The New York Times)

It is the story of a Cuban fisherman, Santiago, whose sole motto for life is, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." Eighty four days of futile efforts gain him the title of 'salao', the worst form of bad luck. The novella became particularly popular for the diverse themes it included. The story revolves around Santiago's struggle for existence as a skillful fisherman. Even though he's been unsuccessful in his recent past, he endeavors to gain back his lost reputation. The simple yet powerful plot encompasses several themes. Heroism, dignity, symbolism, biblical context, nature's predominance, etc are some oft discussed themes but one of these which is also going to be the subject matter of this paper is interdependence of relationship with reference to Santiago and Manolin. The entire novella runs on the concept of interdependent relations out of which one kind will be discussed here.

Santiago, the old man of the novella, runs of bad luck since eighty four days. Due to continuous failure for the past forty days he loses the professional companionship of a young boy, Manolin who had been lately under his guidance. Manolin is compelled to leave Santiago by his parents who send him to a fisherman who they believe to be better skilled than him. Manolin obeys them but does not abandon Santiago. They both share a peculiar relationship not easy to understand. There is piousness and dedication in this relationship only visible to the selfless eyes. Although Manolin is apprenticed under some one else but he has true conviction just in the mentorship of Santaigo. He never wanted to isolate the old companion but his parents wanted him to be trained under some prosperous boat. He says:

"It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him."

"I know," the old man said. "It is quite normal."

"He hasn't much faith."(4)

He serves him and takes care of the old man without caring of what his parents would say. Everyday he brings back Santiago's boat after the old man's worldly ordeals. There is a unusual dichotomy of the relationship that the boy shares with him. He serves Santiago as a child and tends him as a guardian. "If I cannot fish with you. I would like to serve in some way."(5)

Manolin and Santiago share an indescribable bond. It is difficult to analyze the true nature of their relationship. Mostly it is Santiago who mentors the boy but at other times the boy seems to guide him. "Come on and eat. You can't fish and not eat." He continues saying, "Keep the blanket around you...You'll not fish without eating while I'm alive."(11) Santiago simply has showers of blessings for his young friend, "Then live a long time and take care of yourself," (11)

Manolin is probably Santiago's only human friend. Besides looking after the old man he gives him company in his worldly and useful and interesting discourses. Baseball is something the old man is always pleased to talk about. Manolin, quite mindful of this fact urges Santiago to talk about it:

"Tell me about the baseball," the boy asked him.

"In the American League it is the Yankees as I said," the old man said happily."

"They lost today," the boy told him.

"That means nothing. The great DiMaggio is himself again."

"They have other men on the team."

"Naturally. But he makes the difference. In the other league, between Brooklyn and

Philadelphia I must take Brooklyn. But then I think of Dick Sisler and those great drives in the old park.”

“There was nothing ever like them. He hits the longest ball I have ever seen.

Age does not matter in the least and there is some affinity which is characteristic in itself. Together they are a separate world. “Santiago does not treat Manolin as a young boy but rather as an equal.”(Mc Guire)

Irrespective of how and what the world opines about Santiago, Manolin considers him the best fisherman. His expression of the same boosts up the struggling old man and gives him strength to renew his fervor.

“And the best fisherman is you.”

“No. I know others better.”

“Que Va,” the boy said. “There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you.”

“Thank you. You make me happy. I hope no fish will come along so great that he will prove us wrong.” To which the boy replies, “There is no such fish if you are still strong as you say.” (14-15)

In spite of a solitary life that Santiago has been living for years, he finds his only comfort in the company of the boy and surprisingly he in him. Manolin is seen to be most contented when he’s around his true mentor. Unlike most of the children of his age, he finds solace in the company of his old friend discussing issues of common interest. Age does not impede with their bonding with each other. It is difficult to say who guides whom as theirs is a completely correlative attachment. Just as Manolin is most concerned about Santiago’s health, Santaigo is desirous of tutoring Manolin in the intricacies of fishing to enable him to become a successful fisherman. When he sets out on the eighty fifth day of his venture and hooks a marlin, he wishes he had the boy with him. “I wish I had the boy” the old man said aloud. “I’m being towed by a fish and I’m the towing bitt. I could make the line fast. (32) Later again he repeats the words, “I wish I had the boy. To help me and to see this.”(34) He feels his strength enhance with the presence of the boy who has always supported him. Continuously in this present state of trial, he feels lonely and pines for his friend and support Manolin. Another reason why he desires his presence is because he wants to teach Manolin the art of fishing in most adverse situations to enable him to become one of the most successful fisherman. Repeatedly, Santiago utters the words, “I wish I had the boy.” Corbett states, “He has developed a friendship, a working relationship, a love with a young boy who began fishing with him when the boy was only five. Now the boy has moved on to another boat, a more successful one, at his parents’ behest, but he pines to work with Santiago, and when the battle with the great fish has been engaged, Santiago pleads over and over and over: “I wish the boy were here.”

It seems that the presence of the boy reinforces him and keeps him going much better. Besides, he longs for his company as he is the only individual who recognizes his talent even in the most difficult times. Besides his passion for baseball and fishing, if there is anything in world which fosters a sense of achievement and joy in him, it is Manolin. Three days of a life threatening ordeal and futile outcome, distresses Santiago but contrarily enlightens Manolin who decides not to leave the old man any more. He makes it bold and clear that he would fish out with the old man and not with any one else. Although there are some apprehensions on the part of the old man regarding his very own ill luck but the boy convinces him of all good luck.

“Now we fish together again.”

“No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore.”

“The hell with luck,” the boy said. “I’ll bring the luck with me.”

“What will your family say?”

“I do not care. I caught two yesterday. But we will fish together now for I still have much to learn.”(97)

Three days of Santiago’s absence does not bring any professional luck in his life, but it definitely brings the best for him in his personal life. He repossesses the companionship of his only source of happiness, Manolin who cares for him more than a son would have. When he returns and rests in his shack, Manolin directs others, “Let no one disturb him.”(95) and later “Tell them not to bother Santiago.”(96) Simultaneously, he makes arrangements for his refreshments as he knows how much his mentor and friend might have suffered. Nature plays a pivotal role in both their lives. Where on one side, it turns down the aspirations of the old man, on the other, it brings a sense of realization in the boy who unconditionally dares to become his old friend’s mainstay.

## CONCLUSIONS

The novella was assessed from all perspectives. Some critics highly praised Hemingway’s genius while others condemned it of its flamboyance. Irrespective of what most critics consider of how Hemingway portrays Santiago, his endurance, his unfortunate ordeals, one aspect of the novella gains more or less similar approval of the human bonding it exemplifies. The representation of a distinct relationship Santiago and Manolin share has been most appropriately explicated by the author. Although there is a big age difference, nevertheless, it does not alter the great bonding they both share. Manolin takes care of the old man as a son would and alternatively he looks after him also with a paternal affection. Santiago loves the child but treats him as his only friend and companion. Both Santiago and Manolin share one of the rarest kind of a relationship, something not very commonly found in society. The Santiago-Manolin bonding is a testament to Hemingway’s skill of portraying interdependent relationships and their importance in life. Santiago depends on Manolin and he on him. Both feel a sense of fulfillment only when they are with each other. Manolin takes care of the old man and he motivates him, and this constitutes one of the very profound themes of the work, interdependence of human relation which some where give the thrust required to keep going in life and is the basis of Santiago’s incessant struggle.

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