

The Old Man & the Sea

A Novella by Ernest Hemingway

Summary, themes and characterization

Dr. Rudaina Abdulrazzaq

English Department

College of Education for Women

Second class- short story

Summary

For 84 days, the old fisherman Santiago has caught nothing. Alone, poor, exhausted, and facing his own mortality, Santiago is now considered unlucky. So Manolin (Santiago's fishing partner until recently and the young man Santiago has taught since the age of five) has been constrained by his parents to fish in a luckier boat. Every evening, though, when Santiago again returns empty-handed, Manolin helps carry home the old man's equipment, keeps him company, and brings him food.

On the eighty-fifth day of his unlucky streak, Santiago does as promised, sailing his skiff far beyond the island's shallow coastal waters and 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.

Unable to tie the line fast to the boat for fear the fish would snap a taut line, the old man bears the strain of the line with his shoulders, back, and

hands, ready to give slack should the marlin make a run. The fish pulls the boat all through the day, through the night, through another day, and through another night. It swims steadily northwest 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, his brother in suffering, strength, and resolve.

On the third day the fish tires, and Santiago, sleep-deprived, aching, and nearly delirious, manages to pull the marlin in close enough to kill it with a harpoon thrust. Dead beside the skiff, the marlin is the largest Santiago has ever seen. He lashes it to his boat, raises the small mast, and sets sail for home. While Santiago is excited by the price that the marlin will bring at market, he is more concerned that the people who will eat the fish are unworthy of its greatness.

As Santiago sails on with the fish, the marlin's blood leaves a trail in the water and attracts sharks. The first to attack is a great mako shark, which Santiago manages to slay with the harpoon. In the struggle, the old man loses the harpoon and lengths of valuable rope, which leaves him vulnerable to other shark attacks. The old man fights off the successive vicious predators as best he can, stabbing at them with a crude spear he makes by lashing a knife to an oar, and even clubbing them with the boat's tiller. Although he kills several sharks, more and more appear, and by the time night falls, Santiago's continued fight against the scavengers is useless.

They devour the marlin's precious meat, leaving only skeleton, head, and tail. Santiago chastises himself for going "out too far," and for sacrificing his great and worthy opponent. 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. Knowing nothing of the old man's struggle, tourists at a nearby café observe the remains of the giant marlin and mistake it for a shark. Manolin, who has been worried sick over the old man's absence, is moved to tears when he finds Santiago safe in his bed. The boy fetches the old man some coffee and the daily papers with the baseball scores, and watches him sleep. When the old man wakes, the two agree to fish as partners once more. The old man returns to sleep and dreams his usual dream of lions at play on the beaches of Africa.

Themes:

Man vs Nature

Santiago's struggle against the marlin and the sea represents the struggle of every human being against nature. He is characterized as someone struggling against defeat. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish but he refused defeat at every turn; he resolves to sail out beyond the other fishermen to where the biggest fish promise to be. Santiago lives according to his own observation: "man can be destroyed but not defeated" and this represents the main theme of "The Old Man & the Sea".

Perseverance is another theme of this novella, the writer wants to say that what enables a man and make him a successful one is his perseverance against overwhelming odds. Whether the central character, Santiago, wins

or loses his battle with the great fish is less important than waging a good and honorable fight.

Character List

Santiago - The old man of the novella's title, Santiago is a Cuban fisherman who has had a bad luck. He suffers terribly throughout *The Old Man and the Sea*. Despite his expertise, he has been unable to catch a fish for eighty-four days. He is humble, yet 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. Hemingway seems to believe that there are only two options: defeat or endurance until destruction; Santiago clearly chooses the latter. Throughout his life, Santiago has been presented with contests to test his strength and endurance. The marlin with which he struggles for three days represents his greatest challenge. Paradoxically, although Santiago ultimately loses the fish, the marlin is also his greatest victory.

Manolin A young man from the fishing village who has fished with Santiago since the age of five and now cares for the old man. Manolin recently began fishing with another fisherman whom his parents consider luckier than Santiago. Manolin, however, still cares deeply for the old man, to whom he continues to look as a mentor.