

The old man and the sea essay (book review)



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“ The Old Man and the Sea” is a story of a modest old man and his struggle for the greatness. The plot is based on life of Santiago, an elderly Cuban fisherman who is unlucky in his fishing escapades. He is so unlucky that parents of a young boy Manolin, who wanted to fish with an old man and learn the skills from him, forbid him doing this and ask to sail with more successful young sailors.

The author was on the ground of the World War I, and a casualty of the war may be seen as the reason behind the choice of themes. Bravery, courage, pride and honor are virtues that many survivors of the war possessed. Santiago’s move to set out to sea all alone in order to redeem his reputation among his people is a bold move (Hemingway 22).

However, Hemmingway, the author, describes the boy as the one who admires the old man despite his parents discourage him from joining Santiago in his fishing, he still continues to care for the old man. This essay seeks to make a detailed review of the story, “ The Old Man and the Sea”, its themes and relations to the real world.

The plot brings out the boy as being very caring. He is shown in the way he helps the fisherman to carry his fishing gear and discussing the latest happenings in the American baseball. Despite the old man’s unsuccessful fishing trips, the book portrays him as having a strong determination to achieve his aim.

In a highly sequential flow of events, the book explains how Santiago sails further away from familiar territory and ventures into the Gulf Stream. The author goes ahead to explain how the old man gets lucky and catches a big

fish known as Marlin at midday. However, in a twist to the story, Santiago is unable to pull the gigantic animal to his boat, and the fish starts pulling.

The story shows the reader an image of an enduring man who is overcome by fear trying to save his life by all means. It is presented when Santiago struggles to bear the strain of the line hooking the massive fish with his shoulders. He does this in order to avoid tearing the boat apart and tries to hook on it. The story explains how an old man pulls the line for three days as the fish swims with the old man enduring this pain (Hemingway 40).

In this day to day sequence of events, Santiago is presented to the reader as an affectionate man who, despite the strain that the fish is putting him through, sees it as a brother in endurance, suffering, strength and resolve. Testimony to this, (the way Santiago feels it); the people who are going to eat this fish are not entitled to such greatness.

It is on the third day that we see Santiago is getting his catch into the boat finally. It is the evidence of Santiago's endurance and determination because, according to the story, this is the biggest fish that Santiago has ever caught after number of unsuccessful trials (Bloom, 150).

In addition, the story brings out the anti-climax of Santiago's happiness. It explains how Santiago struggles with the attacks of sharks that were attracted by the blood trails left from the fish. Hemmingway creates an image of a boat deep in the sea surrounded by sharks in the mind of the reader.

This is where the courage of the old man is brought out. He is seen trying to deter the Sharks from attacking him by all possible means. For example, he fights them with a spear made by lashing a dagger to an oar and beating them up with the boats filler (Gerry 80).

The old man's courage and creativity are paid back as he manages to kill several sharks. However, he is left with nothing, as sharks manage to devour his catch leaving him with a skeleton, head and a tail. The man regrets his decision to go out far into the sea. He stumbles back home completely worn out and goes to sleep (Hemingway 20).

Despite loosing the fish, the old man achieves greatness without realizing it. The reader understands this when reading about tourists who watch a giant Skeleton with amusement the following morning.

Two themes can be brought out from this story. The first one is the theme of honor. Throughout the story, Santiago is shown as a person swimming against the tide trying not to be defeated. He is shown as a person who is struggling with the power of the sea without catching any fish for eighty seven days, but breaks his record by catching the largest fish ever caught in all his years of fishing.

He is seen as fighting defeat by sailing into deep waters; he is struggling with a marlin for three days, and fights off shark attacks. This theme shows that Santiago and Marlin display virtues of courage and strong will, and they are willing to go to extraordinary lengths to uphold them. Santiago's story does not provides him with the opportunity to change man's place in the

world, rather it enables him meet his most dignified destiny (Hemingway, 40).

The other theme discussed in this story is the theme of pride as the source of greatness and determination. Santiago's character is created similar to all heroes of the world. In addition to coming out as strong, courageous and morally certain, they all possess a fatal flaw and pride. This leads to their downfall despite all the admiration that they receive.

Santiago, on the other hand, is portrayed as being proof that it is pride that pushes great men towards greatness. For example, Santiago admits to killing Marlin out of pride. Thus, pride becomes the source of Santiago's strength. Without this pride, he would neither have ventured deep into the sea, nor would he have struggled with the giant fish for three consecutive days. Pride drives the old man to transcend the forces of nature and come out triumphant (Gerry 50).

In conclusion, it can be argued that this book tries to explain human nature. It explains that we are beings who, in most cases, are driven by pride while trying to achieve our goals in life. In addition, it tries to bring out the fact that pride does not always lead to downfall. Hemmingway illustrates that victory is not always a qualification for honor. It is brought about when one has the pride to struggle until the very end. In the case of Santiago, the glory and pride come not as a result of battle, but from his pride and determination to fight.

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