

The old man and the sea essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



“ They beat me, Manolin...they truly beat.” The first thing that one should consider when addressing this question is what does it mean to be beaten? Beaten in this context should not be interpreted literally as it actually means to be defeated. Bearing this in mind would I agree with Santiago’s evaluation of the outcome of his adventure at sea? The answer to that question would most definitely be no. Santiago states this on (Page 103) when he says, “ But a man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated.”

After reading this outstanding novel written by Ernest Hemingway, I am strongly of the view that even though Santiago suffered an immense loss at the end of the novel, he is never defeated, instead he emerges as a hero and a victor. Hemingway shows us that Santiago’s struggle does not allow him to change his place in the world, instead it enables him to meet his most noble destiny.

The opening page of the novel establishes Santiago’s character and it also sets the scene for the action to follow. From the very first paragraph Santiago is portrayed as someone struggling against defeat. We can see that he lives as an outcast and is constantly mocked and ridiculed by the other fishermen for his unsuccessful voyages to sea. The way in which they deal with him, illustrates that Santiago is an alienated and almost ostracized figure in his small village. Such an alienated position is distinctive of Hemingway’s heroes, whose greatest achievements are fundamentally dependent upon their isolation.

However it is imperative that we keep in mind that in Hemingway’s works, it is only once a man is removed from the deadening and insincere boundaries

of modern society that he can confront the larger universal truths that presides over him.

Almost as a reminder of Santiago's struggles the sail of his skiff is said to resemble "flag of permanent defeat". But we as readers know that Santiago refuses defeat by all means, as we can see how he ventures out beyond all the other fishermen to where the bigger fish are bound to be. "My choice was to go there and find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon" a (Page50) . This show us how strong willed and determined Santiago is and also that he will not give in to defeat as mentioned before.

The narrator can be seen placing emphasis on Santiago's perseverance in the opening pages by the old man's description which said, "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated" (Page 10). We learn from this that even though he has gone eighty-four days without a single catch he still has hope. Even though his physical appearance might give us the impression that he is not capable of handling a challenging situation, the description of his eyes implicitly tells us that he will be fully capable to handle the challenges when the time comes.

Despite the fact that Santiago's adventure at sea will bring about what seems to be defeat, because after having to hold the fishing line for days, even though it was cutting deeply into his palms and causing him excruciating pain the marlin will be mutilated by sharks, and we will see where the he feels a lot of pain for the fish who has been devoured (Page

103). We should not lose sight of the fact that in the end the old man will emerge a victor because the obliteration enables him to undergo a remarkable change, and gain triumph from seeing his so called defeat.

Throughout the novel we can see Manolin constantly expressing his fondness for and faith in Santiago. One instance of this can be seen on (Page 23) when Manolin says, " There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only one you." By doing this he establishes his mentor as a figure of significant moral and professional stature despite the difficulties of the last eighty-four days. And even though the other fishermen poke fun at Santiago, Manolin knows his true worth and the extent of his knowledge.

Santiago's pride which he criticizes and holds responsible for the destruction of the marlin can also be seen as a positive thing because, it is his pride that allowed him to realize his genuine and absolute capabilities. It is also his pride that has enabled him to endure such an epic struggle, and prevent him from ultimately being defeated. Therefore it is evident through Santiago's character that pride can inspire men to greatness.

From the novella we get a sense that the world is a place where death and destruction is inevitable and is therefore a part of the natural order of things. So in order to survive in the world Santiago needs to make a choice between defeat and endurance, and clearly he chose endurance. So having choose to endure he dismissed defeat by all means. For example, we see where he forces himself to eat the dolphin he caught so he could have strength to endure the battle.

Santiago character is elevated above that of the typical protagonist and he is even given Christ like qualities. Even though Santiago does not consider himself to be a religious person, during the struggle with the marlin Santiago begins to seem more and more Christ like through his pain. The cuts in his hands from the fishing line are similar to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus also known as the stigmata. His isolation which was briefly mentioned earlier also gives him the Christ like effect because Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights and also initially Jesus was not favored by the some of the people to whom he preached Gods words to. Santiago fortitude is also represented like that of Christ and as a result his physical suffering will lead to a more significant spiritual victory.

The novel ends on a rather optimistic note with Sanitago being reunited with Manolin who really wants to finish his training. All of the old man's dignified traits and the lessons he learnt from his experiences will be transferred to Manolin, which means that metaphorically speaking, even after death he will live on. Or to be more literal his " legacy" will live on.

The closing image of the novel supports the promise of accomplishment and renewal, as it is an image that recalls Santiago's youth, the lion's suggest the circularity of life. Towards the end of the novel we an also see Santiago clinging to the hope that he has gained from his experience, and he now knows that the destruction of his worthy opponent is not a defeat for him, but instead it leads to his redemption.

There is no doubt that by mutilating the marlin the sharks had denied Santiago of his greater glory. However, I am still of the view that they did not

“ beat” him because he managed to survive the attacks that were by these predators. And even though he was not able to save his trophy catch, he knows the struggle he had encountered, and the skeleton of the marlin is there as proof and as a reminder of how he had endured. And when he says “ fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive”, we see that he doesn’t mind the ups and the downs of his trade, some days there will be good days and other days there will be bad days, but he loves what he does and as a result he is good at it.

The victory and nobility that Santiago has gained did not come from the battle itself but from his exaggerated pride and his determination to fight to the end. Although the battle between Santiago, the marlin and the sharks was played out physically, victory was more spiritual than physical. In the end when the other local fishermen went out to look at Santiago’s skiff and measure the length of the marlins skeleton, they stood in awe and they now had a new found respect for Santiago.

Santiago the humble protagonist can be seen as a victor at the end of the novel. He never backed down from the challenges. He faced them despite the possible outcome and in the end even though his trophy was destroyed he was never defeated, never “ beaten”.