

A role of fish in the old man and the sea novel

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The Importance of Fish

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, by Ernest Hemingway, there are not many characters besides the old man, Santiago, and the boy, plus a few others that only make small appearances. But as I was reading, I noticed there are more characters than one might think. Hemingway focuses on very few human characters, but he also portrays the fish caught by the old man and the sea as characters in this novel. The fish and the sea both prove to have special connections to Santiago; connections that he seems to lack with any other character besides the boy.

Throughout this novel, I could tell that Santiago was lonely. He missed fishing with the boy like they used to. He missed not only the help of the boy, but his company as well. On many occasions, such as pages 45, 48, 50, 51, and 56, Santiago says "I wish I had the boy," or "I wish the boy was here." And since Santiago did not have the boy for this expedition, he used the fish as his company instead. Santiago's loneliness shows as he talks often to himself, and even the fish and the birds that pass him by. Hemingway says that the old man does not usually talk much at sea, but since he is alone, he voices his thoughts; he says "If the others heard me talking out loud they would think that I am crazy . . ." (39). The almost befriending of the fish and sea are important to Santiago because it is something that keeps him going strong through this journey. If not for the fish to keep him company, then Santiago really would go crazy with being all alone out in the middle of nowhere.

Not only do the fish provide company for Santiago, but also a source of food. That, of course, is obvious that the fish can be used as food, but Santiago does not necessarily want to kill the fish at all. He knows he has to, for food and for money, and this is why he really has no problem with killing the fish; however, he thinks of them as his brothers. All throughout the story, Santiago refers to the flying fish, dolphins, and marlin as his brothers. Also, he refers to the fish he hooked- the marlin- as his friend, just like the stars. Although, the old man does not have as close of a connection with the stars as he does the fish. Santiago displays how he cares deeply for the fish, but thinks of it as his duty to kill them when he says, “. . . It is good we do not have to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers” (75). During his fishing journey, Santiago eats a few flying fish and a dolphin to get by as he tries to capture the marlin, and all the while, he still calls them his brothers. This, to me, shows how much of a connection he feels with the fish, and why they play such a major part in this book as characters.

More than anything, Santiago feels a connection to the fish he has hooked. He thinks nothing of the fish at first, but as the time goes by as he stays with the fish for days, the bond between the two grows. The old man says this fish has “ great dignity” and thinks that no person is truly worthy to eat his meat (75). Even when Santiago is eating the flying fish and dolphin, he thinks of the fish and feels pity that he has not been able to eat since getting hooked. Not only does Santiago feel a connection to this fish, he feels admiration towards him. He says, “ He is wonderful and strange . . . Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely. Perhaps he is too wise to

jump,” and clearly, the old man has nothing but good words come to mind as he thinks of the fish (48). Towards the end of the novel when the sharks come and ravage the fish, Santiago seems very downhearted when the fish is nothing but mere bone. Not only has the old man lost his profit, but also his friend; his brother.

The fish and sea are key characters in this novel. They provide companionship, food, and much more to the old man on his expedition. They are his brothers through and through, and he relies on them to keep him sane. Although Santiago does have a deeper and more meaningful connection with the boy, he is still connected with the fish and sea in ways that he could never connect with another human, and this is why they are so important to the story.