



# The Vitality of Nature in 'The Old Man and the Sea' by Ernest Hemingway

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**Abstract:** *The Old Man and the Sea*, Ernest Hemingway relates the tale of Santiago -the old man, a struggling fisherman who lives off the coast of Havana. He has not caught any fish in 48 days, and his apprentice, a youngster named Manolin who has been sailing with him, switched to another boat, leaving the old man all by himself.

In this novel it is evident that the old man differs from most other people, who have a little sympathy for animals and consider them to be inferior to humans. The idea is that Santiago is merely a marine monster. Santiago's observations are interesting in this context. He would like to experience the sea from the aeroplane. He is like fish in the sea which are unable to see the sea from such a distance. In that instant, the old man and the sea seemed one unbreakable entity. The remark can be made that nature provides for the old man's needs; he is completely dependent upon it. This viewpoint refers to nature as a living giver.

It must be said that there are two ways to approach the way nature is depicted in "The Old Man and the Sea." The author narrates the tale of an elderly fisherman catching a large marlin, illustrating how nature can appear "as itself" at first glance. Hemingway outlines the relationship between the fish and the main character. One can "learn" about the difficulties the old man faces on the water, while also getting an impression of Santiago's environment. He learns there about both the "friendly" and frequently terrible elements of nature. The fish and Santiago turn out to be pretty equal; both of them are trying to survive. In addition, one can observe that Santiago is a skilled fisherman since, for instance, he is able to read the "signs of nature." However, nature can also be viewed as a symbol.

**Key words:** Nature, Fisherman, Survival, Co-existence, Sea, Sympathy, Environment

In his well-known book *The Old Man and the Sea*, Ernest Hemingway relates the tale of Santiago -the old man, a struggling fisherman who lives off the coast of Havana. He has not caught any fish in 48 days, and his apprentice, a youngster named Manolin who has been sailing with him, switched to another boat, leaving the old man all by himself. One day he catches a huge fish and struggles with it for three days before killing it. He fastens it to the side of his boat, but many sharks are drawn to the fish by its blood loss and attack it. After a protracted battle, Santiago finally makes it to the harbour carrying only the bones of his fish.

The sea serves as the location for the book, while the fish serves as a peer of Santiago. This article analyses the relevance of nature as it is portrayed in the book. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, there are two perspectives on nature that can be taken. The way it is portrayed, and the kind of relationship Santiago has with nature. Nature, on the other hand, is also seen as a symbol. It is quite evident that nature is shown with a different perspective in this novel.

At first glance, the surroundings of the fisherman, Santiago appears to be totally structured and harmonious. There is order everywhere in Santiago's "universe." There are birds, the sun, the moon, stars, and the sea with its inhabitants. The animals and Santiago have a relationship that is more akin to friendship.

Surroundings of the fisherman, Santiago, at first glance, appears to be totally structured and harmonious. Everything is rather disciplined in Santiago's world. There are birds, the sun, the moon, stars, and water in his world.

Once a little bird flies towards the boat, from the north. He is a warbler and has been hovering close to the water. The elderly man could see that he is exhausted. The bird has landed at the stern of the boat and takes a nap. He takes off and circles the elderly man's head before landing on the line and relaxing there. The old man questions the bird, "How old are you?" Is this a first-time traveller? When he makes a conversation, the bird turns to face him.

It appears that the elderly man is compassionate towards the small bird. He discusses with it as though it can understand. This demonstrates the feelings of Santiago where he treats, animals as his fellow sufferers, notably the fish that he later encounters in the narrative, he has similar kind of feelings towards it. Each element in his "universe" is, in some or the other way connected in synchronisation or love. He feels for every other creature he meets at the sea, similarly he has also feelings for the bird. He feels sympathetic towards the turtles that are killed by other fisherman from other boats, and he refers to the flying fish as "his principal friends on the ocean."

Despite spending a lot of time in turtle boats, he has no mysticism about turtles. Even the enormous trunk-backs that are as long as the skiff and has weighed a tonne makes him feel bad. Because a turtle's heart continues to beat for hours after he has been dissected and killed, most people lack empathy when it comes to them. But the old man has reasoned that his feet and hands are like theirs, and he has such a heart like them too.

In this novel it is evident that the old man differs from most other people, who have a little sympathy for animals and consider them to be inferior to humans. The idea is that Santiago is merely a marine monster. Santiago's observations are interesting in this context. He would like to experience the sea from the aeroplane. The idea that he is like fish in the sea that are unable to see the sea from such a distance. In that instant, the old man and the sea seemed one unbreakable entity. The remark can be made that nature provides for the old man's needs; he is completely dependent upon it. This viewpoint refers to nature as a living giver.

Nature has more than just this idealised view. It can also be antagonistic and harmful. Undoubtedly, searching for fish while rowing on the ocean is not always enjoyable. Even though it initially appears to be so tranquil, nature may occasionally feel hostile. The very first page of "The Old Man and the Sea" demonstrates that bad luck is a result of nature. In the Gulf Stream, Santiago, alone in a boat has gone eighty-four days without taking a fish. It becomes obvious that despite being a part of nature, sometimes man is totally inferior to it. Santiago cannot be a poor fisherman due to his vast experience; since most of the time he is unlucky, this demonstrates that he should never depend on his abilities when he is in the sea. As sea is unpredictable his fate is influenced the inconsistent "tempers" of his environment. The description of the old man's outward appearance reveals the occasionally brutal side of nature. His entire body displays evidence of nature's wilful destruction. He is left with dark patches of the benign skin cancer due to the assault of the sun on his skin. Santiago's deep-creased scars from manipulating large fish on the ropes seem to bear evidence to his prolonged battle with nature. There are also sharks, who ultimately steal the old man's catch. Nature can take away from what it provides. Sharks are a part of this unity; they stand in for nature's wrath. Both creation and destruction are a part of nature and are strongly related to one another.

There is a clear ambiguity in the novel. The whole of nature exists in a perfect harmony, there is also conflict among these creatures. This is demonstrated by Santiago's sympathy for the fish. The contradictory emotion of the old man makes the issue ambiguous. He feels bad about the turtles or the birds, but his sentiments for the marlin seem to be more intense. Santiago has no chance against the fish, unlike the small bird, for instance. The old man fights with it for three days because it is so enormous and strong. Indeed, the boat is smaller than the fish. The marlin starts towing the skiff towards the northwest, against the current, in the Gulf above Havana after it has swallowed the bait. The marlin, which is pulling the skiff, and Santiago, who hold the fish with the line, both attempts to hold out.

His hands begin to bleed. The line has been used to link the man and the fish together. Simply wait for one of the two to lose strength. Both most likely believe that they must persevere until the other gives up., Santiago expresses the following thought: “Keep your head clear and know how to suffer like a man. Or a fish, he thought. “ (On page 79)

The two of them are quite equal. Once more, the reader is left with the sense that Santiago is just like any other animal or perhaps perceives the fish as a person.

After that, he has felt bad for the large fish who is starving, but his intention to kill him has not wavered. He wonders how many people he could feed. But he is suspicious that whether they are fit to consume him. He is quite sure that they are not worthy to eat him. Due to his manner of behaviour and his high level of dignity, no one is worthy of eating him. He feels that he cannot comprehend these things. Nonetheless, it is good that humans are not required to attempt to destroy the sun, the moon, or the stars. Living by the sea and murdering real brothers is sufficient.

One thing is made apparent in this part of the book: all other components found in nature are equal in Santiago's eyes, in addition to fish and men. Stars are also his ‘brothers’.

It seems like everything in this "community" has a set role to perform. The bird needs to catch the fish to survive, but he has no opportunity since the flying fish are too huge for him and they move too fast. Santiago's job is to overwhelm the marlin; the marlin's job is to escape the old man. The idea of hunting and being hunted is involved. Always, the bigger one is superior to the smaller one. This idea is later put into practise for Santiago when the sharks attack and steal his catch.

In a world where everyone is killing or being killed, one critic observes that : “A sense of brotherhood and love, in a world in which everyone is killing or being killed, binds together the creatures of nature, establishes between them a unity and an emotion which transcends the destructive pattern in which they are caught.“ Every contender in the book is concerned with survival; they are all looking for food.(Page:2)

The unchangeability of nature is another feature that *The Old Man and the Sea* highlights. The fishermen cast their nets into the sea, then row back to the land as the sun sets, it rises and sets and rises again without change of rhythm. It resembles a routine that is continuously performed. Santiago's life is also best characterised as changeless because he has probably only ever learnt to fish and never stopped doing it. It can be presumed that the old man resumes fishing as soon as he feels better after being exposed to the stresses of the sea. The sea itself is a representation of the ocean's changelessness because it has remained constant for generations.

It is intriguing to observe the behaviour of Santiago in this situation as a part of this nature or in this environment. It is observed that there is a sense of brotherhood and oneness between each element. Santiago has learned a lot throughout his extended lifetime spent at the sea.

The elderly man could see the dawn approaching in the darkness, and as he rowed, he heard the quivering sound of flying fish emerging from the water and the hissing sound of their firm set wings as they flew away into the night.

This shows that he is highly familiar with the sea. He is clearly connected to nature if he can identify the animals around him in complete darkness at night and sense the dawn. He can read the indications of nature. For instance, the birds can tell him exactly where to look for fish. The old man then has turned to gaze above and has noticed that the bird is once more circling. He declares loudly, ‘He’s found fish,’ he said aloud. “The fish are actually a very good help. They can be called his guides.”(30)

The bird dove slanting his wings for the dive and then flapping them aimlessly as he pursued the flying fish. The big dolphin raised a little bulge in the water as it pursued the fleeing fish, which the elderly man could see. He observed the ineffective manoeuvres of the bird and the repeated eruptions of the flying fish. But, it is possible that he finds a stray and that his large fish is nearby.

The stars are very useful, especially when navigating: "Once he stood up and urinated over the side of the skiff and looked at the stars and checked his course. "(38/39) He does not feel lost even in the pitch darkness. Despite being alone and surrounded by danger, he shows no signs of panic. He can always rely on nature.

Several commentators examined *"The Old Man and the Sea"* from the perspective of symbolism. The belief of Christian symbolism is very clear. Only in the scene where Santiago returns to the cabin, there are numerous references to Christ. As the significance of nature is the focus of this essay, it also attempts to highlight some of the symbolic elements of nature as it is depicted in this fiction. Several Christian symbols can also be discovered in the description of nature. It goes without saying that one should first glance at the ocean. This is the most significant component of the novel. The title of the book is "The Old Man and the Sea" and not "The Old Man and the Fish".

Intriguing aspect is the title of the book. Hemingway decided to give the book this title. The title is not particularly clear because the entire plot revolves around a three-day battle with a marlin. So, the sea must play a significant role in the book. The sea is the largest on Earth, both in terms of type and size. It covers 71% of the surface of the planet. Because of this, someone on the sea can quickly feel lost or at the very least much smaller than the powerful sea. Given that people are a species that originated on the soil, it is necessary to refer to them as a hostile factor. Human beings "home" is on land, but the water has always been a terrifying, inscrutable, and enigmatic place. As a result, the sea is frequently employed in fiction as a symbol of life. A voyage on the water is comparable to a metaphorical journey through life. Participants live life with all its allies, just like Santiago on the sea. The ocean in *"The Old Man and the Sea"* unquestionably represents life itself and the part that each person plays in it.

However, other than the dip of the oars, most of the boats were silent. When they got out of the port, they dispersed, with each one going in the direction of the area of the ocean where he hoped to locate fish. The old guy left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clear early-morning smell of the ocean because he knew he was going a long way out.

Real-world individuals are represented by the boats on the water. There are two types of people: those who participate actively in life and those who are only passive observers. Some vessels navigate the ocean in silence, staying in their designated safe zones. They do not experiment with their limits. Boats are frequently used to symbolise travel, adventure, or exploration. Those who stay close to home are unable to fully experience life and develop their experience. Some people, like the elderly man once more, view life as a struggle. They venture far and take great risks. They can cross any barrier; they go where they choose, not where the water wishes to carry them. Nothing frightens Santiago. He is not like the other boats, which remain in the areas they are most familiar with.

The birds may also represent specific people, they might stand in for those who are frail and inexperienced and are prone to getting lost in life.

"Why did they make birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel?" (p. 23)

In this place, getting lost means being "swallowed" by the sea; in real life, it can also signify failure or death. Because of Santiago's strength and talent, life can no longer harm him. However, some individuals—like children—can be "destroyed" more easily than others.

In addition, it is believed that the sea is the mother of all life. Life first appeared in the water, which is where it all began to exist on Earth. Profiting from it, the fishermen on their boats offer the people on land with the fish that the ocean provides. Consequently, the sea and the ship both denote fertility. The sea is a woman in Santiago's "world". This view is consistent with the assertion that the sea is the source of all life.

La mar, as she is known in Spanish when someone loves her, was the name he has always given to the ocean. Although they constantly refer to her as a woman, those who adore her occasionally criticise her. Some of the younger fishermen, those who have used buoys as line floats and has motorboats that they have purchased when the shark livers have brought in a lot of money, referred to her as el mar, which is a male



pronoun. She is described as a competitor, a location, or even an adversary. However, the old man always perceived her as feminine and as something that imparted or withheld immense tastes, and if she has committed crazy or evil acts, it is because she is powerless to stop herself. He has reflected that she is affected by the moon just like a woman is.

Here, we see how two characteristics are blended into one single thing: the sea is both masculine (to the young fishermen) and feminine (to the older men like Santiago). When the sea is threatening and destructive, men feel as though the sea is engaging them in a contest or a duel. After that, people compare the ocean to a guy.

The elderly man let go of the rope and put his foot on it. He then lifted the harpoon as high as he could and drove it into the fish's side right beneath the large chest fin, which rose into the air to the height of the man's chest, using all of his strength and the additional strength he has just called. He has pushed all of his weight after it after feeling the iron go in and driving it farther.

When analysing the interaction between the elderly man and the young kid Manolin, a critic took into account the notion that the sea is a mother or woman. He has observed the pair—Manolin, who stands in for the son, and Santiago, who represents the father—united with the "mother" like in a family:

For the first time in Hemingway's narrative, father, mother (sea), and son (kid) are able to work together harmoniously. The boy is physically transformed into a student who is able to devote, without hesitation, dedication and admiration to the father. The mother is destroyed as a figure and made mostly passive and receptive (although she is potentially hazardous, the professional can deal with her). The boy ("I wish the boy were here") makes the father deserving. [Pg.4]

In life, there is a connection between the symbols for fish and water. Both images have Christian connotations. The novel's page 75 contains the following statement, which makes to think of baptism: "He lifted some sea water with his left hand and put it on his head." Purification can be represented by washing one's hands in water (page 47: "[...] he washed his hand in the ocean [...]"). Since the fish represents Jesus Christ; it has an even stronger connection to Christianity. According to the Bible, Jesus predicted that Peter, the first apostle and a fisherman by trade, would turn into a "fisher of men" if he decided to follow Him. "San Pedro, like the great DiMaggio's father, was a fisherman." (p. 90)

A very important part in the book is Santiago's dream about the lions. Since that dream is mentioned so often it must have a relevant influence on the story, and this must be the reason why we can interpret it in so many different ways. It is obvious that the lions can be seen as a symbol as well, mainly because a dream is always symbolic. The dream gives us an idea of how Santiago sees his part in life. The dream is referenced for the first time on pages 18 and 19. One night when he sleeps, he has a dream about lions playing on a beach in Africa, "like young cats in the dusk." "This is unusual because typically you wouldn't anticipate seeing any lions on a beach. In addition, they don't act in a way that is consistent with our expectations. Compared to predatory animals, they resemble cats more. As a result, they might symbolise tamed, ferocious elements of nature—a state that, of course, is ideal but impractical in the real world. Santiago as a young man and with greater strength might potentially be represented by the lions. Given that lions represent strength and courage, this is quite evident. Since the lions Santiago saw in his dream were on the beach (a location where such animals wouldn't typically be found), it is likely that they stood in for the same kind of individuals that the vessels that sailed "too far out" on the ocean did. The tourists towards the novel's conclusion are another representation of those people in real life who are quite passive and don't push their bounds.

Whereas other lions would not risk it, the lions do. Similar to the old man when he is caught the marlin; they push their limits to see how far they can go. Santiago can only continue to be powerful and adventurous in his dreams because he is progressively losing the ability to participate actively in life due to his advanced age. He is a sort of surviving among the lions. He returns home as a battered man after the protracted conflict. The child begins to sob as he has noticed the elderly man's hands and noticed that he is breathing. He has left the house in a discreet manner to bring some coffee, crying the entire way. Now that the lengthy battle is over, he makes his way back home in damaged condition. The boy sees the old man's hands, sees that he is breathing, and he starts to cry. He quietly slips out of the home to bring some coffee, crying the whole while.

In conclusion, it must be said that there are two ways to approach the way nature is depicted in "The Old Man and the Sea." The author narrates the tale of an elderly fisherman catching a large marlin, illustrating how nature can appear "as itself" at first glance. Hemingway outlines the relationship between the fish and the main character. One can "learn" about the difficulties the old man faces on the water, while also getting an impression of Santiago's environment. He learns there about both the "friendly" and frequently terrible elements of nature. The fish and Santiago turn out to be pretty equal; both of them are trying to survive. In addition, one can observe that Santiago is a skilled fisherman since, for instance, he is able to read the "signs of nature." However, nature can also be viewed as a symbol. The novel can be analysed in terms of symbolism, in conclusion it can be said that life and the role that people play in it are portrayed in the plot. The sea represents life, and the boats and lions represent the people in actual life. There are two categories of people: those that challenge themselves and are active, adventurous and those who are cautious, apprehensive, and do not dare.

Hemingway's own philosophy on life is alluded to in the character of Santiago. It is reasonable to suppose that he has preferred the old man's way of life. Hemingway himself is a pretty daring person. In addition to participating in the Spanish Civil War, he also has engaged in deep-sea fishing and bullfighting. His writings capture those encounters. Hemingway's life and their own are better understood by his readers through his books. Hemingway encourages his audience to take chances by, in other words, daring them to venture out to sea and capture their own marlin.

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