The Old Man and the Sea

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Ernest Hemingway grew up outside a suburb of Chicago, spending summers with his family in rural Michigan. After high school, he got a job writing for *The Kansas City Star*, but left *The Star* after only six months to join the Red Cross Ambulance Corps during World War I, where he was injured and awarded the Silver Medal of Military Valor. Afterward, he lived in Ontario and Chicago, where he met his first wife, Hadley Richardson. In 1921 they moved to Paris, where he began a long friendship with F. Scott Fitzgerald and other ex-patriot American writers of the "lost generation." After the 1926 publication of his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway divorced Hadley, married Arkansas native Pauline Pfeiffer, and moved to Florida. Hemingway's father committed suicide in 1928, shooting himself. During the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway moved to Spain to serve as a war correspondent, a job which inspired his famous 1939 novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. After its publication, he met his third wife, Martha Gellhorn. In 1946 Hemingway married his fourth and final wife, Mary Hemingway, and the couple spent the next 14 years living in Cuba. After a final move to Idaho, Hemingway took his own life in 1961, leaving behind his wife and three sons.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Living in Cuba in the late 1940s, one of Hemingway's favorite pastimes was fishing in his boat, *The Pilar*. This simple pastime contrasted greatly with the turbulent events of his life that preceded his time in Cuba. Hemingway served in World War I and World War II and witnessed the liberation of Paris and the 1945 schism within the Cuban Communist party. Having viewed death and hardship in many forms, Hemingway's feeling of disillusionment was only magnified by his 10-year struggle with writing that preceded the publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

In Paris, Hemingway became part of the "lost generation" of American writers who had relocated to Europe after World War I. In the company of writers like Ezra Pound, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein, Hemingway infused his work with a sense of emptiness, disillusionment, and rebellion against patriotic ideals. In this way, his work can be considered related to novels like *Ulysses* and *The Great Gatsby*, which describe the sadness and hardship of the human condition.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *The Old Man and the Sea*
- **When Written:** 1951
- **Where Written:** Cuba
- **When Published:** 1952
- **Literary Period:** Modernism
- **Genre:** Fiction (novella); Parable
- **Setting:** Late 1940s; a fishing village near Havana, Cuba, and the waters of the Gulf of Mexico
- **Climax:** When Santiago finally harpoons and kills the marlin; when Santiago fights off the final pack of sharks
- **Antagonist:** The marlin; the sharks
- **Point of View:** Third-person omniscient, although largely limited to Santiago's point of view

EXTRA CREDIT

Awards: *The Old Man and the Sea* was the last major work of fiction Hemingway wrote. It won the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and contributed to Hemingway's selection for the Nobel Prize in 1954.

Criticism of the Critics: Hemingway's novel *Across the River and Into the Trees*, published in 1950, met with severe negative criticism, although Hemingway said he considered it his best work yet. When *The Old Man and the Sea* was published to great acclaim, some viewed the story as Hemingway's symbolic attack on literary critics—the elderly master fighting and triumphing over his long-time adversaries.

PLOT SUMMARY

On the coast of Cuba near Havana, an old widowed fisherman named Santiago has been unable to catch a fish for 84 days. His apprentice, Manolin, has been forced by his parents to seek another "luckier" employer, although Manolin continues to help Santiago launch and retrieve his boat from the ocean each day. Manolin cares for the aging Santiago, bringing him food and clothing, and in return Santiago tells Manolin stories about baseball legends and his younger days fishing in a boat off of Africa. Every night, Santiago dreams of lions on the beaches of Africa. Early each morning, Santiago walks up the road to Manolin's family's home to wake him up for work.

On the morning of the 85th day, Manolin helps Santiago launch his boat into the sea. Santiago rows over the deep well where he has been trying to catch fish for the past week and decides to try his luck farther out. Finally, in the early afternoon, he

catches a ten-pound tuna, which he decides will be his meal for the day. Not long afterward, Santiago feels a hard pull on his line and realizes that a huge marlin has caught his hook.

Because the marlin is so big, however, Santiago cannot pull it in. The marlin pulls Santiago's skiff farther and farther from land. As the sun goes down, Santiago begins to feel a kind of companionship with the marlin. He pities the fish, even loves it, but is still determined to kill it. He decides to cut all his other lines so that nothing will interfere with his great catch.

As the sun comes up on Santiago's second day at sea, the marlin suddenly surges, pulling the line and cutting Santiago's hand. As he nurses his hand, the marlin jumps up out of the water, and Santiago can see the fish is bigger than any marlin he has ever seen, much less caught on his own. He has to hold onto the line with all his might so that the marlin does not break free from the boat. He prays that he will be able to kill the marlin, and wonders what his hero Joe DiMaggio would do if he were in Santiago's situation.

As it grows dark on Santiago's second day at sea, he lets out a small line and catches a dolphin to eat. He rests for a few hours, but is woken by the marlin jumping frantically. Santiago continues holding the line, although it has been cutting into his hand for some time. The marlin tires and begins circling the boat as Santiago grows weaker from lack of sleep and exhaustion. Finally, Santiago uses all his strength to harpoon and kill the marlin.

Santiago ties the marlin to the side of his boat and begins sailing back toward Cuba. During the homeward journey, however—his third day at sea—sharks attack the boat, tearing the flesh from the marlin. Santiago fights desperately, killing or driving off most of the sharks, but eventually the sharks eat all the flesh off the marlin. When Santiago pulls into the harbor, everyone is sleeping, and Santiago struggles to carry his mast back to his shack, leaving the marlin's skeleton still tied to his boat in the harbor.

The next day, Manolin finds Santiago asleep in his shack. Manolin is overjoyed to see him but cries when he sees the cuts in Santiago's hands. He brings Santiago coffee, passing the crowd of fisherman who are marveling at the marlin's giant skeleton. When Santiago wakes up, Manolin tells him he doesn't care what his parents say—he's going to start fishing with Santiago again. Meanwhile, as a party of tourists watches the marlin's skeleton and mistakes it for a shark, Santiago drifts back to sleep under Manolin's watchful gaze and dreams of lions.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Santiago – The protagonist of the novella, Santiago is an elderly widowed Cuban fisherman whose "luck" seems to have run out—he hasn't caught anything in 84 days. Santiago is humble in his dealings with others, yet takes great pride in his work and himself, and is frustrated and embarrassed by his failures. He views his aging body as a kind of betrayer, and fondly remembers his younger days, when he was exceptionally strong and a successful fisherman. Other than fishing, Santiago's greatest joys are the time he spends with his former apprentice, Manolin, and the time he spends talking about baseball, and, in particular, his favorite player, the "great DiMaggio." Besides Manolin, Santiago considers his only friends to be the sea, the fish, and the stars. In his conquest over the marlin, Santiago exhibits exceptional determination and endurance in the face of physical and psychological pain. Although he loses the marlin to sharks, the entire struggle constitutes a spiritual triumph in which Santiago emerges as a Christ figure.

Manolin – An adolescent Cuban boy who has fished with Santiago since he was a child, Manolin is Santiago's devoted apprentice. He cares for Santiago in his old age, and encourages him in his fishing even though Manolin's parents have forced Manolin to seek out a "luckier" employer. He is Santiago's only human friend, and looks up to Santiago as a mentor and father-figure. Manolin exemplifies traits of fidelity, selflessness and compassion. He accepts hard work happily, never complaining.

MINOR CHARACTERS

Pedrico – Another fisherman in Santiago's village, Pedrico makes fish traps. Santiago gives him the marlin's head at the end of the novella in gratitude for supplying him with newspapers that report the baseball scores.

Martin – The owner of the seaside café, the Terrace, where Santiago and other fisherman eat. Martin provides Santiago with meals during his unlucky streak.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

RESISTANCE TO DEFEAT

As a fisherman who has caught nothing for the last 84 days, Santiago is a man fighting against defeat. Yet Santiago never gives in to defeat: he sails further into the ocean than he ever has before in hopes of landing a fish, struggles with the marlin for three days and nights despite immense physical pain and exhaustion, and, after catching the marlin, fights off the sharks even when it's clear that the battle against them is hopeless. Whenever the

situation gets particularly difficult and despair threatens to overwhelm Santiago, he turns to a number of tactics to fuel his resistance to defeat: he recalls memories of his youthful strength; he relies on his pride by demanding that he prove himself a worthy role model for Manolin or by comparing himself to his hero Joe DiMaggio; and he prays to God, even though his prayers do nothing to ease his physical suffering.

Ultimately, Santiago represents every man's struggle to survive. And just as Santiago's effort to bring the marlin back to land intact is doomed, no man can ever escape death. Yet through Santiago's struggle, Hemingway makes the case that escape from death is not the issue. As Santiago observes near the end of his struggle with the marlin, "a man can be destroyed but not defeated." In other words, victory over the inevitable is not what defines a man. Rather, it a man's struggle against the inevitable, even when he knows it is inevitable, that defines him. And the more difficult the struggle, the more worthy the opponent, the more powerfully a man can prove himself.



PRIDE

Pride is often depicted as negative attribute that causes people to reach for too much and, as a result, suffer a terrible fall. After he kills the first shark, Santiago, who knows he killed the marlin "for pride," wonders if the sin of pride was responsible for the shark attack because pride caused him to go out into the ocean beyond the usual boundaries that fishermen observe. Santiago immediately dismisses the idea, however, and the events of *The Old Man and the Sea* support his conviction that pride is not the cause of his difficulties.

In fact, Santiago's pride is portrayed as the single motivating force that spurs him to greatness. It is his pride that pushes him to survive three grueling days at sea, battling the marlin and then the sharks. Yet it is important to recognize that Santiago's pride is of a particular, limited sort. Pride never pushes him to try to be more than he is. For instance, when Manolin tells him, "The best fisherman is you," early in the story, Santiago humbly disagrees. Rather, Santiago takes pride in being *exactly* what he is, a man and a fisherman, and his struggle can be seen as an effort to be the best man and fisherman that he can be. As he thinks in the middle of his struggle with the marlin, he must kill the marlin to show Manolin "what a man can do and what a man endures." Santiago achieves the crucial balance between pride and humility—that "[humility] was not disgraceful and it carried no true loss of pride."



FRIENDSHIP

The friendship between Santiago and Manolin plays a critical part in Santiago's victory over the marlin. In return for Santiago's mentorship and company, Manolin provides physical support to Santiago in the village, bringing him food and clothing and helping him load his skiff. He also provides emotional support, encouraging Santiago throughout his unlucky streak. Although Santiago's "hope and confidence had never gone," when Manolin was present, "they were freshening as when the breeze rises." And once he encounters the marlin, Santiago refuses to accept defeat because he knows Manolin would be disappointed in him.

Yet most of the novella takes place when Santiago is alone. Except for Manolin's friendship in the evenings, Santiago is characterized by his isolation. His wife has died, and he lives and fishes alone. Even so, just as he refuses to give in to death, he refuses to give in to loneliness. Santiago finds friends in other creatures. The flying fish are "his principal friends on the ocean," and the marlin, through their shared struggle, becomes his "brother." He calls the stars his "distant friends," and thinks of the ocean as a woman he loves. Santiago talks to himself, talks to his weakened left hand, and imagines Manolin sitting next to him. In the end, these friendships—both real and imagined—prevent Santiago from pitying himself. As a result, he has the support to achieve what seems physically impossible for an old man.

YOUTH AND AGE

The title of the novella, *The Old Man and the Sea*, suggests the critical thematic role that age plays in the story. The book's two principal characters, Santiago and Manolin, represent the old and the young, and a beautiful harmony develops between them. What one lacks, the other provides. Manolin, for example, has energy and enthusiasm. He finds food and clothing for Santiago, and encourages him despite his bad luck. Santiago, in turn, has wisdom and experience. He tells Manolin stories about baseball and teaches him to fish. Santiago's determination to be a good role model for Manolin is one of his main motivations in battling the marlin for three days—he wants to show Manolin "what a man can do."

Santiago's age is also important to the novella because it has made him physically weak. Without this weakness, his triumph would not be so meaningful to him. As Santiago says, he "had seen many [fish] that weighed more than a thousand pounds and had caught two of that size in his life, but never alone" and never as an old man. Santiago finds solace and strength in remembering his youth, which is symbolized by the lions on the beach that he sees in his dreams. He recalls these lions—slow, graceful but fierce creatures—from the perspective of an old man. In doing so, he realizes that he too, although slow, can still be a formidable opponent.



MAN AND NATURE

Since *The Old Man and the Sea* is the story of a man's struggle against a marlin, it is tempting to see

the novella as depicting man's struggle against nature. In fact, through Santiago, the novella explores man's relationship *with* nature. He thinks of the flying fish as his friends, and speaks with a warbler to pass the time. The sea is dangerous, with its sharks and potentially treacherous weather, but it also sustains him by providing food in the form of dolphins and shrimp. Finally, Santiago does not just see the marlin as an adversary, he loves it as a brother. In the middle of their struggle, Santiago says to the marlin, "Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who." Santiago's statement shows the depth of his admiration for the marlin and hints at the fundamental law of nature that unites man and animal: all beings must die, must kill or be killed. In this way, man and nature are joined in a circular system, in which death is necessary and fosters new life.

CHRISTIAN ALLEGORY

The *Old Man and the Sea* is full of Christian imagery. Over the course of his struggles at sea, Santiago emerges as a Christ figure. For instance: Santiago's injured hands recall Christ's stigmata (the wounds in his palms); when the sharks attack, Santiago makes a sound like a man being crucified; when Santiago returns to shore he carries his mast up to his shack on his shoulder, just as Christ was forced to bear his own crucifix; and Santiago's final position, resting on his bed, resembles Christ's position on the cross. More importantly, Santiago resembles Christ in that, like Christ, he transforms loss into triumph, faces the inevitability of death without complaint and, in doing so, transcends it. Christ literally is resurrected, while Santiago regains Manolin as an apprentice, providing both the companionship he had lost and the chance to pass his knowledge on to the next generation.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in blue text throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

THE MARLIN

The marlin is the giant, 18-foot fish that battles with Santiago in the middle of the ocean for three days and three nights. Although Santiago hooks the marlin on his first afternoon at sea, the marlin refuses to come to the surface and instead pulls Santiago farther and farther from land. Santiago admires the marlin's beauty and endurance, and considers it a "noble" adversary, telling the fish repeatedly that though he loves it, he must kill it. Ultimately, the marlin is presented as Santiago's worthy opponent. Struggling against such an opponent brings out the best in an individual—courage, endurance, and love. At the same time, because Santiago comes to see the marlin as an alter-ego—he identifies the marlin as male and imagines the fish is old—the marlin comes to represent Santiago himself as well. In other words, Santiago's struggle with the marlin is in fact a struggle with himself. It is not a struggle of strength but rather of endurance, and a refusal to accept defeat. Santiago's struggle with the marlin is a struggle to face and overcome his own weaknesses as much as it is a struggle to subdue the great fish. In the process, by refusing to give in to the fish or the weakness of his mind and body, Santiago transcends those weaknesses.

LIONS

Both in his bed in the village and in his boat, Santiago dreams of lions on the beaches of Africa, which he saw when he was a boy on a ship that sailed and fished the coast of Africa. The lions symbolize Santiago's lost youth as well as his pride (a group of lions is called a "pride"). Santiago's love for the lions, which are fierce predators, also mirrors his relationship with the marlin, whom he loves but whose death he feels is necessary to his survival. In this way, the lions as also symbolize Santiago's affinity with nature. Now that Santiago is no longer young, and has lost his friends, family, and strength, he sees the lions only in his dreams. Santiago's dreams of the lions at the end of the novella suggest that in triumphing over the marlin, he has undergone his own rejuvenation.

THE SHARKS

Scavengers and little more than swimming appetites, the sharks are Santiago's fiercest antagonists. Although Santiago manages to kill most of them, they tear apart the marlin's body and leave Santiago devastated. While the marlin is portrayed as both an adversary and a noble companion to Santiago, the sharks are portrayed as purely vicious. The shovel-nosed sharks can also be seen as symbolizing the destructive forces of nature and of the people of Jerusalem, whose petty jealousies and rivalries led to the crucifixion of Jesus. Some have even argued that the sharks symbolize literary critics, whom Hemingway saw as "feasting" on the creations of true artists without actually creating anything themselves.

THE MAST

At the end of *The Old Man and the Sea*, the exhausted Santiago removes his mast from his skiff, and haltingly drags it up the beach to his shack by resting one end of the cross on his shoulder. The position in which Santiago carries the mast exactly mirrors the position in which Jesus Christ was forced to drag his cross on the way to his crucifixion. The mast, then, becomes a symbol for the cross, and cements the parallel that Hemingway sets up between Santiago's ordeal and Christ's.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Scribner edition of *The Old Man and The Sea* published in 1952.

Day One Quotes

Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated.

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 10

Explanation and Analysis

In this characteristically blunt introduction of Santiago, Hemingway sets him up as the novella's titular "old man."

Throughout this tale, Santiago's advanced age plays an important role in his fishing abilities and his interactions with the other fishermen. His body is breaking down, and his unlikely victory against the giant marlin seems like it might be his last big fishing expedition. His body is well-worn, and there seems to be a sort of honor in all the pain Santiago has been able to bear over the years.

But, as Hemingway describes them, Santiago's eyes still have a lot of youth in them. They are "cheerful and undefeated," reflecting Santiago's unwillingness to let up as he struggles to catch the marlin. With eyes the same color as the sea, Santiago is one with it. The sea is Santiago's livelihood, his joy, and his true home.

"There are many good fishermen and some great ones. But there is only you."

Related Characters: Manolin (speaker), Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 23

Explanation and Analysis

Manolin's adoration for Santiago is clear throughout the story, and we know Manolin only stopped fishing with the old man because his parents thought Santiago cursed to never catch another fish.

We learn that Santiago taught Manolin everything the boy knows about fishing, and here Manolin's pride at being an apprentice to the old master shows. It's also a reassurance to Santiago, who is made fun of by many of the younger and more successful fishermen. Despite the fact that these other men seem to catch fish almost every day, while Santiago hasn't caught anything in eighty-four days, Manolin's commitment to Santiago is unbreakable.

As we learn throughout the story, Manolin is the closest thing Santiago has to a friend. And, because Santiago's wife has died, Manolin is also the closest thing the old man has to family.

Hemingway writes in many of his novels and stories about "good" and "great" men, and there's a characteristic bravado to Manolin's statement. It never becomes clear whether or not Santiago is really the best fisherman, but in Manolin's eyes he's a singular talent.

He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy.

Related Characters: Santiago, Manolin

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 25

Explanation and Analysis

By using all these terms of negation (like "no longer" and "nor") to list things Santiago *used* to dream about, Hemingway creates a strong sense of all the experiences Santiago has had in his long life. Though the list evokes some nostalgia, it seems like Santiago's feelings resolve toward the end of this passage to a contentment with what he has lost and what he currently has.

The bravado of Hemingway's male characters emerges again, as we notice the things that Santiago once dreamed of: storms, women, great occurrences, great fish, fights, contests of strength, and his wife. In the world of these fishermen, and probably in Hemingway's mind too, these are the things that allow a man to assert his manliness. This mention of "contests of strength" points to the passage where Santiago arm-wrestles another man for an entire day.

It's important not only that Santiago is a man, but also that he's an *old* man. The other fishermen see Santiago as an old man, but he wants them to see him as a man just like them--or better than them. If Santiago can wrestle in the big marlin, he'll prove to all the other fishermen he's still on top of their hierarchy.

And yet Santiago no longer dreams of these things. Maybe he just doesn't care too much what the others think of him now. His dreams of lions seem to emerge from memories of working on ships off the coast of Africa, far back in his past, and something about this choice of memories makes it seem like part of Santiago wants to retire from the difficulty and competitiveness of fishing and escape far away. Hemingway loves to write about lions, and they're an important element of many of his most well-known short stories.

Day Two Quotes

❝ Why did they make birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel? She is kind and very beautiful. But she can be so cruel and it comes so suddenly and such birds that fly, dipping and hunting, with their small sad voices are made too delicately for the sea.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 29

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago has a deep connection with the ocean and its animal inhabitants, and here he demonstrates a concern for the birds around him. This novella is full of dichotomy-- the division of things into two seemingly opposite groups. For instance, Santiago is divided within himself between his role as a fisherman (to kill and sell fish) and his love for fish. Here, the ocean is dichotomous: it is kind and beautiful, but it is also "cruel" and "comes so suddenly."

This is one of many places in the novella where Santiago is drawn into reflection about the ocean and the life he has spent on it. The ambiguous phrase "Why did they make birds so delicate" evokes Santiago's lack of certainty about things like creation. The question assumes that someone *made* the birds, but the word *they* creates more ambiguity than a word like *God.* Usually, when Santiago finds himself in this sort of reflection, he forces himself back into the present and reminds himself that he should focus on fishing instead of wondering about really big things like creation or sin. But Santiago's deep appreciation for the sea is mystical, almost a sort of religion in itself.

❝ But the old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favors, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman, he thought.

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes: 

Page Number: 30

Explanation and Analysis

Once again, Santiago is reflecting on the sea while he rows across it to reach a better fishing spot. Another major dichotomy of Hemingway's novella is that between *thinking* and *doing*. Santiago will try to get himself to stop thinking and just fish, but it's understandable that he thinks almost constantly even in the most difficult points of his battle with the marlin.

Hemingway uses Spanish nouns, which are gendered unlike English nouns, to explore the trope of the sea as a woman. This labeling of nature as feminine is typical not only of people who talk about the sea-- even in English we hear people use "her" to describe the ocean-- but also of Hemingway, who is very often focused on establishing firm grounds for masculinity as opposed to femininity. This passage implies that when women do "wild or wicked things" they do them because these actions are out of their control. Then there's this strange sentence about the moon affecting the sea as it affects a woman.

It's not really clear what it would mean for the ocean to be feminine, but the change in language from "la mar" to "el mar" signals a shift between Santiago's generation and the generation of younger fishermen in how they view the sea. To Santiago the sea is romantic, and should be seduced like a woman in his masculinist view. To the younger fishermen, the sea is a male enemy, and should be conquered with increasingly advanced boats and technologies.

❝ He is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is, he thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely... He cannot know that it is only one man against him, nor that it is an old man.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 48-49

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago reflects on the oddity of his situation: he is fighting a marlin for hours on end, and neither of them has ever seen the other. The marlin is deep below his boat, and is "wonderful and strange" in the way he reacts so calmly to being hooked on Santiago's fishing line.

Many of Santiago's reflections demonstrate just how much he knows about the sea and its fish. Without even seeing the marlin, Santiago knows how strong the fish might be. This type of thought tells us that Santiago has been fishing for a very long time.

Amazed at the fish's determination to get free and survive, Santiago also wonders about the fish's age. He figures the fish must be old, sort of like he is, because of the way he acts. The fact that Santiago tries to get into the mind of the marlin a bit, wondering how the fish feels about things, deepens the sense that he truly cares about the sea and the marlin.

"Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either of us.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 50

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago sees himself in many ways as the fish's equal. They are "joined together" both literally, on two ends of the fishing line that Santiago uses to catch the marlin, and in their destiny. If Santiago fails to catch the marlin, he will have suffered another defeat and lost much of his equipment. He may even find himself unable to make it back to shore after such a long battle with no reward. If the fish escapes, Santiago will be ashamed at the least and completely ruined in the worst case; but if Santiago finally catches the fish, it'll be the end for his marlin brother. Their fates are tied together by fishing line.

This short phrase "And no one to help either of us" shows that Santiago misses Manolin. The old man continually thinks of the boy during his trials. Manolin used to come along and help Santiago catch fish, but now when Santiago needs him most the boy is somewhere else, with another fisherman.

Day Three Quotes

"Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends."

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 54

Explanation and Analysis

The dichotomy within Santiago-- that he must kill and sell this marlin in order to live, but also loves, admires, and identifies with the fish-- keeps coming up. Santiago realizes that he needs to make a living and that he may be able to kill the fish *even though* he loves it, but he never quite seems to fully resolve his worries.

Both Santiago and the marlin are unwilling to give up. They are both extremely determined to win the battle, but Santiago wants to exhaust the fish and kill him by sunset. Even in his old age, Santiago will not give up; even in his toughest fishing expedition ever he'll find a victory of some sort.

The clouds were building up now for the trade wind and he looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, then blurring, then etching again and he knew no man was ever alone on the sea.

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes:

Page Number: 60-61

Explanation and Analysis

Reading Hemingway's novella, it's difficult not to wonder whether or not Santiago might be lonely out on the boat alone for days on end. As his thoughts of Manolin suggest, he does feel loneliness, but here he comforts himself in feeling connected to some wild ducks flying above him. Hemingway's writing is more imagistic here than normal, with "etching" appearing twice and creating a poetic image for the ducks' movement.

Every bit of information Santiago is able to gather from his surroundings, like the clouds gathering for the trade wind, helps him plan his prolonged battle with the marlin far below. His information-gathering blends in with the rest of the narrative, but when we notice it we are reminded of how well Santiago knows his surroundings.

> "If I were him I would put in everything now and go until something broke. But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able."

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 63

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago goes deeper into his reflection on the marlin and his attempt to figure out the fish's perspective on their long battle. The phrase "If I were him" signals the extent of Santiago's identification with the fish he's trying to catch and kill.

The old man knows what he would do if he were in the marlin's situation, but then he remembers that it's his human intelligence that allows him to think in this way. It's commonplace to assume that humans are smarter and other animals more skilled in other areas. Suggesting that fish are "more noble and more able," Santiago bows in respect to the creature he's hunting.

> But I must have the confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 68

Explanation and Analysis

Santiago and Manolin love baseball, which they hear about over the radio back on shore. Joe DiMaggio, one of the all-time best players for the New York Yankees, was a big star around the time when this novella seems to take place, and baseball seems to already have been massively popular in Cuba during the Yankees era.Santiago's assumption that DiMaggio "does all things perfectly" captures the way we tend to idolize our sports figures.

It's true that DiMaggio had bone spurs, projections at the end of bones that make it painful to move on them. Santiago tries to push through his pain by telling himself to be more like his baseball hero. Baseball gives Santiago a common ground for discussion with Manolin, and also provides him material for self-encouragement when things get tougher.

> "It is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers."

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 75

Explanation and Analysis

This is one of these moments in the novella when Santiago's thoughts both make sense and don't really make sense. It seems like, in these passages, Hemingway is trying to show how taxed Santiago's mind is during his long expedition.

It does make sense, in a way, for Santiago to look up at the stars, so far away, and be thankful he doesn't have to chase them. But, at the same time, Santiago's thought is something of a non-sequitur; it has little to do with the situation at hand. Santiago never imagined that the battle to catch this giant fish could have been so difficult, and in the most trying times his mind wanders a bit. The fish, he thinks, is difficult enough to catch when it's only a few hundred fathoms away instead of a few lightyears.

There is something else here of Santiago's mysticism. He feels more of a "brother" to the sea and its fish than to the sky above him, but in its entirety his view of nature places

him as part of a larger whole rather than at the top of a hierarchy.

Day Four Quotes

❝ You are killing me, fish, the old man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who.

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 92

Explanation and Analysis

At this point in his battle with the marlin, Santiago begins for the first time to acknowledge the possibility that the marlin might win. He oscillates throughout the rest of the story between believing he can catch the marlin and make it back ashore, and fearing that he's taken on more than he can handle.

Like in his arm-wrestling match, Santiago realizes that his opponent has just as much of a right and a chance to win as he does. This humility is probably in part what encourages Santiago to work so hard at what he does.

But there's something special about this fish in particular that makes Santiago acknowledge his equal chance of winning and losing. For this fish is greater, more beautiful, calmer, and more noble than any Santiago has ever seen. This is a bit of a mini-lesson in Hemingway's writing style, as he strings together common superlatives to emphasize the almost unutterable greatness of the creature hooked on Santiago's fishing line.

❝ "God help me endure. I'll say a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail Marys. But I cannot say them now."

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 87

Explanation and Analysis

Having already said a few prayers earlier in his journey, the more desperate Santiago now claims he'll say each of the most common Catholic prayers a hundred times if God will only help him catch the fish.

It's never very clear where Santiago stands on religion, and these prayers seem more based on superstition than faith. The fact that Santiago knows the prayers means he has some familiarity with the church, but his other thoughts so far indicate that he's not particularly committed to the idea of a God.

Rather, Santiago seems to worship nature. He hopes that saying the prayers might help him win this duel with the fish, and it feels like the moment earlier in the book when Santiago discusses the lottery with Manolin. As further evidence that he's not particularly religious, Santiago says "I cannot say them now." He plans to say them later on to hold up his side of the bargain with whatever god might be listening.

❝ Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty. He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff. Then he fell into the water with a crash that sent spray over the old man and over all of the skiff.

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 94

Explanation and Analysis

The fish is so rarely out of the water in the first three days of Santiago's expedition that any jump comes as a sort of climax after all the waiting. Because fishing can be a slow and tedious process, part of Hemingway's achievement with this book is simply that he is able to make fishing an interesting and even suspenseful subject. We, as readers, are forced in a way to sit along with Santiago while we wait for the fish to slow down and get tired or break free and leave Santiago stranded. Finally, here, all the waiting pays

off—the marlin not only jumps, but Santiago has also finally pierced it with a harpoon. The battle is almost over.

We read that the fish comes "alive, with his death in him." This is an odd phrase, meaning that the fish is making his last stand for life, even with Santiago's harpoon in his heart. It also recalls notions of sacrifice and resurrection, and some of the Christian imagery of the book. The rest of the passage emphasizes how huge and how majestic the fish really is. The marlin is significantly bigger than the boat Santiago rides in, and powerful enough to splash water all over the boat. Even in its death it is described as something powerful and beautiful, even sublime.

> You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 105

Explanation and Analysis

With the worst of his trials behind him, Santiago begins to question himself and his motives in killing the fish. Throughout the four days of pursuing and trying to wear down the fish, Santiago develops a real connection to it. Now that he has won the battle and killed the marlin, Santiago has second thoughts. He knows fishermen take pride in the size of their catches, and wonders if it might be wrong to do so.

Santiago tells himself it isn't wrong to kill the fish as long as he loves it. This might be a bit of inherited wisdom, something he has learned along the way. He quickly questions this too: might it be even worse to kill a creature when you love it? Given his near-absolute certainty as a fisherman and a navigator, it is a bit unnerving to see Santiago so unsure of himself. This journey has taken so much out of him that his mind goes places it wouldn't normally go. Or maybe Santiago is no longer interested in this kind of prideful fishing, and we are looking on as he finishes his final fishing trip.

> "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

Related Characters: Santiago (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 103

Explanation and Analysis

This phrase, one of the better known quotations from the novella, is typical of Hemingway's writing. It is an aphorism--it uses simple words to make a huge and general claim about the way the world works.

Santiago says this aloud while sailing back to shore with the giant marlin and trying to fight off the many sharks who come to eat parts of it. Because Santiago hasn't eaten or slept much in a few days, it can be unclear how seriously we are meant to take these statements.

But if we do decide to take it seriously, rather than as the byproduct of Santiago's near-fatal exhaustion, we have to figure out the difference between being *destroyed* and being *defeated*. And why is the statement limited to a *man*? Defeat might imply acceptance that one has lost a battle, whereas destruction simply means the end to the existence of something.

To be destroyed without being defeated, then, is something like that old saying, "going down with the ship." In Santiago's (and perhaps Hemingway's) opinion, a man is someone who goes to the very limit of their capabilities and then either succeeds or fails. But, when a man fails, he does so completely and not out of a lack of effort.

> He stopped for a moment and looked back and saw in the reflection from the street light the great tail of the fish standing up well behind the skiff's stern. He saw the white naked line of his backbone and the dark mass of the head...

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes:   

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

It seems odd, after all this time at sea with Santiago, to encounter something like a street light. We are quickly back on land and back with (relatively) modern technology, out of

the barren and completely natural environment of the ocean. Santiago is looking back at his prize fish, ruined by the sharks who tore it to bits, and it is hard to know what he might be feeling at this moment. The streetlight is symbolic of the town as a whole, and much of the remainder of the novella will focus on the reactions of other people to the fish skeleton left on the beach by Santiago.

Once again, the fish's immense size is emphasized by its "great tail," stretching "well behind the skiff's stern." It's a grotesque image, this giant fish skeleton waiting on the beach for people to wake up and see it in the morning. But Santiago is too exhausted to do anything with it, and the dead fish-- stripped of all its value-- may have stripped Santiago of all his pride and desire to continue fishing too.

He started to climb again and at the top he fell and lay for some time with the mast across his shoulder.

Related Characters: Santiago

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 121

Explanation and Analysis

This phrase is almost an exact transplant from the Bible's descriptions of Jesus Christ carrying the cross before his crucifixion under Pontius Pilate. The exhausted Jesus, forced to carry his own heavy cross on his back, falls and gets back up again. In the Bible, these passages suggest the extreme endurance of Jesus and his willingness to suffer pain for a greater cause.

Here, Santiago tries to carry his (cross-shaped) mast away from his skiff to his home. He cannot bear the weigh after his exhausting journey. But he rises again, like Jesus, making the final push toward his house and refusing defeat after days at sea.

Throughout this novella, which plays with religious ideas like sin and prayer, Santiago has a kind of Christlike presence. He is a pariah figure, acts humbly and honestly, and ultimately spends three full days and nights at sea like the three days between Jesus' death and resurrection according to the Christian Bible.

Day Five Quotes

"How much did you suffer?"
"Plenty," the old man said.

Related Characters: Manolin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

The depth of the connection between Santiago and Manolin shows in this short dialogue between them. Manolin intuits that Santiago must have suffered greatly at sea for multiple days, having seen the massive fish skeleton left ashore. But, by asking Santiago how much he has suffered, Manolin tries to get the old man to talk about whatever happened over the past four days.

Santiago doesn't take the bait, and either out of humility or pure exhaustion doesn't want to discuss his struggles. This humility again suggests the Jesus-like character of Santiago. It is presumed that Jesus suffers greatly in the Biblical story, but he refuses to complain about the pain or say much of anything against the men who kill him. Santiago alludes to the fact that he suffered "plenty" at sea, but doesn't go into greater detail.

"To hell with luck," the boy said. "I'll bring the luck with me."

Related Characters: Manolin (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 125

Explanation and Analysis

Manolin, eager since the beginning of the book to rejoin Santiago aboard his unlucky skiff, is even more excited about the idea after the old man makes it back ashore from his arduous journey. Still Santiago worries that he has bad luck.

It seems unlikely that Santiago actually thinks himself unlucky, given that he continues to go to sea every single day and even discusses buying a lottery ticket before leaving on his big expedition. Instead, Santiago's worry about his "bad luck" is probably more a worry about how Manolin's parents will react if the boy tells his parents he wants to return to working with the old man.

Manolin's response shows a sort of recklessness, but also suggests he might not really believe in luck either. (Most people who really believe in luck probably wouldn't curse luck itself!) But his eagerness to work with Santiago also provides a sort of hope at the end of the story, that they might indeed work together again and that Santiago might have an easier future out at sea.

"What's that" she asked a waiter and pointed to the long backbone of the great fish that was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide.

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 126

Explanation and Analysis

This passage, the second to last one in the novella, provides a bit of both dark humor and wrenching tragedy.

Hemingway has a laugh at the cluelessness of tourists, and his writing cleverly adopts their perspective when this shift is mentioned: "the great fish that was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide." From the perspective of all the men who live along the sea, it's a "great fish"; but to the tourists who haven't any clue what is going on, it's "just garbage waiting to go out with the tide."

This passage seems a bit out of place at first, given that the reader has spent the entire novella so far alongside Santiago. But the woman's question suggests how differently people can see the same object: to Santiago this fish was not only a brother but also the hard-won reward of a nearly deadly fishing trip; to the tourists looking on, the fish is the object of something between curiosity and disgust.

Directly after this passage, the waiter at The Terrace tells them how the fish was maimed (by sharks), but the two tourists think he means the skeleton itself is of a shark. This miscommunication emphasizes how important language and context are in conveying the story behind anything--something Hemingway was always thinking about.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

DAY ONE

Santiago is an elderly fisherman who has gone 84 days without catching a fish. For the first 40 days, a boy named Manolin worked with Santiago. But Manolin's parents forced him to leave Santiago and start working on a "luckier" boat. Even so, at the end of every day Manolin still helps Santiago carry his empty skiff (boat) in from the water.

The novella's opening establishes the Santiago and Manolin's devoted friendship. The number 40 is significant in the Bible, and Santiago's 40 days of bad luck parallels Christ's 40 days in the desert.

Santiago's face and hands are deeply scarred from so many years of handling fishing gear and heavy fish. Everything about him is old, except his eyes, which are the same color as the sea and are "cheerful and undefeated."

Santiago's body betrays his age, but his eyes show that his mind and spirit are resilient and still youthful. That his eyes match the sea links Santiago to nature.

After Santiago's 84th unsuccessful day, Manolin once again helps him to bring in his skiff and gear. Manolin tells Santiago that he has made a bit of money working on the "luckier" boat, and offers to rejoin Santiago. He says that his father lacks faith, which is why he forced Manolin to switch to the other boat. Santiago advises him to stay with the luckier boat, but the two agree that they have faith that Santiago will catch something soon.

Santiago's faith in his own skills and abilities allows him to fight off the hopelessness that might otherwise come from his bad fishing luck. Manolin's offer to return to work with Santiago, despite the likelihood that working with Santiago would make him less money, shows the depth of their friendship.

Manolin offers to buy Santiago a beer on the Terrace, a restaurant near the docks. The other fishermen at the restaurant make fun of Santiago's troubles, but Manolin disregards them. He reminisces with Santiago about the time they first started fishing together, when Manolin was five years old. Manolin says he still wants to help Santiago and offers to get Santiago fresh sardines for bait. Santiago initially refuses, but then finally agrees to accept two pieces of bait.

The other fishermen see Santiago as a defeated old man. Manolin's faith in Santiago helps Santiago ignore these insults, just as later it helps him endure his struggle against the marlin. Santiago refuses Manolin's offer at first out of pride. He wants to be self-sufficient. His acceptance of the offer later shows his desperation.

Over their beers, Santiago tells Manolin that he will be fishing far out in the sea the next day. Manolin says he will try to get the man he is fishing with to go far out as well since the man has bad vision and will follow the boy's recommendations. Manolin wonders how Santiago's vision can be so good after so many years of fishing. Santiago replies, "I am a strange old man."

Santiago's desire to fish far out shows his desperation to catch a fish, even at the risk of danger. If something dangerous occurs, there will be no help—it will be just Santiago and the sea. Santiago's good vision again emphasizes his youthful qualities despite his age.

After they finish the beer, Manolin helps Santiago carry his equipment up the road to Santiago's sparsely furnished shack. On the wall are two paintings: one of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, which belonged to Santiago's wife, and another of the patron saint of Cuba. Santiago has taken down a photograph of his wife that used to hang on the wall because it made him too lonely to see it.

The paintings suggest that Santiago's wife was more religious than he, but that he may have adopted her faith as a way of remembering her. That Santiago feels too lonely to even look at his wife's photograph shows how empty his life is, besides his friendship with Manolin.



After going through the same dinner ritual they follow every night: Santiago offers Manolin some food, which Manolin declines because Santiago doesn't really have any food at all.

The dinner ritual allows Santiago to play the role of gracious host and to resist the sense of defeat that might come from having no food.



They then sit on the porch and read about baseball in the newspaper. Santiago tells Manolin he will have a good catch the next day, his 85th day without luck, and Manolin jokingly asks why he isn't holding out for 87 days, to break his longest unlucky streak. Santiago replies that such an unlucky streak could not happen twice.

Baseball is Santiago's pastime and distraction because, like fishing, it is a game of streaks and luck, and yet, in the end, a player's skill is most important.



Manolin leaves to get the sardines he promised Santiago. When he returns, it is dark and Santiago is asleep on the porch. Manolin covers him with a blanket, noticing that with the old man's eyes closed there is no life in his face. Soon Santiago wakes, and Manolin gives him some food that Martin, the owner of the Terrace, has provided as a gift. Santiago asks if Martin has given them food before, and Manolin says he has. Santiago sleepily says he must thank the owner by giving him the belly meat of a big fish.

That Santiago seems lifeless with eyes closed shows that his youthfulness is internal—in his mind and memories only. Santiago's inability to recall whether Martin has given him food shows how old he truly is, but his promise to repay the gift with good meat from a fish shows that he still has the pride and determination of a young man.



Manolin reminds himself to bring Santiago water, soap, and a towel, as well as a new shirt, jacket and shoes.

Manolin's devotion to Santiago is profound.



Santiago then reminisces about his time as a youth on a ship that sailed to Africa, and about the lions he saw on the beaches there.

The powerful lions symbolize Santiago's youth. Also note that a group of lions is called a pride.



But Manolin wants to talk more about baseball. They talk about Joe DiMaggio, who is Santiago's favorite player and whose father was a fisherman. They then debate the best manager in baseball.

DiMaggio was revered for his grace, humility, terrific skill, and willingness to play through injury—traits Santiago shares.



Manolin breaks in to say that he thinks Santiago is the best fisherman. Santiago humbly disagrees, but acknowledges that although he is no longer strong he has "tricks" and "resolution."

"Tricks" and "resolution" are psychological assets. Santiago's aging body may betray him, but his mind keeps him young..



When Manolin leaves, Santiago wraps himself in the blanket and lies down on the newspapers that cover the springs of his bed. He no longer dreams of storms, women, fish, fights, or his wife. He dreams only "of places now and of the lions on the beach" in Africa.

Santiago's newspaper-covered bed shows he is very poor. Everything has been stripped from him, so that all he has left is a kind of inner lion, an inner pride.



DAY TWO

When Santiago wakes the next morning, he goes up the road to Manolin's house to wake him, as he does every morning. Santiago apologizes for disturbing Manolin's sleep, but Manolin responds, "It is what a man must do."

Both Manolin and Santiago take pride in meeting what they see as the requirements of being a man—duty, honor, facing difficult challenges without complaint.



Santiago drinks his coffee, thinking how he will not eat all day because eating has bored him for a long time. Manolin helps Santiago load his boat, and they wish each other luck. As he rows into the water, Santiago hears the splashes in the dark of other boats nearby, but no voices. Fishermen rarely speak to each other in their boats.

Santiago's boredom with eating suggests his boredom with life—he is no longer interested in everyday pleasures. The habit of silence among fishermen and the fact that Manolin no longer fishes with reinforce how alone Santiago will be at sea.



Santiago rows over "the great well," where the ocean suddenly drops to 700 fathoms and where many fish congregate. He hears flying fish flapping around him. He thinks of these fish as his friends. He feels sorry for the birds trying to catch the fish and failing, knowing how hard these birds must work to survive.

Santiago feels a close connection to the creatures of the sea. He sees himself, a fisherman, not as one who conquers nature but as just another part of it, like the birds who survive by preying on the flying fish.



Santiago thinks of the sea as "la mar," as a woman who can give or withhold great favors and changes with the moon. He doesn't understand the younger fishermen. They use motorboats instead of skiffs and call the sea "el mar," using the masculine noun as if the sea is their enemy.

Younger fisherman do see themselves as conquerors of the ocean. It's not just Santiago who is growing old, but his entire generation. When he dies, his generation's knowledge and way of life will be gone.



Santiago decides to fish past the deep wells, because he caught nothing in the wells the previous week. By the time the sun comes out, he has found a good spot and has his bait in the water, on lines pre-measured to fall to different specific depths. He is proud that he keeps his lines straighter than any other fisherman and does not let them drift with the current. As the sun rises, he marvels at how his eyes are still good despite years of strong sun.

Santiago takes pride in his craft—unlike the younger fishermen who rely on strength and the brute force of technology. Santiago's clear vision symbolizes the wisdom he has gained as he aged, as well as his strength of mind.



Santiago sees a sea bird diving into the sea in the distance. He rows toward it, farther out into the ocean, knowing the dipping means the bird has seen fish. He sees a school of dolphins chasing flying fish nearby, another sign of fish, but arrives too late. He knows his big fish is out there somewhere.

Santiago is able to read the signs of nature. His initial failure (after 84 days of previous failure) is not enough to dampen his optimism.



In the late morning, one of Santiago's lines suddenly tightens and Santiago pulls in a silver, 10-pound tuna. He observes out loud that the tuna will make a beautiful piece of bait, then wonders when he began talking to himself. He concludes that it must have been when Manolin left, and thinks that if the other fisherman heard him they would think he was crazy, though he knows they would be wrong.

Santiago's small catch (his first in 84 days) marks the turning point in his luck. Talking to himself is a way to avoid loneliness and despair. Talking out loud as if Manolin was in the boat allows him to bring his friendship with Manolin with him even though Manolin isn't there.



Around noon, Santiago feels a tentative pull on one of his lines. He thinks it must be a marlin eating the sardine bait, 600 feet below. The marlin leaves, and then comes back, and Santiago becomes more and more excited, judging from the strength of the pull that the marlin must be a huge fish. Finally, when he thinks the marlin has gotten hold of the hook, Santiago tries to pull the marlin up. The fish doesn't budge.

Many years of fishing have honed Santiago's intuition and his ability to interpret even the smallest signs in the sea. From the strength of the pull he can immediately estimate the size of the fish. For the first time in the story he becomes animated instead of tired, acting much like a young man.



The marlin starts to move away, pulling Santiago's skiff with it. The marlin pulls the skiff all day, as Santiago braces in his skiff and holds tight to the line. The marlin continues to tow the skiff until Santiago can no longer see the shoreline of Cuba anymore. He is confident, however, that when the sun goes down he will be able to find his way back by following the glowing lights of Havana.

Pulled out so far that he can't even see the land, Santiago faces a fish far stronger than he is. As an old man with no available help, Santiago faces a serious and potentially dangerous challenge. But his pride won't allow him to accept defeat.



When the sun goes down, Santiago wishes Manolin could see his big catch and help him drag the marlin out of the water. But then he begins to pity the marlin, wondering if the fish is old, like him. He can tell by the way marlin took hold of the bait that it is a male fish. He realizes that he and the marlin are "joined together" far out in the ocean, "beyond all people in the world," with no one who can help either one of them.

Santiago finds both a friend and an enemy in the marlin. He has a fondness for the fish, even sees himself in it, and recognizes that both will fight to the death to prevail. Even though Manolin isn't there, the thought of him seems to give Santiago strength.



Santiago remembers when he and Manolin caught a female marlin, one of a pair. She fought desperately, and the entire time she was fighting the male fish never left her side. When Santiago dragged the female into the boat, the male marlin followed the boat.

The male marlin's reaction to his female companion's capture mirrors Santiago's own loneliness and sadness over his wife's death. Once again, this highlights the connection between men, and Santiago in particular, and nature.



DAY THREE

Before daylight, something takes hold of one of Santiago's other baits, which are still in the water. Santiago quickly cuts all of his other lines so that nothing interferes with the marlin's line.

In devoting himself to capturing the marlin, Santiago reveals that this struggle is all-important to him. It is a matter of pride, of proving and defining himself.



After Santiago cuts the other lines, the marlin makes a sudden, surging dive that pulls Santiago downward. He cuts his face, just below the eye, on the line. Santiago tells the marlin he will never give in, and will fight until one of them dies.

The physical injury that the marlin inflicts shows that this battle could result in injury or even death for Santiago. The injury only strengthens Santiago's resolve.



The marlin continues to pull the boat to the northeast. Santiago senses that while the fish doesn't seem to be tiring, it is swimming at a shallower depth. Santiago hopes the fish will jump, so that its air sacs will fill, stopping it from diving so deeply. If the fish died while deep underwater, Santiago knows he would not be strong enough to pull it up. Santiago holds tight to the line and occasionally pulls it taught, but he is fearful to pull on it because the line might snap or the hook might pull free from the marlin. He tells the marlin that he loves and respects it, but vows to kill it before the end of the day.

Santiago carefully and skillfully practices his craft, pitting his decades of knowledge as a fisherman against the marlin's greater strength. He loves and respects the marlin because it is a worthy opponent, but he must kill it for two reasons: 1) to fulfill his role as a fisherman, and 2) to prove his strength despite his age by overcoming such a worthy adversary.



A warbler (small song bird) flying south lands on the marlin's line. Santiago talks to the bird, wondering why it is so tired. When he considers the hawks that the bird will have to escape when it comes near land, though, he tells it to take a nice rest and then go "take your chance like any man or bird or fish."

Santiago again feels an affinity with an animal. His advice to the bird hints at his belief that all living things struggle against mortality, and that how one faces that struggle, rather than whether one survives it, is what defines a person.



As Santiago is talking to the bird, the marlin lurches again and the bird flies away. Santiago notices that there is blood on the line—the pull of the line has cut his left hand. He thinks that the marlin must itself have been injured to lurch in that way. He berates himself for letting the bird distract him, and vows not to lose focus again. Santiago washes his cut hand in the salt water, then carefully positions himself and eats the tuna he caught earlier in order to keep his strength up. Even so, his left hand soon cramps.

The injuries to Santiago's hand evoke Christ's stigmata (the crucifixion wounds in Christ's hands). The injury inspires Santiago to work harder and stay focused, even though the cramping shows his body's age and frailty. Notice that Santiago continues to sense a connection with the marlin, believing it also must have been injured just when he was.



As he tries to nurse his cramped hand, Santiago sees a flock of wild ducks in the sky and realizes that no man is ever alone on the sea. He continues to try to uncramp his hand, and thinks of the cramp as a betrayal by his own body. He wishes that Manolin were there to rub his hand for him.

Santiago's body betrays him, just as Judas Iscariot betrayed Christ. Yet Santiago does not despair. He derives strength from his connection to nature and from Manolin's friendship.



Suddenly, the marlin jumps out of the water. The magnificent fish is dark purple and huge, two feet longer than the length of the skiff with a sword as long as a baseball bat.

Purple, a royal color, suggests that the marlin is a kind of "king of the sea." In his Christ-like role, Santiago is also regal, as Jesus was King of the Jews.



Santiago holds the line with both hands to keep the fish from breaking the line. He thinks that if he were the marlin he would give a final pull on the line until something broke. He gives thanks that fish are not as intelligent as men, although he thinks that they are "more noble and more able."

Santiago recognizes his superior intelligence, but he does not see himself as a superior being to the marlin. His thought about what he would do as the marlin shows his resistance to defeat.



Santiago has seen many fish over 1000 pounds and caught two fish of that size in his life, but never when he was alone and out of sight of land. And this marlin is bigger than any he had ever heard of or seen. He thinks that to catch this fish will be a great accomplishment.

Santiago recognizes that he has given himself a nearly impossible job, but he focuses on the immensity of the achievement rather than the immensity of the task.



Although Santiago is not religious, he promises to say 10 Hail Marys and 10 Our Fathers if he catches the marlin. He says the prayers, and feels better, though the pain in his back and cramped hand is just as strong.

Faith is belief in the absence of evidence or proof. Santiago's prayers don't alleviate his pain, but they do help him to feel better despite his pain.



Realizing it will be dark soon, Santiago decides to rebait a small line to catch some more food. He thinks about why he wants to catch and kill the marlin: To show "what a man can do and what a man endures" and to prove to Manolin that he is indeed a "strong old man."

Santiago, who was bored of eating, now has a reason to eat and live. He wants to defeat the marlin out of pride, and to prove that Manolin's faith in him is not in vain.



As the day approaches its end, Santiago wishes he could sleep and dream of the lions again. Then he wonders why the lions are the only things left for him to dream about.

Since the lions represent Santiago's youth, here he is beginning to realize all that he has lost as he has aged.



Eventually Santiago's hand uncramps, but he feels tired. He hopes that the marlin also feels tired. If it isn't, he thinks, then it is a very strange fish.

Another connection between the marlin and Santiago, a self-described "strange old man."



To distract himself, Santiago thinks about baseball. He tells himself that he must try to be worthy of the great DiMaggio, "who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel." He wonders if DiMaggio would stay with the marlin as long as he will stay with it, and knows that DiMaggio would.

In 1949, when The Old Man and the Sea is set, DiMaggio was recovering from career-threatening bone spurs and playing as well as ever. Santiago challenges himself to overcome defeat, to live up to his hero.



It occurs to Santiago then that men may be inferior to the "great birds and beasts." For a moment, Santiago wishes that *he* were the marlin. That is, unless sharks were to come. If the sharks come, Santiago thinks, both he and the marlin would be in trouble.

Again, Santiago displays his deep respect for and connection to nature. His thoughts of sharks foreshadows the arrival of the sharks later in the story.



To prop up his own confidence, Santiago remembers when, as a young man in Casablanca, he arm-wrestled a great "negro" who was the strongest man on the docks. The battle lasted an entire day, and finally Santiago won. For a long time after that he was known as "The Champion."

Santiago purposely recalls this memory in order to try to regain the youthful strength he needs to defeat the marlin. His memories may not literally give him strength, but he uses them to fuel his determination.



Just before dark, Santiago's small line is taken by a dolphin. He pulls the dolphin into the boat and clubs it to death. It seems to Santiago that the marlin has begun to pull with a bit less strength. He positions himself so that the line puts less stress on his back. He feels confident because he's learned how to handle the line and because he has recently eaten and will eat again soon, while the marlin hasn't eaten anything.

Santiago's reverence for nature and animals is not at all an unwillingness to kill, as his clubbing of the dolphin shows. Instead, it's an acknowledgment of his role within nature as a man. He has tired the marlin not through strength but through his endurance and skill as a fisherman.



When it becomes completely dark, the stars come out. Santiago thinks of the stars as his friends. The marlin is also his friend, he thinks, but he must kill it. Santiago is glad that men do not have to kill the sun, the moon or the stars as they do their fellow creatures. He feels sorry for the fish, and thinks there is no one worthy of eating him.

Santiago considers his struggle with the fish noble because its stakes are so high: life or death. In fact, Santiago has come to see the struggle as an end in itself, and sees any purpose other than winning, such as eating the fish, as secondary or unworthy.



Santiago rests for two hours, after which he decides to eat the dolphin he caught. When he cuts the dolphin open to fillet it, he finds two fresh flying fish in its belly. He eats half the dolphin and one of the fish. When he runs his hand through the water after skinning the fish, he notices that his hand has left a trail of phosphorescence in the water.

As Christ multiplied the loaves and fishes to feed the thousands who had gathered to hear him, Santiago has multiplied the fish he has caught. The phosphorescence given off by his hand suggests that the act of preparing food is a sacred act.

Finally Santiago falls asleep. He dreams at first of a vast school of mating porpoises leaping in the water. Then he dreams of sleeping in his bed in the village, with a north wind blowing coldly over him and his hand asleep from having slept on it. Finally, his dreams turn to the lions walking along the long yellow beach in the early dark, and he is happy.

Santiago's dreams of the porpoises and his cold bed set up a contrast between the fertile splendor of the sea and the emptiness of life on land. Yet, even in sleep, rather than giving in to despair, Santiago gains strength from his dreams of his youthful pride.



DAY FOUR

The marlin suddenly surges, waking Santiago. In the darkness, he sees the marlin jump from the water, again and again. The jumps jerk the line, pulling Santiago face-first into the leftover dolphin meat from his meal. Santiago desperately holds onto the line with his back and hand. His left hand is cut open again, and Santiago wishes that Manolin were with him to wet the lines to reduce their friction.

The reopening of the wound in Santiago's hand again evokes Christ's stigmata, linking Santiago's struggle to Christ's. Neither Santiago nor Christ sought to escape their suffering, Instead, each chose to endure it, and in the process, transcend it.



Desperate not to lose his strength from nausea, Santiago wipes the dolphin meat from his face. He examines his hands, which look almost like raw meat, and tells himself that "pain does not matter to a man." He eats the second flying fish to regain his strength.

Santiago again uses his pride in himself as a man to derive the strength he needs to endure the pain in his hand. .



As the sun rises, the marlin begins circling the skiff. Santiago now slowly fights the fish for line, pulling it closer to the boat inch by inch. The struggle takes hours. Santiago begins to feel faint and black spots appear before his eyes. As the marlin passes beneath the skiff, Santiago gets a glimpse of its full size and is awed by how big the marlin is. He pulls the fish in closer and closer in order to harpoon it. The effort is immense, and it seems to Santiago that the fish is killing him. He tells the fish, "Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who."

The struggle between Santiago and the marlin reaches its climax. Santiago's faintness and the marlin's slowly shrinking circles indicate that both are tiring and approaching death. Santiago considers the struggle more important than its outcome: the struggle to survive and overcome is more important than actually living or dying.



As the marlin comes in closer, Santiago takes out his harpoon. He tries several times to harpoon the marlin, but misses, growing weaker and weaker. Finally Santiago draws all his strength, pain, and pride together and plunges the harpoon one last time, driving it into the marlin's heart. The marlin makes a final leap, glistening in the light, then falls into the water, dead. The marlins' blood stains the water red.

Stabbing the marlin in the heart symbolizes Santiago's love for the marlin. It also shows that to Santiago the marlin's death is essential. The mixing of the marlin's blood with the water alludes to a wound Christ received while on the cross that bled water and blood.



Santiago estimates the marlin weighs about 1500 pounds, too big for Santiago to pull inside the boat. Santiago lashes the marlin alongside the boat.

In death as in life, the marlin is Santiago's companion, literally traveling by Santiago's side.



As he works, Santiago thinks about how much money the marlin will bring, then imagines how proud of him DiMaggio would be. He wonders if his injured hands are comparable to DiMaggio's bone spur.

Santiago's thoughts about money are dwarfed by his pride in his ability to fight off pain and resist defeat.



Santiago begins sailing southwest, toward Cuba. He is hungry, and eats some tiny shrimp he finds living in a patch of yellow Gulf weed floating in the water. He takes the second-to-last gulp of water from his water bottle. Nonetheless, he becomes light-headed and wonders if he is bringing in the marlin or if it is bringing in *him*. He keeps glancing at the marlin as he sails. His injured hands prove that his struggle with the marlin was no dream.

It's clear that Santiago remains connected to the marlin, even in death. In fact, at times Santiago seems to think that he is the one that has died after the ordeal. The injuries that plagued him are now the only things that he can count on as real.



An hour after Santiago killed the marlin, a big Mako shark appears, having caught the scent of the marlin's blood. As the shark bites the dead marlin, Santiago rams his harpoon into the shark's head. The shark thrashes, dies, and sinks, but the harpoon rope breaks and Santiago's harpoon is lost with the shark.

Santiago's stabbing of the shark in the head, rather than the heart, suggests that he does not feel the same emotional connection or affinity with the shark as he did with the marlin.



The shark's bite took a 40-pound hunk of flesh from the marlin. More blood now pours from the marlin into the water, which Santiago knows will only attract more sharks. It seems to Santiago that his battle with the marlin was worthless, since the sharks will just come and eat the marlin. But Santiago quickly reminds himself that "a man can be destroyed but not defeated."

When Santiago was battling the marlin, hope inspired him. Now Santiago sees that he has no hope of getting the marlin, the proof of his triumph, back to shore. Yet in deciding to struggle anyway, he is deciding that the struggle against defeat is what's important, not the prize.

Santiago tries to remain hopeful. He considers it silly, or even sinful, to not be hopeful. But he begins to wonder whether it was a sin for him to kill the marlin. He knows that he did not kill the marlin just to feed himself and others, but also out of pride and love. He wonders whether it is more or less of a sin to kill something you love. He feels no guilt, however, for killing the shark, because he acted in self-defense. It occurs to him that "everything kills everything else in some way," but then he reminds himself that it is Manolin who keeps him alive.

Santiago begins to question whether his struggle was justified and worth the sacrifices he made. The marlin that he battled and now considers a friend will soon be little more than shark food. At this moment, when despair might overtake him, Santiago's thoughts of Manolin sustain him.

Santiago leans over, strips off a piece of the marlin from where the shark bit it, and eats it. The meat is of the highest quality and would have fetched a good price. He sails on, eating pieces of the marlin in order to remain strong.

When Santiago eats the marlin, he and the fish become one, and the marlin lives on through Santiago. This recalls the Eucharist, in which Christ asks his followers to symbolically eat his flesh and drink his blood.

Two hours later, two shovel-nosed sharks approach. When he sees them, Santiago makes a noise that the narrator describes as a sound a man might make as he felt a "nail go through his hands and into the wood."

Nails were driven through Christ's hands when he was crucified. Here the sound marks both the death of Santiago's hope and his continued insistence on enduring pain.

Santiago kills the sharks using a knife that he's lashed to an oar, but not before the sharks have eaten a quarter of the marlin. He feels no pride in killing the shovel-nosed sharks, which he considers dirty scavengers. The marlin is now drained of blood and completely silver in color. Santiago wishes that he had not killed the marlin, and apologizes to the marlin for having gone out so far from land. He can't bear to look at the marlin's body, only half of which remains.

The sharks do not struggle with worthy opponents. They eat the dead remains of them. Drained of blood, the marlin loses its regal purple color and becomes a more deathly silver. Once again, doubts and regrets overwhelm Santiago.

A lone shovel-nose shark attacks. Santiago kills it with his knife, but loses the knife in the process. Two more sharks attack just before sunset. Santiago fights them off with the club he uses to kill bait fish. Exhausted and sore, he dares to dream that he might make it back with the half of the marlin that remains, and he believes that when darkness falls he will see the glow of Havana. He wonders if Manolin has been worried about him.

Santiago's ordeal becomes more difficult as more sharks come and he loses his weapons. At first he turns to hope to save him—the hope that he might make it back to see Havana. Then he uses Manolin's concern for him to help fuel his determination to get back to land.

When it finally gets dark, however, Santiago can't see Havana. He tells God he still owes him many prayers that he will say when he's not too tired, and he wonders if he "violated" his luck when he went too far out to sea. He again apologizes to the marlin for killing it, and promises to fight off the sharks even if it kills him. Around 10 pm, he sees the glow of the harbor.

Even with his hope of seeing Havana dashed, Santiago prays to God. He does not blame or demand anything of God, and does not give in to hopelessness. Instead he promises to fight despite certain failure.



Around midnight, a pack of sharks attacks the skiff. Santiago uses all his strength to fight them off with his oar and club, and finally, when those have been lost, he breaks off the tiller of his skiff and uses that to club the sharks. But by the time he kills or drives off all the sharks, no meat remains on the marlin.

Santiago can't possibly defeat the sharks, yet he does not surrender the marlin to them—he faces the sharks. This mirrors Christ, who redeemed mankind not by avoiding the cross but by suffering through it.



Santiago spits blood into the water and tells the sharks to dream that they ate a man. He checks his skiff, and sees that only the rudder is damaged, and can be fixed. He sails toward the harbor, thinking that the sea contains both enemies and friends. Utterly exhausted, he wonders for a moment what it was that defeated him. He decides that nothing beat him. He just went out too far.

Santiago's own blood mixes with the water, and by extension with the marlin's blood. He realizes that he pushed himself to the limits of endurance, and though success was impossible, he never gave up the struggle.



It is still dark when Santiago sails into the harbor. The lights on the Terrace are out, and he knows everyone is in bed. As he steps out onto the rocks, he looks at his boat and sees the giant white skeletal tail of the marlin lit by the reflection from the streetlight.

The marlin's skeleton is a reminder that Santiago did in fact achieve a seemingly impossible goal—he defeated the marlin and brought it to land.



Santiago removes the mast of his skiff and wraps the sail around it. He rests the mast on his shoulders and drags it back up to his shack. It is so heavy that he is forced to stop and rest several times. When he reaches his home, he falls asleep on his bed facedown with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up.

Santiago carries the mast just as Jesus was forced to carry the cross, and falls to sleep in the position of the crucified Christ on the cross. This parallel suggests that Santiago's struggles are meant to represent the struggles of mankind in general.



DAY FIVE

Santiago is asleep when Manolin comes to his shack in the morning. Though relieved to see that Santiago is breathing, Manolin cries when he sees Santiago's cut hands. He goes outside to get Santiago some coffee.

Manolin's weeping, like the weeping of the women at Christ's crucifixion, suggests that Manolin recognizes the scope of the struggles Santiago endured.



Near the water, many fisherman have gathered to look at the marlin's skeleton attached to Santiago's skiff. They estimate its length at 18 feet. When they see Manolin, they ask him how Santiago is doing, feeling guilty for all the times they laughed at Santiago.

The marlin's skeleton is proof of Santiago's triumph and defiance of defeat. In death, the marlin gives Santiago a new life in which he is respected by his fellow fisherman.



When Santiago wakes up, Manolin is at his side with the coffee. Santiago tells Manolin to give the head of the marlin to Pedrico to use in the fish traps, and offers the spear to Manolin.

When he couldn't catch a fish, Santiago was forced to live off the kindness of others. Now he repays his debts.



Manolin tells Santiago that the coast guard and search planes looked for him for days. Manolin then says that he will return to fish with Santiago, no matter what his family says. Manolin asks Santiago how much he suffered while he was at sea, and Santiago responds, "Plenty." Manolin then goes out to bring Santiago food and the daily papers.

Just as Christ's struggle led to resurrection, Santiago's struggle leads to the resurrection of his friendship with Manolin. Now Santiago can pass on his knowledge, skill, and way of life to Manolin, and can live on through Manolin after he dies.



A group of tourists notices the giant skeleton of the marlin in the water. They ask a waiter at the Terrace what it is. Attempting to explain what happened, the waiter says "Tiburon" (shark). The tourists think that he meant that the skeleton is that of a shark.

This scene suggests that Santiago's victory may not be remembered over time. But what is important was the struggle itself, not its legacy.



When Manolin returns to Santiago's shack, Santiago is sleeping, Manolin watches over Santiago as Santiago dreams of playing lions.

Santiago's earlier dreams were of the lions walking. That they are now playing suggests that he has been rejuvenated.



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