

**Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research
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“The Old Man and the Sea”
Ernest Hemingway

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By

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The marlin: Santiago hooks the marlin, which we learn at the end of the novella measures eighteen feet, on the first afternoon of his fishing expedition. Because of the marlin's great size, Santiago is unable to pull the fish in, and the two become engaged in a kind of tug-of-war that often seems more like an alliance than a struggle. The fishing line serves as a symbol of the fraternal connection Santiago feels with the fish. When the captured marlin is later destroyed by sharks, Santiago feels destroyed as well. Like Santiago, the marlin is implicitly compared to Christ.

Joe DiMaggio: Although DiMaggio never appears in the novel, he plays a significant role nonetheless. Santiago worships him as a model of strength and commitment, and his thoughts turn toward DiMaggio whenever he needs to reassure himself of his own strength. Despite a painful bone spur that might have crippled another player, DiMaggio went on to secure a triumphant career. He was a center fielder for the New York Yankees from 1936 to 1951, and is often considered the best all-around player ever at that position.

Perico: Perico, the reader assumes, owns the bodega in Santiago's village. He never appears in the novel, but he serves an important role in the fisherman's life by providing him with newspapers that report the baseball scores. This act establishes him as a kind man who helps the aging Santiago.

Martin: Like Perico, Martin, a café owner in Santiago's village, does not appear in the story. The reader learns of him through Manolin, who often goes to Martin for Santiago's supper. As the old man says, Martin is a man of frequent kindness who deserves to be repaid.

The Honor in Struggle, Defeat & Death: From the very first paragraph, Santiago is characterized as someone struggling against defeat. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish—he will soon pass his own record of eighty-seven days. Almost as a reminder of Santiago’s struggle, the sail of his skiff resembles “the flag of permanent defeat.” But the old man refuses defeat at every turn: he resolves to sail out beyond the other fishermen to where the biggest fish promise to be. He lands the marlin, tying his record of eighty-seven days after a brutal three-day fight, and he continues toward off sharks from stealing his prey, even though he knows the battle is useless.

Because Santiago is pitted against the creatures of the sea, some readers choose to view the tale as a chronicle of man’s battle *against* the natural world, but the novella is, more accurately, the story of man’s place *within* nature. Both Santiago and the marlin display qualities of pride, honor, and bravery, and both are subject to the same eternal law: they must kill or be killed. As Santiago reflects when he watches the weary warbler fly toward shore, where it will inevitably meet the hawk, the world is filled with predators, and no living thing can escape the inevitable struggle that will lead to its death. Santiago lives according to his own observation: “man is not made for defeat . . . [a] man can be destroyed but not defeated.” In Hemingway’s portrait of the world, death is inevitable, but

the best men (and animals) will nonetheless refuse to give in to its power. Accordingly, man and fish will struggle to the death, just as hungry sharks will lay waste to an old man's trophy catch.

The novel suggests that it is possible to transcend this natural law. In fact, the very inevitability of destruction creates the terms that allow a worthy man or beast to transcend it. It is precisely through the effort to battle the inevitable that a man can prove himself. Indeed, a man can prove this determination over and over through the worthiness of the opponents he chooses to face. Santiago finds the marlin worthy of a fight, just as he once found "the great negro of Cienfuegos" worthy. His admiration for these opponents brings love and respect into an equation with death, as their destruction becomes a point of honor and bravery that confirms Santiago's heroic qualities. One might characterize the equation as the working out of the statement "Because I love you, I have to kill you." Alternately, one might draw a parallel to the poet John Keats and his insistence that beauty can only be comprehended in the moment before death, as beauty bows to destruction. Santiago, though destroyed at the end of the novella, is never defeated. Instead, he emerges as a hero. Santiago's struggle does not enable him to change man's place in the world. Rather, it enables him to meet his most dignified destiny.