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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Pride as the Source of Greatness & Determination: Many parallels exist between Santiago and the classic heroes of the ancient world. In addition to exhibiting terrific strength, bravery, and moral certainty, those heroes usually possess a tragic flaw—a quality that, though admirable, leads to their eventual downfall. If pride is Santiago's fatal flaw, he is keenly aware of it. After sharks have destroyed the marlin, the old man apologizes again and again to his worthy opponent. He has ruined them both, he concedes, by sailing beyond the usual boundaries of fishermen. Indeed, his last word on the subject comes when he asks himself the reason for his undoing and decides, "Nothing . . . I went out too far."

While it is certainly true that Santiago's eighty-four-day run of bad luck is an affront to his pride as a masterful fisherman, and that his attempt to bear out his skills by sailing far into the gulf waters leads to disaster, Hemingway does not condemn his protagonistfor being full of pride. On the contrary, Santiago stands as proof that pride motivates men to greatness. Because the old man acknowledges that he killed the mighty marlinlargely out of pride, and because his capture of the marlin leads in turn to his heroic transcendence of defeat, pride becomes the source of Santiago's greatest strength. Without a ferocious sense of pride, that battle would never have been fought, or more likely, it would have been abandoned before the end.

Santiago's pride also motivates his desire to transcend the destructive forces of nature. Throughout the novel, no matter how baleful his circumstances become, the old man exhibits an unflagging determination to catch the marlin and bring it to shore. When the first shark arrives, Santiago's resolve is mentioned twice in the space of just a few paragraphs. First we are told that the old man "was full of resolution but he had little hope." Then, sentences later, the narrator says, "He hit [the shark] without hope but with resolution." The old man meets every

challenge with the same unwavering determination: he is willing to die in order to bring in the marlin, and he is willing to die in order to battle the feeding sharks. It is this conscious decision to act, to fight, to never give up that enables Santiago to avoid defeat. Although he returns to Havana without the trophy of his long battle, he returns with the knowledge that he has acquittedhimself proudly and manfully. Hemingway seems to suggest that victory is not a prerequisite for honor. Instead, glory depends upon one having the pride to see a struggle through to its end, regardless of the outcome. Even if the old man had returned with the marlin intact, his moment of glory, like the marlin's meat, would have been short-lived. The glory and honor Santiago accrues comes not from his battle itself but from his pride and determination to fight.

MOTIFS:

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to developand inform the text's major themes.

Life from Death: Death is the unavoidable force in the novella, the one fact that no living creature can escape. But death, Hemingway suggests, is never an end in itself: indeath there is always the possibility of the most vigorous life. The reader notes that asSantiago slays the marlin, not only is the old man reinvigorated by the battle, but the fish also comes alive "with his death in him." Life, the possibility of renewal, necessarily follows on the heels of death.

Whereas the marlin's death hints at a type of physical reanimation, death leads to life in less literal ways at other points in the novella. The book's crucifixion imagery emphasizes the cyclical connection between life and death, as does Santiago's battle with the marlin. His success at bringing the marlin in earns him the awed respect of the fishermen who once mocked him, and secures him the companionship of Manolin, the apprentice who will carry on Santiago's teachings long after the old man

has died.

SYMBOLS:

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideasor concepts.

1- The Marlin: Magnificent and glorious, the marlin symbolizes the ideal opponent. In aworld in which "everything kills everything else in some way," Santiago feels genuinely lucky to find himself matched against a creature that brings out the best in him: his strength, courage, love, and respect.

2- The Lions on the Beach: Santiago dreams his pleasant dream of the lions at play on the beaches of Africa three times. The first time is the night before he departs on his three-day fishing expedition, the second occurs when he sleeps on the boat for a few hours in the middle of his struggle with the marlin, and the third takes place at the very end of the book. In fact, the sober promise of the triumph and regeneration with which the novella closes is supported by the final image of the lions. Because Santiago associates the lions with his youth, the dream suggests the circular nature of life. Additionally, because Santiago imagines the lions, fierce predators, playing, his dreamsuggests a harmony between the opposing forces—life and death, love and hate, destruction and regeneration—of nature.

3- The Shovel-Nosed Sharks: The shovel-nosed sharks are little more than moving appetites that thoughtlessly and gracelessly attack the marlin. As opponents of the old man, they stand in bold contrast to the marlin, which is worthy of Santiago's effort andstrength. They symbolize and embody the destructive laws of the universe and attest tothe fact that those laws can be transcended only when equals fight to the death. Because they are base predators, Santiago wins no glory from battling them.