

BILCANS

THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

CRITICAL NOTES

For

Bachelor of Arts
(English Classes)

By

SYED MUHAMMAD WAQAS

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**BAB-UL-ILM INSTITUTE OF LANGUAGES, COMPUTER &
NATURAL SCIENCES
(BILCANS)**

SOHAWA, MANDI BAHAUDDIN

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Contact us:

Cell: 0322-778-7338, 0321-774-6647

Email: Birf.Pakistan@hotmail.com

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Q.1: Describe the Old Man's struggle against the sharks in your own words.

Or "Man can be destroyed but not defeated." Comment on Old Man's heroic struggle against the sharks.

Or Of all the challenges faced by the Old Man, fight against the sharks is the greatest. Discuss

Or Fight against the sharks is a real test of the Old Man's mettle. Elaborate

Or Which is the greater challenge for the Old Man from the struggle with the big fish and fight against the sharks?

Answer:

The old Cuban fisherman, Santiago, faces two major challenges in this novel apart from many minor ones. The first challenge is his contest with the big fish, marlin, whereas the second being his battle against the sharks. Critically viewing, the fight against the sharks appears a rather challenging task than the catching of marlin.

Santiago is by far extremely exhausted due to his nerve-racking fight with the giant fish, Marlin. He has been in a state of fight for some two days, all alone and without much food. However, he is resolute and diligent against every impending danger.

Sharks, the hunter-beasts of the sea, are the real challenge between the old man's actual victory and its acknowledgement. Santiago, after having been tired owing to a constant fight against the marlin without much food and sleep, is no more a strong old man. It has been only one hour since the victory of the old man over marlin that the first sharks attacks him. He calls it "Dentuso". As soon as this shark tears away some forty pounds of marlin's flesh, the old man furiously strikes its head with his harpoon, and the shark is doomed. However, with its death, the shark also takes away the old man's harpoon and rope. Thus, the old man is now unarmed.

The first shark proves only the precursor of a large-scale shark-attack on the marlin. The old man uses his gear and every other possible means to kill the attacking sharks, and, in fact, he manages to kill some of them. But the sharks prove too stubborn for the old man, as they do not give up in spite of old man's stiff resistance. They are countless indeed.

The marlin began to be eaten up gradually. The sharks were snatching away every bit of its flesh, time and again, and the old man could do nothing. However, it was against the dignity of this aged sea-hero to become a mere spectator; therefore, he continues his struggle against the hostility of opposite forces to save the achievement of his life. He kills many of these hunter beasts in a constant fight using his oar, tiller and knife.

However untiring his struggle, the old man is unable to save his beloved big fish, marlin, from the sharks. He reaches back to the coast with only skeleton. Nevertheless, critically speaking, he proves his utterance true that **"a man can be destroyed but not defeated."** Like a true hero, he does not give up in the face overpowering danger until the last moment—even when he has no hope for the marlin to be spared. Interestingly enough, he does not mind the loss of the fish and, when asked by the boy, he expresses his will to go back for fishing.

In this novel of Ernest Hemingway, the sharks represent an all-powerful force of Nature and the old man fights against this hostile force with an iron will even when at odds.

Q.2: Describe the heroic struggle of the Old Man.

Or Write a note on the heroic spirit of the Old Man

Or The Old Man is by all means an extraordinary fisherman. Elaborate

Or No other fisherman is as skilled and as perfect in fishing as the Old Man. Discuss

Or Compare and contrast the Old Man with the other fisherman.

Or Santiago is a greater fighter. Comment

Or The Old Man is brave but not reckless. Comment

Answer:

The old man, Santiago, is indeed a remarkable heroic figure among the heroes of Ernest Hemingway. He is a man of sublime vision, high goals and noble character. In the art of finishing, he is certainly matchless. Despite being without a fish for 84 days, his mastery of fishing cannot be questioned. The other fishermen of the town call him, as we are informed, with the native term “Salao” i.e. the unlucky. It is very true because luck plays a central role in the story of this novel. However, when we come to see the resolution of the old man, we find him unshaken like ever. He does not bother about what the people of town say about him. He is simply following his great-goal—the goal of hooking a great fish. This shows his devotion to his work as well as his vision. Santiago is not a man of blank personality; instead, he is an ideological person who believes in the dignity of man.

Critically speaking, every action of Santiago proves him a great hero and his personality reflects all nobility that is due to legendary characters. He is undoubtedly superior to the other fishermen; however, he is never heard boasting and expressing his superiority. His resolution coupled with techniques of fishing certainly makes him an “extraordinary fisherman.” His passions, self-consolation, proportionate work, methods of hooking, so on and so forth, turn him into a “perfect fisherman”.

While contesting with the marlin, the great fish, he utters this heroic statement: “Man is not made for defeat.” This shows his belief in the dignity of man. Dignity does not mean to him a mere act of boasting, but granting an equal right to other creatures for survival. He allows the big fish to kill him if he can, and he regards himself as superior only in tricks. His respect for the marlin exhibits how grand a hero he is. Comewhatmay, he cannot compromise on his victory, for he is ready to accept death and destruction, but “defeat” and “failure” are two words unknown to his being.

The old Santiago, a very brave man, is also a very altruistic character. Defeat to him is as noble as victory, but it is his inner hero that goes always for victory as it is a symbol of manliness and pride. He renders equal respect to his opponent because he believes in the fundamental right of self-defense. After having hooked the marlin, he combats the sharks to save him. He does not do so only because the marlin is his hunt, but also because he is his responsibility. He, in fact, calls him his ‘brother’ at times. While combating the sharks, the old man soon discovers that Nature favors them for victory against his heroic character. Thus, he humbly embraces the reality of failure.

All such characteristics of his sublime being, as above discussed, in fact, make him into a man of “no match”, whether in art or in conduct. The whole novel shows that an indifferent universe goes all out against heroic Santiago.

Q.3: Why does Santiago not mind the derogatory remarks of other fishermen on the terrace?

Or Describe Old Man’s poverty and lack of resources.

Or Describe Santiago’s search for a big fish.

Or “Everyday is a new day,” says Santiago. Comment

Or The theme of victory and defeat is embraced in the story. Explain

Or Discuss the role played by the fate in this novel.

Or How does “The Old Man and the Sea” fit into the general philosophy of Hemingway?

Answer:

“Everyday is a new day” is the manifestation of the highest form of optimism we find in the novel, ‘The Old Man and the Sea’. Hemingway seems to have been recovering from the “Nihilism” of his early and middle age. Santiago, the old fisherman, is the heroic incarnation of Hemingway’s ideal. The old man’s character, in fact, gives expression to the inborn heroic spirit of ageing Hemingway. Despite being a veteran of First World War, however, the spirit of heroism inherent in Hemingway could not fully embody itself in action. This novel, therefore, appears to be a product of its writer’s long-desired yet unaccomplished heroic career.

Is has been 84 days since the last success the old man has had in catching fish. He is being named in the native language as “Salao”, the worst form of being lucky. Other fishermen, especially that of the youth circle, use for him derogatory words and examples. Only his peer fishermen feel sympathy for the extraordinary yet unlucky fisherman, Santiago: the rest of the town speaks of him in negative terms. It is here, the life of the old man on land, where we catch the first glimpse of his heroism. Santiago does not bother what the people say about him, for he believes in dedication to the mission. Lack of resources and vivid poverty of the old man are two other disadvantages that add to the graveness of the situation. On the other hand, it is sheer talent of the old Santiago that enables him hook the greatest fish ever seen by the fishermen of that town.

By all definitions—and despite all hostility of circumstances—the old man emerges to be a “Champion fisherman”. He spends a long time in the search of a big fish, which equates the worth of an ideal life for the old man. 84 empty days compel him to plan something extraordinary to accomplish his high goal. He thus plans to go out far in the sea—beyond his actual sphere. It is here that the novelist wants us know that fate is an all-powerful entity and that nothing can be accomplished beyond one’s reach. Human sphere marks the area of man’s mastery and beyond it, however much effort one puts, little is left in his hand. Only unfulfilled wishes are the phenomenon he is gifted in turn by the fate.

The novel depicts old man’s remarkable struggle against the marlin, which, in fact, shows how far a man can go after his goal. While being out of human sphere, however, he is left only with the skeleton—a half victory. Sharks stand for an aspect of fate in the novel, which eventually wins over old man’s heroic struggle.

Q.4: Elaborate the final stage of Santiago's struggle with the fish/marlin.

Or **The fight of the Old Man with the fish must be won.**

Or **The old man's life and honor depend upon victory from the fish. Discuss**

Or **Does Santiago prove the truth of his remark, "Man is not made for defeat"?**

Or **The Old Man fights against the big fish/Marlin to the very end without being despaired. Comment**

Or **The Old Man in his struggle against the Marlin does not get despaired because that would be worth death. Comment**

Or **How was the Old Man able to hook the Marlin?**

Or **"Fish", he said softly aloud, "I will stay with you until I am dead." Discuss**

Or **How far do skill and resolution of the Old Man count in his struggle against the fish?**

Answer:

The story of the struggle of the old man, Santiago, no doubt leaves a mark on every reader. It is a remarkable heroic achievement of the zenith of human courage and determination. Here shows the traditionally pessimistic novelist, Ernest Hemingway, a contradiction to his own philosophy of life. It is surprising that his pen wrote down a novel in the Post-World War era that stands for an invincible determination and sublimity of conduct. This story of optimism in the face of an ever-opposing Nature is indeed a miracle of man's nobility.

The old man, Santiago, remains quite resolute in his struggle against the marlin. Despite age and despite his body being somewhat exhausted, his nerves never give up. He feels his nerves as young as a young man's and he consoles his soul and mind at times to continue his fight courageously. Continually, the old man also feels sympathy and love for the fish. This is because he is well-versed in the tradition of humanity. He does not employ ill means or treacherous tricks to catch the fish; instead, he allows the fish to use his best tricks. It is obvious from one of his epiphanies that occur in his mind and he comments on his own situation in the words given below:

"My choice was to go there to find him (marlin) beyond all people...Now we are joined together and have been since noon and no one to help either one of us."

This shows how resolute Santiago is in his fight that he does not even want to think of having other men to help him—except for the boy at times. He considers himself only superior in skills. When the fish pulls him down and his face bleeds, he utters these noteworthy words:

"Fish, I will stay with you until I am dead."

This statement speaks not only of his fury, but also of his trust in his determination. He employs all superior skills of fishermanry, whereof the best ones are his patience and vigilance. His aching body and injured hands commit no mistake in the whole episode. When it has been over two days since the beginning of the struggle, the final stage—the real test of the old man—approaches. Marlin disturbs him by jumping high in the air, pulling the line tight, and making Santiago wait too long. However, the resolute old man soon compels the fish to encircle the boat and get gradually close. After many unsuccessful turns, when the fish has come very near and passes under the boat, Santiago strikes the marlin with his harpoon. The marlin makes a final effort to rescue himself, but in vain. The fish is now dead and the old man the champion.

We can, therefore, sum up this topic in precision that the old man proves the veracity of his statement. He grants an equal right to the fish to kill him, for he respects his opponents. And it is this thing that exclusively befits the aged custodian of heroic traditions of the sea, Santiago.

Q.5: Hemingway's mysticism is that he feels one with the fish as the part of the grand scheme of Nature. Discuss.

Or **Write a brief note on Hemingway's style.**

Or **Hemingway's the knowledge of ocean sound. Discuss.**

Or **Santiago is more philosophic than other philosophers. Explain.**

Or **Trace the some of the symbols employed by Hemingway in this novel?**

Answer:

"The Old Man and The Sea" is a novel full of symbols and images. Hemingway generously employs a plethora of symbols in the knitting of the old man's story. To an ordinary reader, no doubt, the novel sounds a boring work. However, underneath the outer shell of dullness and boredom, there is a very appealing heroic struggle of a man who is "perfect" in his art—art of fishing. It is Hemingway's unique style that gives a wonderful sense of life to an ordinary story of finishing. Hemingway's style is an ever-living character—terse but simple—and it has certainly made him immortal.

Moreover, it is not just the style that impresses us in this novel, but also the profound knowledge of the sea that Ernest Hemingway possesses. In fact, it is Hemingway himself who is present in the character of Santiago in all spirit. Another interesting element in the philosophy of Hemingway manifest in his style is his mysticism. It is a new age—post-World War mysticism—which is, in one way or another, the regeneration of ancient mysticism. In fact, what we mean by mysticism is the inner, esoteric knowledge we are endowed by the supernatural.

Hemingway presents the whole scheme of things as a grand monolithic phenomenon of Nature. He treats both Santiago and Marlin as only two different embodiments of Nature and it is why that the old man, Hemingway's mouthpiece, says to the fish:

"You are my brother."

Mysticism leads in its ultimate to the philosophy that every thing is the part of other; hence originally one. It is this mysticism which replaces religious aspirations of ageing Hemingway in this novel. Although there are a few references to Catholic Christianity, however, they are too feeble to serve our purpose. This whole episode may be termed as the rebirth of spirituality in Hemingway. Hemingway's style in this novel is heavily influenced by the New Age Mysticism. Secondly it is his knowledge of the ocean that leaves a mark on his style. He goes into every minute detail of the things present in, on, and above the sea. The whole environment of fishing has been literally elaborated in the novel. Thus, we can conclude that mysticism is Hemingway's style and sea the arena where he exhibits his superior knowledge. Heroism and eventual defeat of man at the hand of Nature are to dominate themes blended in his unique style.

Q.6: Sea is presented as a living character in the novel, “The Old Man and the Sea”. Discuss

Or Sea is as good a character as any other in the novel. Elaborate

Or What is the significance of the sea in this novel?

Answer:

Sea is as good a character in the novel, “The Old Man and the Sea”, as is any other. When discussing this amazing piece of Hemingway’s penmanship, no one can ignore the significance and crucial role of the sea for the simple reason that it is the manifestation of Nature; hence a living character. Hemingway incarnates the invincible power of Nature into the geographical entity of sea. Of course, sea is a dominant phenomenon, which, due to its gigantic size, has no match on earth. The power of the creatures living inside it, collectively, assumes the authority of Nature. Thus, we are justified to say in the light of this novel that Nature knocks down what man nurtures. Since the old man remains alone for the most part, it is the sea that accompanies him everywhere. Flying fish, dolphins, marlin, sharks, sea birds, turtles, weeds and water, all collectively formulate the single character known in Hemingway’s novel as a “Sea”. The old man even talks to the sea and its creatures.

Hemingway is a “naturalist”, for he opposes the theory of “special creation”. He believes that it is the mechanism of the laws of Nature that ultimately proves victorious in every contest between Nature and nurture. However much a man struggles, whatever tricks and methods he employs, the power of Nature is going to defeat him in the end.

Critically speaking, Santiago is only an object on the vast plane of the sea, which surrounds him from every side. Sea also puts every hurdle in his work of fishing—the ideal of the old man. Although the mastery of Santiago wins in the first phase, the second round is won by the sea, which renders his entire heroic struggle as fruitless, hence useless in the worldly terms.

Therefore, we can conclude on solid textual grounds that sea is as good a character in the novel, “The Old Man and the Sea”, as any other.

Q.7: Explain the relationship of the old man and the boy.

Or The boy is the symbol of youth and power for the old man. Discuss

Or The old man looks upon Manolin as not only his apprentice, but also his friend and his equal. Elaborate

Or Discuss the old man’s loneliness at the sea and his aspiration for the boy to be present with him.

Answer:

Manolin, the young apprentice boy, is introduced in the beginning of the novel as one having great love for his master, Santiago. However, we are told that the boy has been compelled to forsake the old man and abandon his skiff on the account of Santiago’s ever-mounting crisis. Santiago, the old man, remains without fish for a long time and thereby the parents of Manolin enroll him in a “lucky” boat. The old man going without fish becomes “Salao” and eventually his boat an “unlucky” boat. The relationship between old man and the boy marks the two-faceted reality of human relationship i.e. (a) one of youth and age and (b) that of master-disciple.

However, the decision forced on the boy by his parents shows the impatient nature of human beings and their selfishness towards the unlucky and lowly. The boy naturally has sympathy for the old but determined Santiago. Nevertheless, he is not allowed despite his greatest desire to rejoin him. This restriction does certainly not keep him from visiting old man. He not only serves the old man, but also takes care of all his major businesses. The boy appears to be a semblance of the disciples of Jesus Christ in the novel. He is fully devoted to the cause and personality of Santiago. Moreover, he respects the old man's ideas and appreciates his youth-like aptitude for baseball.

Manolin is indeed an equal of the old man in some ways. He always gets hope to the old man with his encouraging remarks. We see the peak of this encouragement-bond in the end when the old man is beaten by the sharks and he laments, saying: "I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore." The boy immediately rejoins him answering in an encouraging as well as healing tone: "The hell with luck, I'll bring the luck with me." The old man fully understands the nature of this relationship and gives it great value.

Only one utterance of old man, namely, "I missed you (Manolin)", is sufficient to make us believe how greatly the old man is associated with the boy. The boy has a firm belief that there is only one great fisherman, Santiago. He can be seen crying in the end when the old man returns despaired and injured. Manolin cannot stand the sight of his state and he runs out of his shack to get him coffee and eatables.

His decisions to rejoin the old man without caring for his parents shows his deep affection for the old man. Santiago, on the other hand, finds in Manolin the incarnation of his youth and skill. He is his family and his disciple simultaneously. We can, therefore, conclude on solid grounds that Manolin is not only an apprentice of the old man, but also his trusted friend and, in some ways, his equal. It is the only relation in the novel which seems to have integral connection with the theme.

GOOD LUCK