

ANALYSIS

The Old Man and the Sea (1952)



Ernest Hemingway

(1899-1961)

Hemingway knew this was his greatest work of art: “This is the prose that I have been working for all my life that should read easily and simply and seem short and yet have all the dimensions of the visible world and the world of man’s spirit. It is as good prose as I can write as of now.” His aspiration to express “all the dimensions” of Man and Nature in one work is the poetic ideal called *synecdoche*, Hemingway’s goal throughout his career. Faulkner said in his review of *The Old Man and the Sea*, “Time may show it to be the best single piece by any of us. I mean his and my contemporaries. This time he discovered God, a Creator.” Faulkner considered it perfect: “Praise God that whatever made and loves and pities Hemingway and me kept him from touching it any further.”

The wonder of it is how Hemingway turned a simple fishing story into his masterwork. The fishing story is almost as old a form as the human race and the old man could have lived at any time at many places throughout the world, giving his story a depth transcending time and space. As always Hemingway derives elemental power from Nature—from archetypal actions, patterns, images, emotions and characters. Transcending time and space in this story with archetypal content, he dramatizes universal truths and evokes holistic consciousness--ideals in religion and in Modernism. *The Old Man and the Sea* is so deeply spiritual it makes secular Postmodernists uncomfortable. It is to Hemingway what “Credo” is to E. A. Robinson, “After Apple-Picking” is to Frost, *Four Quartets* is to Eliot, *Death Comes for the Archbishop* is to Cather, and *The Bear* is to Faulkner.

The title consists of six words of three letters each, a perfect balance. The balance of each word in relation to the others expresses the theme of balance--psychological, moral and ecological—as well as the Neoclassical aesthetic values of simplicity, economy, clarity, and symmetry. Santiago maintains a literal balance in his little boat. Man and Nature (the sea) are asserted as equal, in contrast to prevailing values in the modern world. Today fishing in the Gulf of Mexico is high tech capitalism with industrial boats guided by sonar tracking schools of fish from airplanes. Until recently, most human lives were short and old people were respected for their wisdom learned from experience, as Manolo respects Santiago. Today in secular civilization the young disrespect the old and most people have been civilized out of touch with Nature—those, for instance, who are bored by *The Old Man and the Sea*.

The first sentence suggests the whole story (synecdoche), initiating the suspense common to all good fishing stories, except that here the significance of every aspect is magnified. Anyone alone in a skiff at sea who keeps trying after almost 3 months without taking a fish is heroic. There is a sense from the beginning that this poor old man must be exhausted and near death. "The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat." The simple prose is "translated" Spanish, transcending one culture and giving the tone a formality that further dignifies Santiago.

For the first "forty days" the boy had been with him. Sympathy for the old man is increased through Manolin, who loves Santiago. "It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty." Forty days is the same period of time that it rained in the biblical story of Noah and his ark, a submerged allusion here that would have jumped out at readers before the 1960s. In contrast to Noah, this old man is suffering from a dry spell, evoking the spiritual wasteland of T. S. Eliot. And he is alone. Like Job, he is suffering for no fault. Christianity in tension with *nada* is a theme throughout Hemingway, culminating in what Faulkner recognized as the religious affirmation of *The Old Man and the Sea*. As Jake Barnes said, "Some people have God. Quite a lot." Christ recruited fishermen for his disciples, the fish was a recognition symbol among early Christians, and Santiago becomes Christ-evoking. The tone is set by the first three sentences with their biblical measuring of time. The tone becomes increasingly spiritual as the old man gets farther out to sea and beyond time.

The old man is given vivid particularity in the second paragraph through detailed physical description, unusual in Hemingway. The scars on his hands "were as old as erosions in a fishless desert," placing him explicitly in a wasteland. "Everything about him was old except his eyes," for he is the archetypal wise old man. His eyes are not old because his vision transcends time, they are the same color as the sea because his life is in harmony with Nature, and they are also the same color as the Sky because he has a capacity for spiritual transcendence: Despite his poverty, loneliness, old age, bad luck, and the jokes made about him by other fishermen, his eyes are "cheerful and undefeated."

Manolin offers to rejoin Santiago despite his bad luck and tries to encourage him. They share respect for family values, yet the boy has more in common with Santiago than with his own father, who "hasn't much faith" and "does not like to go far out.... He is almost blind." This is the main theme in American literature, the tension dramatized by Anne Bradstreet in her poem "The Flesh and the Spirit" (1678). In society the theme enlarges to Materialism versus Idealism, as expressed by Jonathan Edwards, Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Hawthorne, Melville, Henry James, Howells, Twain, Wharton, Dickinson, E. A. Robinson, Frost, Cather, Eliot, Faulkner, O'Connor, and so on.

Manolin wants to help Santiago, "to serve in some way." This is the definition of love in *A Farewell to Arms*: "You wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve." Santiago "was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it and he knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride." In his humility he has transcended the machismo of his Cuban-Latin culture, in contrast to the stereotype of Hemingway as a Macho Man. Santiago is part of the natural order, apart from the social order, as he is in relation to the other fishermen on the Terrace. He is in direct contact with the earth. "He was barefooted."

His simplicity and poverty are evident in his shack, barely furnished with a cooking place on the dirt floor. The shack is organic, made from palm trees. His mast is almost as long as his shack is wide, corresponding to the balance in his life between land and sea. His shirt "had been patched so many times that it was like the sail," identifying him with his boat just as in Melville ships symbolize the souls of their captains. Pathos deepens again with the reference to Santiago's dead wife. He misses her so much he had to take her picture off the wall and hide it. Her purity and the purity of his love for her are implied by hiding her under a clean shirt and his idealization of her by the "tinted" photograph and by its juxtaposition to the "Sacred Heart of Jesus" and "the Virgin of Cobre."

Fiction is a means of transcendence, as the old man and the boy disregard facts such as having no food and live in spirit above the flesh—cheerful and undefeated. Unsympathetic critics have belittled their spirited conversation about baseball, calling it trivial. On the contrary, this is an example of Hemingway's identification with common people rather than with critics. In the first place, the conversation is Realism.

Manolin plays baseball like almost all boys in Cuba. Baseball is more than a game there and elsewhere in the Caribbean, it is a popular religion—as evident in the reverent tones of Santiago and Manolin. It is also a potential way to individual stardom. In disproportionate numbers baseball players from impoverished families in the Caribbean have made it to the major leagues in America. Cubans talk about baseball the way ancient Greeks talked about the heroes at Troy. The parallel unites past with present to illustrate a universal truth about human nature: Men follow heroes, they make gods, they aspire. They always will. Baseball is pastoral, a civilizing ritual sublimating war.

Literally, the conversation is also Realism in reflecting the facts and common views of major league baseball at the time: the New York Yankees were dominant, they were challenged by the Cleveland Indians with their great pitching staff, and the Detroit Tigers were contenders. “Have faith in the Yankees my son.” Santiago sounds like a priest of baseball. Giving such importance to baseball is another wholesome fiction, an idealization like romantic love that can be a means of transcendence through identification with heroes. “Think of the great DiMaggio.” Joe DiMaggio was the son of a fisherman in San Francisco (St. Francis), a modest gentleman and the centerfielder of the New York Yankees who once hit successfully in 56 straight games despite being deliberately walked repeatedly to avoid his hitting—a feat once voted the greatest athletic achievement in history. He is an apt choice for a baseball hero because he had a bone spur on his heel that made him comparable to Achilles. Ironically, though he is himself an exemplar to the boy, even the heroic Santiago needs an exemplar to look up to.

The season is September, “‘The month when the great fish come,’ the old man said. ‘Anyone can be a fisherman in May’.” Fall is the season of tragedy, a test of character. Santiago welcomes the challenge of fishing in the Fall. In contrast to his going after the great fish, “‘I go now for the sardines,’ the boy said.” It turns out that—remarkably—this is not the worst bad luck Santiago has ever had. His record is 87 days without catching a fish. More than most people, fishermen *must* have faith. Santiago is encouraged in his faith by the boy, who feeds him spiritually and literally. The innocence, compassion, and good character of the boy inspires faith in the younger generation. The old man recalls his own youth when he saw lions on the beaches in Africa, a memory that becomes a motif evoking the youth and origin of the human race. Santiago embodies our humanity. “He dreamed of Africa when he was a boy.”

The old man loves the sea like a woman: He thinks of *la mar* 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.” His hand line gives him a deep, sensitive, and intimate relation to her. He also loves the porpoises, who love one another: “They are our brothers like the flying fish.” He differentiates among creatures based on their intelligence and beauty. He seems to love all creatures, like St. Francis—flying fish, hawk-bills, turtles. He is one of them. Nevertheless, like an Indian he must kill animals to live. This “primitivism” is what makes him a part of the natural order. He compares his heart to the heart of a turtle that keeps beating “for hours after he has been cut up and butchered”—“a man can be destroyed but not defeated.” Santiago also “drank a cup of shark liver oil each day” because “it was good for the eyes.” Mentally imbibing the essence of an enemy improves perception in more than a literal sense.

The prose style is authoritative from the start of *The Old Man and the Sea*, even scriptural. Technical details, realistic action and vivid perceptions add authenticity to the narrative as they accumulate. This “solidity of specification,” as Henry James called it, is a strength of Realism. “Experience is communicated by small details intimately observed,” Hemingway said. Far out to sea Santiago’s fishing lines are going “straight down into the water that was a mile deep.” Many of his spoken lines are deep as well. Literal depth is the *objective correlative* for the feeling of depth that extends throughout the story. When the great marlin takes his bait “one hundred fathoms down”—hope rises to excitement. “This far out he must be huge in this month, he thought.” We can imagine. But suddenly the fish is gone. “God help him to take it.... Christ knows he can’t have gone.” His prayer is answered. And the fish is so huge it pulls his little boat all night—farther and farther out to sea. The glow of Havana fades behind him. Hemingway has the eye of an Impressionist painter but he understates, avoiding similes and the lush poetic style characteristic of Impressionist writers such as Stephen Crane and Kate Chopin.

Santiago “began to pity the great fish that he had hooked.” His admiration is expressed in the beautiful paragraph recalling the loyalty of a male marlin to his mate after she got hooked. The alliteration, rare in

Hemingway, elevates the style to poetry: “The male fish always let the female fish feed first.” Chivalry is natural to the male fish, and used to be traditional among men and women, according to the old Victorian paradigm of gender roles. According to the Feminist paradigm now prevailing, male and female are equals competing against each other—even in marriage, for now “the personal is political.” The male fish “jumped high into the air beside the boat to see where the female was and then went down deep”—evoking the emotional depth of his loss: “He was beautiful, the old man remembered, and he had stayed. That was the saddest thing I ever saw with them.” Santiago can empathize with the marlin because of his own loyalty and love for the wife he lost: “Now we are joined together.”

Hemingway then forces the reader to face the brutal truth that humans evolved by killing for food, not by eating only fruits and vegetables. Santiago depends upon eating meat for his strength. Well-fed liberals can afford to be sentimental about what they eat, whereas most humans for millions of years have had to eat what was available and compete against other animals, as Santiago does with the great marlin. He and the boy “begged her pardon and butchered her promptly.” They show mercy by killing her promptly, like a matador who tries to kill a bull with one merciful thrust of his sword. Black Elk tells of how Indians thanked their prey and kissed fish they caught. Santiago expresses the paradox: “‘Fish,’ he said, ‘I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends’.”

Santiago is named after Saint James, called a “fisher of men” in the *Bible*. Talking to animals relates him also to St. Francis. He continues to call upon God: “Thank God he is travelling and not going down”; “God let him jump”; “God help me to have the cramp go.” God helps those who help themselves. The tension in his line evokes the psychological tension of his struggle and a small bird “flying very low over the water” is a metaphor of his own fatigue. When the bird lands to rest on his fishing line he talks to it just as he talks to himself and to the great fish at the deep end of his line, connecting the depths to the heights, the sea to the sky. He invites the bird to come and live with him at his shack on the land. *The Old Man and the Sea* was originally planned to be one in a trilogy of stories uniting land, sea, and sky.

Like James Joyce, Hemingway is always striving for the ideal of total unity, holistic consciousness and universal truth: “Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole. Then any part you make will represent the whole if it’s made truly” (synecdoche). His literary ideal is holographic. For example, while Santiago is distracted by the bird from the sky, the marlin lurches and almost pulls him overboard. This is Realism critiquing Romanticism, like Melville in “The Masthead” chapter of *Moby-Dick* when Ishmael becomes so distracted by romantic thoughts he almost falls overboard. In both books these incidents are like facets of a prism that refract the light from all the other parts at once: Man on a Journey in a Boat through a Sea of Troubles in Pursuit of Truth and Salvation in the Wilderness embodied in a Divine Animal from the Depths of the Soul must be Balanced—uniting symbols that are archetypal, traditional, and allegorical—which represent “the whole.”

In speaking to his cramped left hand as if it were separate from himself, the old man expresses his objectivity, self-criticism, and spiritual transcendence of the body. The left hand is controlled by the right brain, metaphorically the heart, and is associated with feminine traits that are not always reliable when strength and endurance are required. When the marlin comes up, Santiago urges his left hand to come up: “Come on hand. Please come on.” But his hand fails to uncramp and he compares it to “the gripped claws of an eagle.” An eagle is not a bird of the sea, the context of this simile is larger. An eagle in American literature alludes to the nation, from the Catskill eagle in *Moby-Dick* to the *Winesburg Eagle*. This may imply that one cannot rely on the government or the American dream of material success for fulfillment, that Americans have cramped in the grip of illusion. The humble Santiago blames himself for the cramping: “Perhaps it was my fault in not training that one properly.” Taking responsibility, “If he cramps again let the line cut him off,” a variation on the injunction in the *Bible*: “If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out.” This epitomizes his *puritan* virtues (masculine)—discipline, responsibility, labor, endurance, self-sacrifice—which balance his *pastoral* virtues (feminine)—sensitivity, humility, pleasure, love and again self-sacrifice—in a psychological synthesis characteristic of *transcendental* consciousness as expressed in literature. Santiago is the opposite of a Postmodernist.

Coming out of the sea, the marlin is described as “bright in the sun”—light rising from darkness—“the biggest fish that he had ever seen and bigger than he had ever heard of.” If he can land this fish, it will

become a legend. "His sword was as long as a baseball bat and taper like a rapier." The sword identifies him as a killer too, a fisherman like Santiago. The comparison to a baseball bat implies that baseball, more than a game, is a preparation for competitive life. The marlin is "two feet longer than the skiff." Like a fighting bull, it is much stronger than a man: "I must never let him learn his strength.... But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able." The great fish is parallel to a great bull, and Santiago parallel in some ways to a great matador. At the same time, although he is the exemplar to Manolin, even Santiago needs someone to look up to and emulate, a hero to set high standards: "I must have 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."

As a young man he was an arm-wrestling champion with his right hand, "But his left hand had always been a traitor and would not do what he called on it to do and he did not trust it." The symbolism of the left and right hands is common in modern literature and has a neurological basis. As an old man Santiago has individuated beyond a competitive need for dominance, as expressed in his recurrent dream of peaceful lions. In fact he is transcending himself: "I wish I was the fish, he thought, with everything he has against only my will and my intelligence." His left hand uncramps. He becomes whole by surrendering his ego. Landing the marlin is more than arm-wrestling. It is the final challenge to his whole spirit, his most important performance en route to the grave. "Bad news for you, fish."

In representing the common man, Santiago is "not religious" in that he does not go to church and is self-reliant. Like the common man he is practical and barter with God: "'I am not religious,' he said. 'But I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish, and I promise to make a pilgrimage to the Virgin of Cobre if I catch him'." In baseball this is called covering all your bases. "He commenced to say his prayers mechanically." Then he works the fingers of his left hand "mechanically," a repetition suggesting that both his prayers and his fingers are necessary and so natural to him he does not think about them. He prays like a ballplayer crossing himself when stepping up to bat. The irony is that Santiago displays a deeper spirituality than most people who go to church. Although as a common man he believes that it makes sense to be practical, as an uncommon man he is impractical. He risks his life. He is "strange" for going out "too far" in order to show "what a man can do and what a man endures." Santiago embodies the human spirit that transcends the common and aspires to an ideal.

"Why are the lions the main thing that is left?" His recurrent memory of peaceful lions on the beach is his image of a heavenly state of being, a motif that suggests an unconscious anticipation of death. He pictures the marlin underwater with his pectoral fins "set wide as wings"—another image that unites opposites, fish with bird, Sea with Sky—a characteristic of transcendent consciousness in literature, more explicit in *Walden* (1854). Hemingway's sea is larger and deeper than Thoreau's pond. Still another image of uniting opposites is the flying fish. By this point in the narrative, the reader has been in the boat with Santiago long enough to lose sight of land and lose track of time. The measure of your transcendence of space and time is your response to this: "An airplane passed over head on its course to Miami and he watched its shadow scaring up the schools of flying fish."

The airplane intrudes upon the mood, disrupting the transcendence of time and space—a more imposing Machine in the Garden than the traditional symbol of progress the railroad. It is much higher in the Sky than the flying fish, but the airplane is a sealed enclosure limiting perception whereas the "schools" of flying fish are alive in the vibrant fresh air and cycling like Nature through both air and sea, comparable to Santiago cycling with the sun from land to sea and back again. The shadow of the airplane, its dark effect, disturbs the natural order—scaring the fish. The passengers in the airplane would not be able to see the tiny figure below them in the tiny boat, just as they probably would not understand the "strange" old man even if they could see him. High up in the clouds, they represent the modern elevation of living standards that dissociates people from Nature, like the tourists at the end of the story.

In great and increasing pain, Santiago transcends his own suffering with pity for the fish, though "his determination to kill him never relaxed in his sorrow for him." Humility and need redeem him from the killing—though he is proud too: "There is no one worthy of eating him from the manner of his behavior and his great dignity." Though he enjoyed hunting game animals himself, participating in the natural order, Hemingway expresses more compassion for animals and identifies with them more often than anyone else

in literature. He had many pets and took in strays and nursed injured animals back to health. He revered elephants so much that he deplored killing them at all, as he dramatizes in the poignant African story in *The Garden of Eden*, his most transcendental fiction after *The Old Man and the Sea*.

When he guts the dolphin for food and finds two flying fish inside, we are reminded that in the natural order animals eat other animals to survive. Santiago does not feel superior to them, he knows that he too is part of the natural order. The pace of the narrative evokes his patience and endurance as he suffers to the verge of losing consciousness. Prolonging his pain and detailing his struggle to hold on and then to harpoon the fish builds suspense and gives more power and poignancy to his eventual loss. The harpoon brings to mind whaling, and the greatest fishing story ever told. Whalers fish in crews, Santiago is alone. Captain Ahab is proud, solipsistic, and mad for revenge. Santiago is humble, fraternal, and transcendent. He directs his frustration toward himself rather than toward anything outside himself, in particular at his left hand: "If it cramps again let the line cut him off." Santiago attains a spiritual victory and is compared to Christ, whereas Ahab destroys himself and is compared to Satan.

The circling of the fish prepares for the climax: "God help me endure. I'll say a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail Marys." At the same time, as the great fish circles him, he is inspired by its beauty and nobility and has a feeling of transcending death: "Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who." He is a strange old man. When at last he has harpooned the fish and secured it to the side of the boat he can take his satisfaction: "I think the great DiMaggio would be proud of me today." But toward the fish he is humble too: "I am only better than him through trickery and he meant me no harm." His triumph lasts only an hour "before the first shark hit him." Hemingway's "omission theory" has made the shark a sickening shock. The sea of life is full of surprises. Suddenly the tired old man must once again become "full of resolution"—but now "he had little hope. It was too good to last, he thought." He is able to kill the first shark but it sinks with his harpoon. Having lost his weapon, he fortifies himself with the major theme of the story: "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." He can even admire the shark that mutilates his marlin as beautiful, fearless, and noble.

Though a simple uneducated fisherman Santiago recognizes paradox: "Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive." He qualifies this by crediting the boy for keeping him alive. Manolin gives him hope, love, and faith in humanity. Santiago knows that "a very bad time was coming." When he sees more sharks approaching, he cries out with "a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood." This parallel to the crucifixion implies that Santiago is going to die. An obscure fisherman like the first disciples, he has proved himself Christlike in character. In "Today Is Friday," about three Roman soldiers discussing Christ after they crucified Him on the cross that day, Hemingway expresses admiration in particular for His endurance.

Even given his pantheistic love of all Nature, the old man is also Christlike in fighting evil as a part of the natural and divine order. There are good sharks and bad ones like the two shovel-nosed sharks approaching—"hateful sharks" that without any smell of blood shred men in the water and bite the legs and flippers off turtles sleeping on the surface. These sharks tear off chunks of the great marlin and Santiago kills them both with his knife lashed to an oar. He kills 4 sharks before losing his knife, then they come in a pack. Suspense and intensity increase with the number of sharks and the blood in the water. They keep on coming and he bludgeons them until one seizes his club. "I'll fight them until I die." He wishes he had a baseball bat. He tears loose his tiller and fights them off with that. At any moment a shark could bump his boat and knock him into the bloody water. He survives by maintaining his balance.

After an attack Santiago apologizes to what is left of the great fish and takes responsibility: "I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish." This is the classic definition of tragedy: The tragic hero overreaches due to a flaw in his character and pays for it. However, Santiago overreaches due to his *virtues*, not due to any flaw. The reader cannot agree with the humble Santiago. His heroic performance has been inspirational, in a humbler way like that of Christ, who also went "too far" from a merely practical perspective. This is an ironic tragedy in that we are glad it happened.

That night no one is awake to see the exhausted old man drag his boat ashore with the long skeleton lashed to its side. He has been at sea for 3 days. He shoulders his mast like a cross and climbs the hill

until, again like Christ on the way to Calvary--he falls. "He has to sit down five times before he reached his shack." Inside he sleeps "with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up." The boy finds him looking almost dead. He goes to get him coffee and "all the way down the road he was crying." On the shore by the little boat he sees other fishermen looking on in awe and one measuring the skeleton at 18 feet long. Says the proprietor of the Terrace, "There has never been such a fish."

When he finally wakes up, Santiago tells the boy to take the great marlin's spear, which is the length of a baseball bat. The spear is analogous to the ear of a fighting bull, a symbol of honor given with acclaim to a matador who then gives it to someone else in tribute, as Pedro Romero does in *The Sun Also Rises*. The bull and the marlin are both divine, like the white whale of Melville, the white heron of Jewett, and the bear of Faulkner. Hemingway unites in Santiago his two major thematic motifs of fishing and bullfighting. Few have seen their significance throughout Hemingway. The boy tells Santiago that a search was conducted by coast guard boats and airplanes. Unlike the passengers in the airplane that flew over him on course to Miami, these people were professionals looking for him, yet they could not see him. Ironically, in his greatness Santiago was too small.

Ominously, "In the night I spat something strange and felt something in my chest was broken." The story ends with the old man dreaming again about the lions and the boy sitting beside his deathbed, still hopeful. The great fish bones on the beach are now "just garbage" among empty beer cans. Ironically the tourists at the Terrace misunderstand the waiter's explanation and mistake the skeleton for a shark—the thematic opposite of the great marlin. Like most people in the modern world, the tourists are comparable to the passengers in the airplane that flew over Santiago in their distance from Nature, and from the truth embodied in the old man and the marlin. Such people called Hemingway "primitive."

Some critics who thought the story was about them said that the sharks symbolize the critics who had torn apart Hemingway's art. Actually most critics are more like the tourists at the Terrace, except that they usually do not even see the skeleton. The analogy of sharks to critics best applies to the Scribner's editor of *The Garden of Eden* (1986), Tom Jenks, a shovel-nosed shark who ripped off some pieces he could digest and then vomited. The aesthetic traditions informing Hemingway's fiction—Neoclassicism, Realism, Naturalism, Modernism—all seek universality in general truths. *The Old Man and the Sea* is an allegory of human aspiration in general, idealistic pursuit dramatizing the theme of attaining a spiritual victory that transcends destruction, the major theme of religions and of "The Artist of the Beautiful" by Hawthorne, in which the artist's butterfly is destroyed. In "The Butterfly and the Tank" (1938) Hemingway embodies the polarity of destruction and transcendence.

TRANSCENDENTAL CHARACTERISTICS

In American literature the characteristics of transcendence are most fully evident in such diverse works as the "Personal Narrative" of theologian Jonathan Edwards, Melville's *Moby-Dick*, Thoreau's *Walden*, Whitman's *Leaves of Grass*, the poems of Emily Dickinson, *The Professor's House* by Cather, *Black Elk Speaks*, *The Bear*, and *The Old Man and the Sea*: (1) Santiago has made the *quest* into the Wilderness all his life every time he has gone out to sea fishing and he is fully *individuated*; (2) he takes full *responsibility* for all his actions in *pursuit* of what amounts to his salvation; (3) he himself is a *Christ-evoking figure* yet in his humility he venerates the exemplar DiMaggio; (4) he himself is the *wise old man* and *spiritual guide* to the boy; (5) he is *self-reliant* in *solitude* after he loses the company of the boy (*Man-olin*), but also *soul-reliant* on God; (6) his *ultimate Truth* takes the form of the wild marlin; (7) he seems to *die and revive* somehow repeatedly to fight the sharks; (8) he is *at one with Nature* all the time, seeing all creatures as friends and brothers except the shovel-nosed sharks; (9) this pantheistic love of Nature *reconciles opposites* and is imaged in the marlin with fins like wings and the bird that rests on his line connected to the marlin and so on; (10) *cyclical imagery* includes the course of the sun and the marlin circling around him after he hooks it; (11) *inner light* is suggested by the great marlin, his salvation, coming up out of the dark depths "bright in the sun"; (12) descriptions of the marlin and Santiago's marveling at it are evocations of its *numinous* divinity; (13) the sea is *mysterious*, the fishing experience becomes increasingly *intense*, and *ecstasy* is catching, seeing, and securing the great marlin; (14) *transcendence of time and space* is best felt, paradoxically, when it is lost-- when the airplane comes flying overhead on course to Miami; (15) Santiago recognizes *paradox* when thinking that "Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive"; (16) that the

meaning of the great fish and the old man's struggle is *ineffable* is symbolized by its bones in the garbage and when the waiter at the Terrace is misunderstood by the tourists; (17) Santiago's *holistic perception* integrates the relationships of Man to Boy, to Woman, to Nature, and to God; (18) his story is *unique* in literature yet *archetypal*—universal--as an allegory of human aspiration, struggle, and transcendence.

Michael Hollister (2012)