

21-4-20
Man and the Sea'.

Or

"Santiago's story has been widely interpreted as a symbolic representation of Hemingway's vision of himself in 1952." Discuss with reference to 'The Old Man and the Sea'.

Or

In what way is the story of 'The Old Man and the Sea' a private parable?

Ans. *The Old Man and the Sea* has often been described as a personal parable. The story of Santiago can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of Hemingway's vision of himself in 1952. Santiago, the expert fisherman, is Hemingway, the conscientious writer, the meticulous craftsman, dedicated, like Santiago to his vocation. There are several similarities in the careers of both Santiago and Hemingway. These similarities can be traced in the following paragraphs.

Santiago's struggle with the marlin is Hemingway's struggle with his material

The Old Man and the Sea can be interpreted in several ways. On a symbolic level it can be seen as a representation of Hemingway's own struggle with his material as an artist. The old man is none but Hemingway himself and the marlin in this novel. The sharks are the critics who criticized the novel of Hemingway and tried to tarnish his literary reputation. Hemingway himself may have been encouraged to identify himself with Santiago. The imagery of his response to the Nobel prize in 1954 can be read as suggesting a spiritual identification with Santiago, the Cuban fisherman: "It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go out to

where no one can help him". These words recall Santiago's words in the novel, "I went out too far."

Santiago's devotion to his art of fishing can be taken as Hemingway's seriousness, precision and perfection which he showed in his art of writing. The fishing and the fisherman can be seen as metaphors which are very apt. Santiago is a master who sets his lines with more care than his fellow fishermen, but he has no luck anyhow. It would be better to be lucky but he will be exact instead, then when luck comes he will be ready for it. Once he was known as the 'Champion'. He had defeated many rivals in fair fights. Manolin also says about him, "There are many good fishermen, and some great ones. But there's only you." But the whole reputation of Santiago is endangered by a sheer stroke of bad luck. Anyway, Santiago's skill in the art of fishing resembles Hemingway's skill as an artist. Santiago feels great respect and love for the marlin. He struggles with all his determination to overpower the fish; he fights too against the hungry sharks who seek to destroy the beauty and magnificence of his prize. Santiago remains essentially undefeated, and hopes despite failure, to go out to sea again. In the field of art, Hemingway himself had been doing this. Thus *The Old Man and the Sea* is generally seen as a parable about the heroic capabilities of man in general.

Santiago—a self-portrayal

Santiago can be seen as a self-portrait of Hemingway. Hemingway's career as a literary craftsman during his last ten years shows that *The Old Man and the Sea* is a symbolic representation of an intense personal conviction. After 1950 Hemingway began to practise the technique of depicting his youthful self, which he represents as revitalizing the aged champion, Santiago. Santiago's faded reputation as a champion represents Hemingway's literary reputation in 1950's. The great marlin in the story represents Hemingway's achievement in having produced this masterpiece. The sharks represent the ruthless critics who had been attacking Hemingway's approach in his fiction. Santiago's suffering from the loss of his painfully acquired big marlin to the sharks represents Hemingway's suffering from the critics' attack on *Across the River and into the Trees* in which his ego, particularly his own fear of growing old and dying was deeply involved. In fact, in Santiago, Hemingway created a hero through whom he could explore the stresses of ageing and impending death which preoccupied him in *Across the River and into the Trees* as well as the stress of threatened championship.

Mingling of private and public concerns

Many of Hemingway's novels and stories are based on their author's personal experiences. It is generally noted that in the fiction of 1920's and early 1930's which is based upon the experiences of his boyhood and early manhood, Hemingway achieved an exceptionally successful fusion of private and public concerns. Hemingway's personal shocks and responses to the prevailing conditions proved immediately significant to his entire generation. His generation had been profoundly

shocked by the happenings of the First World War. His fictional representation of the inadequacies of the conventional values appealed to many young people. Hemingway's agony caused by war or in other sense the war wounds of his heroes could be seen as the war wounds caused by the World War to the people in general. They represented the frustration of the youth at large. The 'separate peace' of the Hemingway hero dramatized the spiritual deviation of many youthful Americans from the official values of their country. These Hemingway heroes appealed, directly or symbolically, to many readers who could no longer believe in old order in a disordered social world.

But this mingling is not so prominently seen in his later fiction. In the 1930's he began to exploit the personal legend of Hemingway, becoming openly his own hero in *Death in the Afternoon* and in *Green Hills of Africa*. In these works, Hemingway tended to flaunt personal emotion. But if Hemingway emphasized the importance of personal experience, his critics over-emphasized his public duty. These critics came forward to rebuke Hemingway for publicising personal tastes such as bull-fighting and fishing. These critics demanded of him a more serious literature. Influenced by such criticism, or under the influence of the Loyalist cause in the Spanish Civil War, Hemingway made at least some concession to social concern in the subject-matter and the themes of *To Have and Have Not*, *The Fifth Column* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*.

In *The Old Man and the Sea* Santiago is also a hero from whom Hemingway is able to maintain critical distance. For example, the elemental simplicity of the humble Cuban fisherman and his adventure separate him clearly from any direct and literal identification with Hemingway's complex personality. This distance between Santiago and his creator fits Santiago to serve as a symbolic type of common human experience. Thus this novel can also be read as the representation of the popular American tradition of self-reliant individual victory over adversity in an orderly moral universe.