**Oum El Bouaghi University**

**Department of English**

**Module: ITL**

**Level: First Year**

**A Simple Analysis of *The Old Man and the Sea* (*by Ernest***

***Hemingway*)**

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“… the ocean is worth writing about just as a man is” (Qtd in. Bloom 2), Ernest Hemingway says in an interview with George Plimpton while commenting on his choice of the sea or the Gulf Stream as the central place or the container of the happenings comprising his 1952 short novel or novella *The Old Man and the Sea*. In order to understand how the old man is related to the sea in this novella, we need to analyze its six fictional elements namely: the plot, the characters, the narrative point of view, the setting, the theme, and the conflict.

**The Basic Fictional Elements in *The Old Man and the Sea***

**1-The Plot***:* Answering the question of what happens in *The Old Man and the Sea?* constitutes the plot of the novella’s story.

Santiago is an old man who goes without fishing for eighty-four days, the fact that led people in the Havana call him “Salao” meaning someone of a very bad luck. Despite people’s despised looks at him, the old man is still hopeful that the eighty fifth day will bring him luck and a very big fish. However, a big fish can be found only in the deepest parts of the ocean. Therefore, in this particular day of cold September, he goes further inside the Gulf Stream fetching for the big fish until he catches him with difficulty after four days of psychological and physical endurance. However, in his way back to the shores of the Gulf Stream, the old man’s relief from this dire struggle does not last very long since different schools of sharks attack him and his big fish. In the end, arriving to the sea’s shores, the exhausted Santiago is left only with the carcass of the marlin who has been eaten by the sharks.

Now we will analyze the plot according to its four sequential levels:

**1-1 Exposition**: refers to the initial situation of the story. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, the beginning of the story represents introducing the characters, their social conditions and where and when they are living. At this primary level, we encounter the old man or Santiago and his young friend Manlio and the fishing entourage in which these two characters are living characterized with poverty, and simplicity.

**1-2 Complication (1) (rising action):** starts with the Old man’s failure to catch a fish for eighty-four days which drives him to undertake a sea journey that lasted four days in order to catch a big fish. The action of catching a big fish gets complicated when Santiago found the marlin, then it rises gradually in his multiple attempts to catch the big fish that is struggling to defeat the old man who in turn is fighting to get the fish.

**1-3 Climax (1):** happens when the big fish is completely exhausted and can no longer endure hanger and pain; thus, he gives up and gets defeated by the old man.

**1-4 Resolution 1 (falling action1):** the old man is finally relaxed and returns to his homeland.

**1-5 Complication (2):** Suddenly a group of different types of sharks’ attacks Santiago’s boat and he enters a struggle with the sharks. This struggle sharpens gradually and the old man uses all the arms he has between his hands to fight against the incessant attacks of the sharks.

**1-6 Climax (2):** happens when he loses all his arms and his energy and he surrenders to the total defeat by the last group of the sharks who eat the rest of the meat covering the marlin’s carcass.

**1-7 Resolution (2):** The old man is completely beaten and he sails back to his homeland feeling nothing and thinking of nothing but of arriving safely and having a rest.

**2- Characters:** Because *the Old Man and the Sea* is a novella, it does not contain many characters. The characters are: Santiago (the old man), Manlio, the marlin, the sharks, and the fishermen.

1. **Santiago:** is **the protagonist** (the central character). He is **a round character** because he is fully developed and we can understand his personality and his motivations through his actions of bravery and dare, his thoughts of hope and sustenance. The old man is also a **dynamic character** as he undergoes many changes which occur especially in his journey to fish a big fish: we see him both in success and in failure.
2. **Manlio:** is a **flat minor character** because he is not well-developed. His personality traits are simple: we know just that he is Santiago’s dearest friend. The young boy is therefore classified as a **static character** because he is the same person from the beginning to the end.
3. **The marlin**: is a **dynamic character** because he goes through different levels of change and this can be seen in his challenging fight with the old man. He is also at times **the antagonist** of the story because he goes against the will and the wish of the old man who is the protagonist.
4. **The sharks**: represent **the antagonist** characters in the story and the enemy of Santiago because they cause the old man many losses and particularly the big loss of the big fish . They are **flat and static** because they are not well-developed characters and they do not undergo any changes.
5. **The fishermen**: are **stock characters** because they are unimportant characters who serve just the scene of the action.

**3- The Narrative Point of View**:

The narration of *The Old Man and the Sea* shifts between two narrative points of view namely: the first-person narrative perspective, and the third-person limited omniscient narrative point of view.

**a-The first-person narrator:** is the old man who acts as the storyteller of thestory and who uses the first-person pronouns (I/we) in many instances and especially in the many monologues that interrupt the actions in the story and tells us about the old man’s interior thoughts and feelings. For example, Santiago compares between the human endless mental capacities and the animals’ limited mental abilities:

He is a great fish and **I** must convince him, he thought. **I** must never let him learn his strength nor what he could do if he made his run. If **I** were him **I** would put in everything now and go until something broke. But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as **we** who kill them; although they are more noble and more able.

**b- The Third Limited Omniscient Narrative Perspective:** is an omniscient (unknown) narrator who tells the readers everything about one character (his thoughts, his feelings, his actions, his speeches). For example, the third limited omniscient narrator tells us about the old man’s empathy towards the big fish who is starving saying: “Then he was sorry for the great fish that had nothing to eat and his determination to kill him never relaxed in his sorrow for him”.

**4- Setting**: represents the combination of both the place and the time of the action in *The Old Man and the Sea.* The story takes place in the Gulf Stream in the Havana during four days after the eighty-fourth day of no-fish catching for the old man in the month of September.

**5- Theme (s):** *The Old Man and the Sea* treats many themes that are inspired from the fishing skill like: the oneness of man and nature. loneliness, sustenance, failure, Knowledge and luck.

**a-The Oneness of Man and Nature:** Embracing nature and becoming one with it is very important in building a strong relationship with the natural world. This idea is expressed by Santiago who says, “I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother.”

**b- loneliness:** Loneliness can sometimes cause a lot of pain to the human being especially in moments of despair and need**.** This theme appears when the old man is alone in the middle of sea with no company to ease his physical pain or to help him in catching the big fish. Santiago is missing Manlio’s company in moments of despair and need saying, for example, “If the boy were here he could rub it for me and loosen it down from the forearm”.

**c- Sustenance:** Sustenance is the key to success and the sign of self-respect. This theme is embodied in the old man’s continuous insistence on succeeding in catching the big fish despite the pain he endures. In this respect, the old man says, “-…My legs are all right. Also now I have gained on him in the question of sustenance.”

**d- Failure:** It is better to fail after trying your best than to fail because you never tried. We can see this when Santiago feels no regret over losing his big fish because he tried his best at defending the marlin.

**e-Knowledge and luck:** knowledge is the driving force of luck and success. This idea is manifested when Santiago says, “I may not be as strong as I think . . . But I know many tricks and I have resolution.” That is, his knowledge and his skill at fishing helped him to catch the big fish despite the difficulty of the mission.

**6- Conflict:** *The Old Man and the Sea* is full of internal and external struggles. For example:

**a-The internal conflict:** Person Vs himself/ the old man vs himself/ the old man Vs loneliness (emotional conflict).

**b-The external conflict:** Person Vs nature / the old man Vs the sharks (physical conflict).