

## ANALYSIS OF MAJOR CHARACTERS

### SANTIAGO

Santiago suffers terribly throughout *The Old Man and the Sea*. In the opening pages of the book, he has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish and has become the laughingstock of his small village. He then endures a long and grueling struggle with the marlin only to see his trophy catch destroyed by sharks. Yet, the destruction enables the old man to undergo a remarkable transformation, and he wrests triumph and renewed life from his seeming defeat. After all, Santiago is an old man whose physical existence is almost over, but the reader is assured that Santiago will persist through Manolin, who, like a disciple, awaits the old man's teachings and will make use of those lessons long after his teacher has died. Thus Santiago manages, perhaps, the most miraculous feat of all: he finds a way to prolong his life after death. Santiago's commitment to sailing out farther than any fisherman has before, to where the big fish promise to be, testifies to the depth of his pride. Yet, it also shows his determination to change his luck. Later, after the sharks have destroyed his prize marlin, Santiago chastises himself for his hubris (exaggerated pride), claiming that it has ruined both the marlin and himself. True as this might be, it is only half the picture. For Santiago's pride also enables him to achieve his most true and complete self. Furthermore, it helps him earn the deeper respect of the village fisherman and secures him the prized companionship of the boy—he knows that he will never have to endure such an epic struggle again. Santiago's pride is what enables him to endure, and it is perhaps endurance that matters most in Hemingway's conception of the world—a world in which death and destruction, as part of the natural order of things, are unavoidable. Hemingway seems to believe there are only two options: defeat or endurance until destruction; Santiago clearly chooses the latter. His stoic determination is mythic, nearly Christ-like in proportion. For three days, he holds fast to the line that links him to the fish, even though it cuts deeply into his palms, causes a crippling cramp in his left hand, and ruins his back. This physical pain allows Santiago to forge a connection with the marlin that goes beyond the literal link of the line: his bodily aches attest to the fact that he is well matched, that the fish is a worthy opponent, and that he

himself, because he is able to fight so hard, is a worthy fisherman. This connectedness to the world around him eventually elevates Santiago beyond what would otherwise be his defeat. Like Christ, to whom Santiago is unashamedly compared at the end of the novella, the old man's physical suffering leads to a more significant spiritual triumph.

## MANOLIN

Manolin is present only in the beginning and at the end of *The Old Man and the Sea*, but his presence is important because Manolin's devotion to Santiago highlights Santiago's value as a person and as a fisherman. Manolin demonstrates his love for Santiago openly. He makes sure that the old man has food, blankets, and can rest without being bothered. Despite Hemingway's insistence that his characters were a real old man and a real boy, Manolin's purity and singleness of purpose elevate him to the level of a symbolic character. Manolin's actions are not tainted by the confusion, ambivalence, or willfulness that typify adolescence. Instead, he is a companion who feels nothing but love and devotion. Hemingway does hint at the boy's resentment for his father, whose wishes Manolin obeys by abandoning the old man after forty days without catching a fish. This fact helps to establish the boy as a real human being, as a person with conflicted loyalties who faces difficult decisions. By the end of the book, however, the boy abandons his duty to his father, swearing that he will sail with the old man regardless of the consequences. He stands, in the novella's final pages, as a symbol of uncompromised love and fidelity. As the old man's apprentice, he also represents the life that will follow from death. His dedication to learning from the old man ensures that Santiago will live on.