

LECTURE 2

What is the role of the sea in " The Old Man and the Sea "

There is a sense in which the sea or nature in general ,can be seen as indifferent to man ,in this reading ,the plot of the story is completely arbitrary ,there is no reason why Santiago should catch the great fish , nor is there any reason why the fish should be eaten by the sharks.

Santiago is not rewarded or punished ,he is as much a part of the ecology of the sea as any of the fish he catches.

There is another sense ,however in which the sea functions as test , a kind of challenge to Santiago 's spirit as his code as a fisherman .

The central conflict of Hemingway 's novella is man vs. nature. Santiago is at odds with nature because he makes his living by it , as a fisherman .

However , the sea is not providing him with enough catch to survive on .He is able to catch the large marline , but the sea will not allow him to have it ,and he returns to shore with nothing but the skeleton.

The conflict is representative of man's conflict with overpowering forces in society ,and man's resilience against those forces .Despite being beaten by the sea ,Santiago goes to sleep dreaming of more adventures. He may have physically beaten ,but he is not emotionally beaten.

The need of society

"He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty –four days now without taking a fish ."

It has been suggested by a critic that from the first eight words of the novel , we are confronted with a world in which man's isolation is the most insistent truth , True as this is ,we should not forget Santiago 's profound awareness that "no man was ever alone on the sea ."this novel is the climax of Hemingway's long search for disengagement from the social world .

If the old man leaves society to go far out and "beyond all people in the world " an awareness of society and of his relationship to it are never far long out of his thoughts and his mind ,and in the end he returns back to his village where he finds it pleasant to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to himself and to the sea.