

Santiago's Spiritual Wealth

Yuan-zhen Peng

North China Electric Power University, English Department, Baoding, Hebei, People's Republic of China

Abstract

The old man named Santiago in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* was materially poor but spiritually wealthy. Hemingway presented us a strong-minded figure by putting him in contrast with the ordinary people, in fight with the shark, in connection with the little boy, and in harmony with the peaceful sea. What Hemingway thought highly of was apparently Santiago's struggle with and also his pride over difficulties in life.

Keywords: Santiago, Spiritual wealth, Struggle, Pride

1. Introduction

A loser is always alone, either because people cannot obtain any benefits from him or because people are afraid of and want to stay away from his misfortune in case they become unlucky due to his bad luck. Santiago was, to some extent, a definite loser. He came back home from the sea with his skiff empty time and time again, altogether amounting to 84 times. On the 85th time, he finally caught a huge fish after a long-time and severe struggle with it. Hemingway devoted much ink and many pages into the detailed description of the life-and-death battle. After the fight, the old man thought of his bed as a great thing. He sailed back into the little harbor, finally feeling tired. Others were asleep. He was exhausted yet with a sense of achievement.

This paper attempts to exhibit the spiritual wealth, which Hemingway intended to communicate to us through the story by analyzing the relationships between the old man and people surrounding him, between the old man and the sea and between the old man and the boy accompanying him. Santiago was isolated from ordinary world due to his bad luck and his strong spirit as well. The boy functioned as a link between him and the human world. As a matter of fact, the old man seemed to be born for conquering nature: the sea and the shark. Only when staying with the boy, the old man was considered to be connected with the real world. The thought of his wife made him feel lonely. The loneliness seems to be Hemingway's own loneliness deep in his mind.

Hemingway was a war correspondent in the Second World War. His language style can be summarized by one word: simple. This characteristic is not excluded in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Sentences in the story are not long, but with a large vocabulary of fishing, like "skiff" "lines" "gaff" "mast" etc. Short sentences give readers the sense of strength, which fits into the theme of the story Hemingway intended to communicate.

2. The Old Man and Ordinary People

People around Santiago gave first priority to the result of fishing: whether you caught fish or not. If you caught, you had good luck. They would be willing to be with you. If you were a loser in fishing, they would assume you were cursed with bad fortune. They would try to keep a distance with you as if they could be far away from bad luck in this way.

"In the first forty days a boy had been with him. But after forty days without a fish the boy's parents had told him that the old man was definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst form of unlucky, and they boy had gone at their orders in another boat which caught three good fish the first week." It is a sharp and immediate contrast: the old man's misfortune and the boy's family's good luck. It seems as if Hemingway intentionally put the old man in such a terrible situation so as that he could show his strong-mindedness in the face of such adversity. When the boy's parents were enjoying the fish they had caught from the sea, the old man was prepared to begin a journey to conquer the sea. Therefore, the big difference lies in the attitudes people and the old man adopted towards fishing. Santiago sailed not only because he wanted to catch a lot of fish but also because he longed to conquer the big fish and the vast sea. He wanted to become a great hero: a real man and a conqueror of nature and a victory of a fight. So it is not hard to find out that he focused on the pursuit of being a conqueror of difficulties in life other than fish itself.

The old man was determined to sail on the sea to fish. He was calm without resentment. "They sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man and he was not angry. Others, of the older fishermen, looked at him and were sad. But they did not show it and they speak politely about the current and the depths they had drifted their lines at and the steady good weather and of what they had seen." There were two kinds of attitudes among the fishermen towards Santiago's situation. The old men had experienced more difficulties than others, so they were compassionate with Santiago. They knew life was not as easy as the young fishermen thought. Santiago was tolerant for others' laughter at him. Or we can say he had the strength inside himself to resist the laughter at his failure. Or we can say he was optimistic about his next sailing.

"I must give him something more than the belly meat then. He is very thoughtful for us." "He" refers to "Martin". Santiago was not only grateful for the boy who brought supper for him but also thought about how to thank Martin later. He had a heart full of gratitude and kindness.

3. The Old Man and the Sea

The old man Santiago was obsessed with fishing in the sea. To be more specific, he was fascinated by the human pride over defeating the sea. When he returned with a fishless skiff, "The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat." Confronted with repeated defeats, he should have given up. However, his eyes were still full of hope and enthusiasm. "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." The relationship between the old man and the sea can be described as the conqueror and the conquered. "Fight them... I'll fight them until I die."

Santiago was old, really old except his eyes. "The old man's head was very old though and with his eyes closed there was no life in his face." Only when he opened his eyes can we see his active mind, which was enthusiastic with sailing in the sea. That was what his life was for.

When seeing flying birds above the sea, the old man was sympathetic towards the birds. In his eyes, the birds were so delicate while the ocean could be so cruel. The sea was beautiful and nice. Therefore, the old man appreciated the beauty and kindness of the sea but was strong enough to experience her cruelty. Even though the sea became bad-tempered now and then, the old man thought of the sea as a woman, which was considered to be tender in this sense, rather than an enemy. So again it is not hard to see that Santiago took him as part of the sea. He believed he belonged to the sea.

When the old man watched how a bird got fish, he began to think about his own big fish. It seemed the old man was the same as the bird flying above the sea. Both of them were looking for fish. The old man did not isolate himself from the animals in nature. Also, the old man loved to watch different kinds of animals and to observe them. Perhaps the sea became the real home of his spirit. He enjoyed staying on the sea and with the natural world.

Now that he regarded himself as part of the natural world, he would try to survive in it, just like a lion or a flying bird etc. The main part of the story was devoted to the description of the sea and of the old man's experience when he was alone together with the sea. It seemed that Hemingway, or we can also say the old man, was fascinated by the life on the sea. They were attracted by the scenery and the animal's life there. When carrying out the fight against the big fish, the old man really made great efforts to catch it. It was harsh for the old man to rely on limited food during the fierce battle against the big fish. His strong spirit sustained him to survive and finally managed to catch a huge fish. It is a symbol of victory although not much of the fish had been left. The sea represents nature. The old man never separated himself from it. But for survival and dignity, he never gave up despite the unimaginable difficulties.

4. The Old Man and the Boy

As they themselves viewed, they had faith in each other. Despite of the old man's bad luck and his parents' objec-

tion, the boy loved Santiago. He helped Santiago with his work. He even accompanied him in the sailing. He was a little boy, but he loved Santiago and even encouraged Santiago to be optimistic. He said to the old man after his 84th failure, "But remember how you went eighty-seven days without fish and then we caught big ones every day for three weeks." And it is more moving when Santiago told the boy that he knew the boy didn't leave him because of doubt. There exists deep love between the old and the young. They were like father and son or two good friends.

It is obvious that the old man was poor. "The shack was made of the tough bud-shields of the royal palm which are called *guano* and in it there was a bed, a table, one chair, and a place on the dirt floor to cook with charcoal." It is a brief description of Santiago's house. He lived a fairly simple and poor life: no more furniture or no more need, just a bed to sleep on, a place to cook. The boy clung to him spiritually, which reflects the power and influence of his strong spirits. At the end of the story, a tall and splendid image of the old man turned up in our mind. As a matter of fact, this image had been formed in the boy's mind ever since they were friends regardless of Santiago's bad luck. "And the best fisherman is you." That is how the boy viewed the old man. Therefore, the boy admired Santiago and was a follower of the old man, besides being his companion.

The boy is a care-taker of the old man's life. He helped Santiago put away the lines or gaff. He brought beer and sardines to the old man. He serves as a link between the old man's heroism and the real world. By talking with Manolin, Santiago got to know what had happened to people around him and what attitudes people had towards his failure and success.

Before setting out, Santiago had a dream. He dreamed of Africa. "He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor fights, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife. He only dreamed of places now and of the lions on the beach. They played like young cats in the dusk and he loved them as he loved the boy." So the old man dreamed of being a lion, being a king of nature. And he hoped that he was no alone and that the boy would be as strong and mighty as a lion. It was Santiago's dream to be part of nature. Two lions played in a forest. It was a picture full of fun and happiness. Santiago dreamed of returning to nature, with the boy if it was possible. This explanation also applies to the poor material life the old man led. That's to say, the old man wanted to live far away from the civilized material world. He longed to stay with or to stay in nature. It was fascinating for the old man to think of going back to Africa, and of living in the wild.

5. The Old Man and His Wife

The old man missed his wife who had passed away. "These were relics of his wife. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt." San-

tiago's loneliness is deep in his heart. He took down the picture of his wife, which is a reminder of his loneliness. He didn't want to feel lonely because he was born for fighting, for fighting the sea, for fighting the difficulties in life. No one else was as strong as him. No one else was so strong to continue sailing after 84 fishless days. Therefore, he resisted being tamed by loneliness, even though the feeling was brought by seeing the picture of his wife. His dream was to return to the wild nature and to play like a lion in the nature. Although he missed his wife, he preferred to be part of nature.

6. Conclusions

The old man Santiago was a hero in fighting the severity on the sea. Did Hemingway here want to regard nature as the enemy of human beings? Or did Hemingway want to exhibit the spiritual power human beings have by putting him in the fight against nature?

Is the old man Hemingway himself? It is known that Hemingway had a large amount of vocabulary in fishing. Anyway, it is certain that Hemingway had much experiences in fishing.

References

- [1] Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and The Sea*, Beijing: World Publishing Corporation, 1989.
- [2] Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and The Sea*, London: Arrow Books, 2004.
- [3] Baker Carlos. Hemingway as Artist. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1956.