

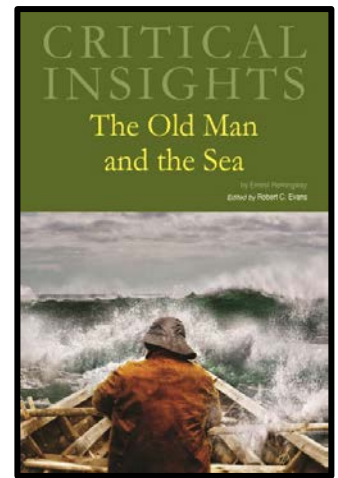
Critical Insights: The Old Man and The Sea

Critical insights: The Old Man and the Sea, much like the novella it reflects upon, is a study on the human condition: luck, success, aging and loss. The text is a collection of essays divided in sections, compiling four "Critical Insights" essays, which, together with the "Critical Readings" sections, offer a look at Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* from different perspectives. In the introductory essay (which is followed by a brief but thorough biography of Ernest Hemingway by the editor, Robert C. Evans), Susan Norton asks a key question: "Why then would anyone in the new millennium . . . turn for insight and inspiration to Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*?" (xvi) It is not, she argues, because of the shared likeness between the characters and our own lives. Nor is it because of the "philosophical world view of an aging mid-twentieth-century white male literary giant" (xvii). The answer lies in how the novella touches that which is named "the universal," the transferable skills it teaches on a psychological level, gaining depth of understanding of life's succession of moments, with all its gains and losses.

One of those losses, which Evans points to in "historical perspectives," is Hemingway's own dealing with the loss of youth and the process of aging. The old man is trying to grapple with his existential condition and has apprehension about how to do so. As a historical footprint of Hemingway's psyche, Evans references *Man and his years: an account of the first nations conference on aging*, a 1951 study in which Oscar R. Ewing observed the rise in the average age level of the United States. In relation to this emerging public interest in age, the novella would have afforded several planes of reflection to take different age-roles into account. The proposition would be a challenge by example: the enduring strength in the face of the loss of time. Sure, the sharks would come, but not before the glory. Aging and the passage of time is inevitable. Glory, on the other hand, is elusive, and takes a mixture of circumstances and elements. Luck and chance, whether the belief in it is shared or not, will play a role in this process. . . .-*The Hemingway Review*

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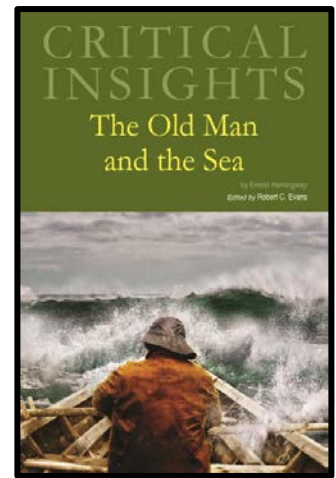
“In “The Gambling Fisherman and the shapes of chance in Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*,” Edwin Wong highlights how Santiago has struck out like DiMaggio, but he bets on his luck and hopes chance will turn in his favor. Even though he does break the streak, catching the great fish, the game of chance is not over. The sharks would smell the blood and ultimately come. Wong’s analysis emphasizes a second game of chance: Hemingway’s own: his intent on securing his place as a literary authority. “It ended up rigging the biggest fish of all: the 1954 Nobel Prize in Literature” (P.59), alluding to how loss and gain are tied together. The seemingly opposite forces sometime act as one, both in life and literature.

Eric Waggoner’s essay “Inside the current: A Taoist reading of *The Old Man and the Sea*” (referenced in Joyce Ahn’s “Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*: A Survey of Modern Critics”), we find a commentary on how chance, in its interplay between favor and disfavor, the seemingly opposite forces act as a balanced homogenous substance. This, in itself, embodies the Tao. The *Tao Te Ching* by Lao-tzu, a core text in Taoism, says the Tao is never truly definable: “it is hidden but always present. I don’t know who gave birth to it. It is older than God.” In all its mystery and ancientness, the Tao is akin to a universal flow, much like the currents in the sea, and has the capacity to carry small boats effortlessly on itself. In Waggoner’s reading, Santiago embodies a “spiritual traveler” (109), whose actions and thoughts are aligned with Taoist and Buddhist principles. Even though he is there to kill his “brother” (as Santiago refers to the fish numerous times throughout the novella), his attitude towards it and nature do reflect these teachings. The cyclical nature of the universe with its opposing forces can also be read in the final loss of the fish to the sharks, the very essence of the dichotomic forces at play. As Waggoner point out, Santiago’s resolve shows a man centered in the Tao, largely accepting of the outcome....”

-The Hemingway Review

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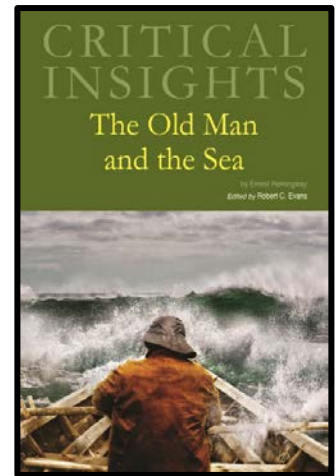


Critical Insights also includes several perspectives and readings that engage Hemingway's spiritual experiences and religious beliefs, even if by unconscious action. Essays in this vein include Matthew M. Thiele's "Everything is a Sin": Anthropocentrism and the Environment in *The Old Man and the Sea*" and Lauren Kathleen McClain's "Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*: A Roman Catholic Reading," both examine how Catholicism and Christian doctrine were key in certain phases of his career, including those in which he wrote his Pulitzer Prize-winning work. While McClain notes that Hemingway denied "at least once denied" (117) any deeper or spiritual meanings in the novel, the very nature of literature implies deeper meanings, whether conscious or not. Even the author himself would end up realizing this fact: in 1954 he would write Father Robert Brown, "You know about Santiago and you know the name is no accident" (117). This is a probable allusion to Santiago de Compostela, the Spanish title for St. James the Apostol, a theme which is expanded in the essay.

In the "Critical Readings" subsection, Courtney Petrucci "A Most Worthy Opponent: Man Against Nature in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*" examines this intersection of man and the natural world, while Jericho Williams's "Ernest Hemingway and the Art of the Fishing Story" provides a salient examination of fishing as a literary resource in Hemingway's craft. How fishing has been used to link religion and literature also plays an important part in the collection: if religion is not limited to metaphysical devotion to superior beings, it may also be a devoted action (and an act of devotion) with all its rites, ceremonies, and emotions that lead a person toward the transcendental. As Will Arndt notes in his essay "Hemingway's Religion: How Hemingway's Views on Fishing Relate to *The Old Man and the Sea*," Hemingway had an intimate—even ritualistic—bond with the activity of fishing. His devotion to the art of fishing was harnessed from an early age, in which he would fly-fish the streams of Michigan...."

-*The Hemingway Review*

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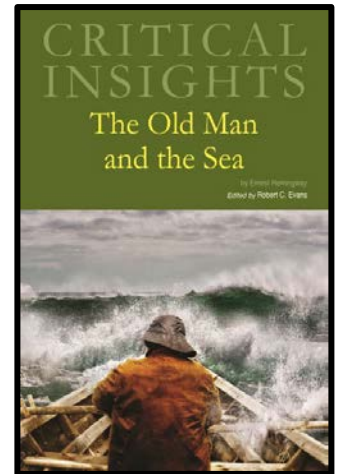
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“...In this there are the quasi-iconographic elements, as Arndt observes: “the nature of the fishing line, which connects the fisherman to life, the fish’s life, but also guarantees the fish’s death. The line is the tether linking both” (140). Many fishermen-authors, as Arndt points out, have a tendency to link spiritual elements to the sport (as is also the case in Norman Maclean’s *A River Runs Through It*): “For fishing’s veterans and enthusiasts, the readership participates in an introspective exchange of spiritually charged moments” (137). After all, it is a fight to the death, in which pain and sacrifice are no strangers. As Hemingway moves the practice to deep sea fishing, the pain exerted by the heavy rods on the back and shoulders fighting marlin and tuna fish (for hours on end) would have been akin to a cleansing physical sacrifice to deities. Hemingway writes “you will be purified and be able to enter unabashed into the presence of the very elder gods and they will make you welcome” (*By-line* 140). Arndt’s insights contextualize the act of fishing as a ritualistic, spiritual one, an analysis that binds Hemingway’s book and his deep-sea hobby to sacred dimensions of being.

In the final section of readings, Philip Booth (“Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* on the Screen: Three Versions”), James Plath (“Santiago Goes Hollywood: *The Old Man and the Sea* and the 1958 Screen Adaptation”), and Jordan Bailey (Closing Episodes in Three Film Versions of Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea*) take on the cinematographic angles of the novella, developing astute perspectives on how literature, film, and commercial factors influence the transition from print to screen. After these “Critical Readings,” the book concludes with a series of excellent photographs and a useful chronology of Hemingway’s life.

A clear strength of *Critical insights: The Old Man and the Sea* is how the collection offers different ways to approach this timeless work, to enrich a reader’s experience with one of Hemingway’s most outstanding books. In the cutting edge of literary scholarship, this text’s material is interdisciplinary but also multilateral, delivering many analyses that will allow readers to consider new to stand out in our time, and for posterity.” -The Hemingway Review

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