

# Comparative Study in Ernest Hemingway's Novels: The Old Man and the Sea and for Whom the Bell Tolls

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**Abstract:** The theme of human endurance is found in Ernest Hemingway's novel and two of his novels are selected to justify the title. They are *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. These novels portray the theme of human endurance in different perspective in different context. The novels are compared and contrasted. The endurance of the protagonists in both the novels is portrayed on various aspects. They give their level best to overcome the hardship. Their persistence towards the situation is the main theme of this article.

**Keywords:** Code hero, endurance, life experience, sea, war.

## 1. Introduction

Like any other national literature, American literature was shaped by the history of the country that produced it. The 20th century has been called the 'American Century'. There is a particular interest in modern and contemporary literature within an international and global frame in peace time and at war. In the 20th century fiction the little magazine helped the growth of the poetry and the era also contributed to development of its fiction. The number of important writers in this hundred year time span of American literature is remarkable. Some of the best writers such as Fitzgerald, William Faulkner, Henry Roth, and Nathanael West continued to explore the Modernist vein of the previous decade, only a few writers are timeless. Ernest Hemingway is one of them in the American chapter of world literature.

Ernest Miller Hemingway was born on July 21, 1899, in Oak Park, U.S. He was an American novelist and short-story writer; he was a sportsman, soldier, boxer, hunter, journalist, author and recipient of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954. He was noted for the intense masculinity of his writing and for his adventurous and widely publicized life. After getting graduation from high school in 1917, he was impatient for a less sheltered environment. He did not study in college, but then he went to Kansas City, where he was employed as a reporter for the Star. He was repeatedly rejected for military service because of a defective eye, but he managed to enter World War I as an ambulance driver for the American Red Cross. On July 8, 1918, when he was not 19 years old, he was injured on the Austro-

Italian front at Fossalta di Piave. He was decorated for heroism and hospitalized in Milan, where he fell in love with a Red Cross nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky, who declined to marry him. Hemingway's experience of Spain in war and peace was the result of the novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), a substantial and impressive work that some critics consider his finest novel. It was also the most successful of all his books as measured in sales. The novel is set during the Spanish Civil War, and it tells of Robert Jordan, an American volunteer, who is sent to join a guerrilla band behind the Nationalist lines in the Guadarrama Mountains. The novel is about Jordan's relations and experience with the varied personalities of the band, including the girl Maria, with whom he falls in love.

After the war in Europe, Hemingway returned to his home in Cuba and began to work seriously again. He also travelled widely and on a trip to Africa, he was injured in a plane crash. Later in 1953, he received the Pulitzer Prize in fiction for *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), a short heroic novel about an old Cuban fisherman, who experiences an extended struggle in the sea where he catches a giant marlin. Later it gets eaten by voracious sharks during the long voyage home. This book played an important role in gaining for Hemingway the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.

Hemingway took great pains with his work and he revised tirelessly. According to him, the style of the writer should be direct and personal and his words must be simple and vigorous. Hemingway words are simple and vigorous, burnished and uniquely brilliant and he was more fulfilled in his own requirements for good writing. Hemingway's novels reveal an essential message to his readers. That is that man is a helpless victim of a malevolent environment, an environment which inflicts violence and pain. He had a belief that life wounds all of us unreasonably: If we love something, we will lose it because life will rob us of it. His works *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* focus on the theme of human endurance. And thus, Hemingway was a genius and his stories are a great accomplishment not only in its style, but also regarding their theme. He went beyond all boundaries and ended up with impressive pieces of art.

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## 2. Compare and Contrast

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* are the result of his work as a journalist as he learned to report facts crisply and succinctly. In both the novels, Hemingway's characters are a representation of himself, their creator. From the beginning of his writing career in the 1920s, Hemingway's writing style is occasioned as a great deal of comment and controversy. A typical Hemingway novel or short story is written in simple and direct prose. His writings are the outcome of his experience.

The novel, *Old Man and the Sea*, begins in a small Cuban fishing village. Among Hemingway's literary heroes, Santiago is the next iteration in the long line. He is the man of action, tested by adversity, who lives by his own beliefs. Manolin observes that Santiago's eyes are still good and Santiago describes himself as a strange old man. He is strange in the sense that he is unconventional in his society. The old man is a poor man, whose best days are behind him. Since after forty days Santiago did not catch any fish, Manolin's parents have decided to send him out with another fisherman because they believe that Santiago is unlucky. Santiago realizes that Manolin's parents have their authority over him. Santiago tells Manolin, "If you were my boy, I'd take you out and gamble .... But you are your father's and your mother's and you are in a lucky boat."(6)

According to the settings the overall, the structure of the novel can be divided into three parts: they are the three phases of Santiago's cyclical journey from the land to the sea and then back to the land again. The cyclical journey also suggests the cyclical quality of human life and the various cycles of the natural world. The novel's second part takes place at sea, which is the central action and most dramatic moment. Although only about half the length of the novel's part is on the land, the first section is of the much lengthier part at sea, which adds much more than a simple build up of suspense. Hemingway demonstrates the considerable skills of Santiago as a fisherman, which he gained through a lifetime of experience. His dedication to his vocation and his capacity to cultivate has drawn upon the inspiration and imaginative vision which he needs to sustain himself when he needs to face the hardship. Even with the better days behind, Santiago is still a man in charge, who is still an expert. He knows what to do and knows the tricks of his fisherman's craft. Santiago is still a man, whose imaginative vision remains strong despite a lifetime of hardships that have hurt him, as the morning Sun has always hurt his eyes.

Santiago succeeds by killing the great marlin. He lashes it along the side of the skiff. He considers marlin as the beautiful creature that he admires and identifies and calls his brother seems to be bringing him in. Santiago considers himself better than the fish only through the tricks which he pursues. According to him the tricks and that capacity for imaginative vision makes him to be stronger and resolute. The death of the marlin represents Santiago's greatest victory. He desperately hopes to redeem his individual life. Santiago enjoys this victory for only an hour because later the sharks begin to come. Santiago is now the subject of nature's endless cycle and life's

tragedy. The third part of the novel is the brief part of the novel. It completes the cycle of Santiago's journey from the land to the sea and back to the land again. The story benefits from this controlled reporting and psychic distance because all the earlier preparations and foreshadowing assure that the emotional impact of Santiago's tragedy is not lost on readers, but instead resonates within them without melodrama that is without unearned sensationalism and extravagant emotional appeal. All the living creatures are both predators and preys in the natural order and all nourish one another. Santiago must accept his role in the natural order and the cycle of human existence, his suffering, endurance, and nobility in defeat also redeem his individual life. Santiago's epic catch is all practical and material worth. Eventually after wash out with the tide, the skeleton still manages to become a vehicle for the intrinsic values Santiago craves most to give his existence meaning and dignity.

The novel, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, begins in the spring of 1937, and Robert Jordan is an American explosives expert, who volunteers for the Republican side. The ironic and sceptical view of life is revealed by the distrust of Jordan's integrity in comrades-in-arms. This distrust of integrity is matched by Pablo, the Spanish guerilla leader who mistrusts Jordan, because he is a foreigner, who has come into his country to give him orders. Pablo has given up hope himself, yet resents the interference of an outsider into a war, which is ostensibly being waged for the benefit of the underrepresented:

If they know we are here and they hunt for us with planes, they will find us. If they send Moors to hunt us out, they will find us and we must go. I am tired of all this. You hear? He turned to Robert Jordan: What right have you, a foreigner, to come to me and tell me what I must do? (17) Pablo is not a selfless freedom fighter, but rather is only interested in the survival of himself and his group. Ironically, at the same time, there is a evident for his defeatist attitude. He feels that it is too futile to run and hide any longer, and so he will remain in the mountains until he is inevitably found and killed.

Jordan's states that "the bridge can be the point on which the future of the human race can turn" are important for two reasons. One, it reaffirms the central theme of *For Whom the Bell Tolls* that the necessity for a republican soldier to believe that the cause for which he both kills and risks lives will benefit his countrymen. The second is the affirmation. Each action a man makes, for example, blowing the bridge, this will have great consequence is a key to fulfil the role of a "code hero." According to Hemingway the Code Hero is the man who lives his life correctly by following the ideals of honour, courage and endurance in a world that is sometimes chaotic, often stressful, and always painful.

The conversation between Maria and Jordan strengthens their love affair. They experience the love at first sight. This enhances the situation which is necessary for the plot in wartime and to facilitate the encompassing three days. The following lines make it clear that Maria's love for Jordan will save her from the aftermath of the horrors of her captivity: He looked at her brown face and at the eyes that, since he had seen them, had never been as young as the rest of her face but that now were suddenly hungry and young and wanting. (70)

Maria herself is a mixture of immaturity and world-weariness, for she has experienced many of the horrors and few of the joys of life. The suggestions given by Pilar to Maria shows that in the novel, love is idealized and considered as the balm to heal Maria's previous sexual trauma, "if we do everything together, the other maybe never will have been." Just as Jordan has purified Maria with his love, Jordan's loneliness is abolished by his physical union with Maria. When the enemy aircraft overheads them they are frightened. It symbolizes the poor odds that the guerillas face. Indeed, the scattered terror the planes produce in these bold people foreshadows disaster. War has made the time short, and Hemingway constantly emphasizes this to justify the realism of his plot.

Jordan's death becomes irony of *For Whom the Bell Tolls*; his mission is accomplished, yet he must fulfil the omens, which have followed him during his "life in three days." Hemingway describes Jordan's pain vividly; indeed, we almost feel his broken leg with "the sharp bone and where it pressed against the skin." Jordan's goodbye to Maria reiterates the theme of their oneness: "Thou art all there will be of me." Having given his soul to Maria, Jordan can wait for his body to be "integrated" into the one which we first met him. Jordan's own acceptance of his death lets the reader consider that perhaps he did not die in vain, for he celebrates the greater understanding he has gained from his three days of life.

### 3. Conclusion

Many literary critics indeed see in each of Hemingway's characters a representation of himself, their creator. It could be part of his doctrine that consisted on writing about what the author knows by creating real characters but not writing about real people. The protagonists Santiago and Jordan are representation of Hemingway himself. Out of his emotions and

needs, as well as out of a conscious desire to create and win approval, the author projects, transforms, exaggerates, and a drama emerges, which is based on his life, but which has only a very tenuous relationship to the situation in its facts that might be observed from the outside. Hemingway's life is relevant to his fiction, but only relevant in the way that a dream might be relevant to the emotional stress that might have produced it.

Hemingway wrote about war, wounds, threat, alcoholism, love, disappointment, boxing, fishing and hunting. His stories take place in Spain, Paris, Africa, places that he had visited and even lived in. All these are found in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. Because of Hemingway's fame, because of his identification with his characters, because he advertised himself as writing from experience, and because he gradually failed to provide his fictions with sufficient distance, the attraction of the biographical fallacy has seemed nearly irresistible. Hemingway followed an unconventional path in his writing. He was an innovator and he was great in it.

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