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## HEMINGWAY'S EXTENDED VISION: THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

BY BICKFORD SYLVESTER

CLEANTH BROOKS wrote recently that the early story, "Fifty Grand," "presents Hemingway's basic theme quite as well as *The Old Man and the Sea*." "Nor do I think," he continued, "that Hemingway in his most recent story now finds the world any more meaningful than he once found it."<sup>1</sup> For once Mr. Brooks was following rather than initiating opinion. Ever since *The Old Man and the Sea* was published, critics have admitted that in its effect upon the reader the book is somehow different from Hemingway's earlier work. Those who like the difference and those who do not have tried to account for it in many ways, most of them familiar to readers of the early reviews and of the surprisingly few later readings of the story. But to a man commentators have assumed that whatever the story's new impact—whatever the nature of that affirmative power most readers have felt—it reflects no essential change in Hemingway's view of an inscrutable natural order in which, ultimately, man can play no part.<sup>2</sup> I want to suggest, on the contrary, that *The Old Man and the Sea* reveals Hemingway's successful achievement at last of a coherent metaphysical scheme—of a philosophical naturalism which, although largely mechanistic in principle, embraces the realm of human affairs and gives transcendent meaning to the harsh inevitabilities Hemingway has always insisted upon recording.

I think it is precisely the failure to recognize the presence of this informing scheme that has hampered the most searching students of the story. And what is equally important, I think this oversight largely accounts for several recent interpretative extremes. On the one hand we have Clinton S. Burhans with his well-intentioned portrayal of the aging Hemingway as an apologist for conventional views of human solidarity,<sup>3</sup> and on the other hand we have Robert P. Weeks supporting the *Encounter* critics by insisting that because the style and attitude of *The Old Man and the Sea* is different from that in Hemingway's earlier work, the book is a fuzzy-minded failure, inferior to the first short stories.<sup>4</sup>

Therefore, let me work into my analysis of the story by at least attempting to answer Mr. Burhans, whose article has been reprinted by Carlos Baker<sup>5</sup> and is often discussed in the classroom. In referring to Santiago's apology for

having "gone out so far,"<sup>6</sup> Burhans argues that the old man's sin is specifically that of "isolated individualism in a universe which dooms such individualism" (p. 447). But Santiago's has been a necessary transgression, says Burhans, because in the story "only through the isolated individualism and the pride which drive him beyond his true place in life does man develop the qualities and the wisdom which teach him the sin of such individualism and pride" (p. 453). Like Hemingway himself, Burhans thinks, Santiago has had wrongfully to withdraw from the social community in order finally to appreciate the old values of "human solidarity and interdependence" (p. 451). But rather than the homogeneously interdependent community Burhans posits, in which individualism must be viewed ironically, there are the passive dependents and the active, tested individuals, as always before in Hemingway's works. Indeed, the distinction in the story between those who break the way for themselves and those who depend upon others has been clearly identified by Leo Gurko. As Gurko points out, among all the living creatures in the

<sup>1</sup> *The Hidden God: Studies in Hemingway, Faulkner, Yeats, Eliot, and Warren* (New Haven, 1963), p. 14.

<sup>2</sup> It is only fair to say that Leo Gurko has provocatively referred to the world of the story as "no longer a bleak trap . . . but a meaningful integrated structure": "*The Old Man and the Sea*," *CE*, xvii (October 1955), 14. Yet this suggestive remark is unfortunately so undeveloped as to be enigmatic, and I am reluctant to classify it.

<sup>3</sup> "*The Old Man and the Sea: Hemingway's Tragic Vision of Man*," *AL*, xxxi (January 1960), 446-455. Further references are included in my text.

<sup>4</sup> "Fakery in *The Old Man and the Sea*," *CE*, xxiv (December 1962), 188-192. Falling prey to the same logic, Philip Toynbee grows shrill as he reviews comment in *Hemingway and His Critics*, ed. Carlos Baker (New York, 1961): *The Old Man and the Sea* "is meretricious from beginning to end, . . . the archaic false simplicities of its style are insufferable, . . . the sentimentality is flagrant and outrageous and . . . the myth is tediously enforced." See *Encounter*, xvii (October 1961), 87. Dwight Macdonald agrees in "Ernest Hemingway," *Encounter*, xviii (January 1962), 121: *The Old Man and the Sea* is simply "The Undeclared," "transposed from a spare, austere style into a slack, fake-biblical style which retains the mannerisms and omits the virtues" of the earlier work.

<sup>5</sup> In *Hemingway and His Critics*, pp. 259-268, and *Ernest Hemingway: Critiques of Four Major Novels* (New York, 1962), pp. 150-155.

<sup>6</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea* (New York, 1952), p. 121. Further references will be included in my text accompanied by the designation *OMAS*.

story, including the men, those who are fearless and aggressive are conspicuously portrayed as clean, beautiful, and aesthetically satisfying in their behavior. On the other hand, the "hateful," "bad smelling" scavengers (*OMAS*, p. 119) are uniformly disgusting, dishonest, and awkward.<sup>7</sup> Now the guilt for which Santiago apologizes cannot be that of individualism if individualism is the only mode of behavior sympathetically portrayed. Nor, conversely, can interdependence be the positive norm if it is also evil and dirty.

Then there is a second fundamental error in Burhans' thesis. He insists that "the theme of solidarity and interdependence pervades the action and provides the structural framework within which the old man's heroic individualism and his love for his fellow creatures appear and function" (p. 447). Yet according to most readings—all of which are true, Burhans allows—the basic structural principle of the story is that of natural parallels to man's experience. Thus no framework essentially human in focus, as is Burhans', can include the deepest origins of the story's meaning. We are presented, then, not with a pragmatic ethic spun "out of man himself," as Burhans remarks (p. 455), quoting E. M. Halliday,<sup>8</sup> but specifically out of man's experience of the rest of nature.

The community element should therefore be considered as a motif somehow ancillary to the theme of natural precedence which accounts for the rich complexity of the story. Burhans' primary assumption, of course, is that Hemingway has increasingly turned from his earlier concern with the universals of nature to concentrate upon the relations between men (p. 447), and he cites *For Whom the Bell Tolls* as indicative. Still convinced of the inscrutability of the universe, Burhans thinks, Hemingway has settled, finally, for the warmth that men can derive from each other. If an objective appraisal of *all* of *The Old Man and the Sea* establishes anything, however, it is that this particular direction in Hemingway's thought and art has reversed since *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. If the theme of the novel is that "no man is an island," the theme of the story is that *mankind* is not an island. The idea can be found in the Old Testament sermon from which Hemingway took the title of his first novel: "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth / beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one / dieth so dieth the other; yea, they have all one / breath; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a / beast" (Ecclesiastes iii.19). Long ago Hemingway declared of social

concerns in general: "Let those who want to save the world if you can get to see it clear and as a whole."<sup>9</sup> And I think that the serenity which readers find new in *The Old Man and the Sea* springs from Hemingway's discovery at last of a quintessential natural truth which gives meaning to all struggles, including man's.

What is this essential perception, then, and how does it reconcile Santiago's individualism with the passivity of the shallow water fisherman? There is indeed in *The Old Man and the Sea* a greater tolerance shown toward the total community than ever before in Hemingway's work. Burhans, like many reviewers,<sup>10</sup> is right in perceiving this much. But rather than interdependence, there is implied the dependence of the many upon the one, of the passive community upon a potent individual redeemer who, in his dependence upon a principle basic to universal order, is independent of all men. This is the implication of the Calvary allusions and it is, furthermore, consistent with the individualism stressed by the system of natural parallels throughout the story. Without going into extensive illustration, I want to outline what I mean.

A careful study of the behavior of the creatures Santiago encounters at sea reveals an affirmation of the values of strength, total immersion in activity, and the exploitation of adversity. Several species include exceptional individual members whose aggression and desire for intensity of experience lead them to oppose natural manifestations. Thus the great marlin turns against the Gulf Stream as soon as he is hooked (*OMAS*, p. 50), and refuses to yield to the current until the moment of his death. Yet his blue stripes, the color of the sea, reveal that in his paradoxical opposition to the sea he is closer to her than are the brown surface fish who always swim with the current.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Gurko, p. 12.

<sup>8</sup> "Hemingway's Ambiguity: Symbolism and Irony," *AL*, xxvii (March 1956), 3.

<sup>9</sup> *Death in the Afternoon* (New York, 1932), p. 148.

<sup>10</sup> See especially Robert Gorham Davis' review in *The New York Times Book Review*, 7 September 1952, p. 1, and J. Donald Adams, "Speaking of Books," *The New York Times Book Review*, 21 September 1952, p. 2.

<sup>11</sup> The carefully reported navigational details of the marlin's progress, scrupulously distinguishing as they do between the direction in which he is facing and the direction in which he is actually moving at key points in his run, reveal that the current, moving at a speed greater than his and at a forty-five degree angle to his initial heading, gradually peels him off to the east (*OMAS*, pp. 49, 50-51, 58, 74, 93, and 94). His heading in relation to the current is thus presented as a gauge of his vitality. And the fact that he

Accordingly, the other champions of the story, who each bear the color of the sea, also inherit a defiance of their mother's whims. The blue-eyed Santiago (*OMAS*, p. 10), who has only his hands between himself and the sea (no buoys or machines [*OMAS*, p. 32]), only the food the sea proffers (*OMAS*, p. 30), and whose very sun-cancer is significantly benign (*OMAS*, p. 9), also demonstrates that the sea bestows her greatest favors upon those who make their own conditions. Like the marlin, the blue-backed Mako shark who "would do exactly what he wished" (*OMAS*, p. 111), and the golden dolphin who shows purple stripes when he is "truly hungry" enough to take any risk (*OMAS*, p. 79), Santiago opposes the sea when her vagaries conflict with his purpose. He crowds the current (*OMAS*, p. 36), and he gladly risks the dangerous hurricane months in which, significantly, the biggest fish are to be had (*OMAS*, p. 67).

Indeed, by a chain of associations pervading the texture of the story, opposition to nature is paradoxically revealed as necessary to vitality in the natural field upon which the action takes place. Both the marlin and the "September" fisherman are old (*OMAS*, pp. 46 and 19), oriented away from that phase of the life cycle when the natural sources of energy flow freely. But the greater concentration thus required of them yields the greater intensity which is an indication of life itself.<sup>12</sup> All implications accrue, eventually, to expose a fundamental natural principle of harmonious opposition. Hence flow subsidiary motifs which can also best be stated as oxymorons: compassionate violence, comfortable pain, life in death, aged strength, and victorious defeat. These provide the structure of the story.

Each of the exceptional individuals of the various species has something "strange" about his eyes (*OMAS*, pp. 15, 107, and 112) which suggests his perception of the paradoxical logic of nature.<sup>13</sup> Acting accordingly, each adopts a mode of behavior which leads ultimately to his death in an intense contest with a champion from another species. But upon this contact, which always leads to impossible odds for one, depends the vital interplay of nature, as I shall explain presently. "I killed the shark that hit my fish," says Santiago, suggesting the vital round (*OMAS*, p. 113). And Santiago, because of his acceptance of the terrible odds, is able to become "the towing bitt" (*OMAS*, p. 49), the essential link, between humanity and the natural world. Christlike, he must "cushion the pull of the line" with his body (*OMAS*, p. 85). Like the

marlin, and the Mako who is also part of the scheme, he bears in calm solitude the terrible brunt of the only genuine communion with nature, and thus in his agony he redeems the unextended ones, the shallow water fishermen who make up most of the human race. The parasitical surface fish and the scavenger sharks, of course, fill out the rest of the other two species involved in the circular scheme.

Very subtly, then, the rationale emerges in which Hemingway is at last able to see some transcendent purpose in the stringent individualism he has hitherto regarded, bleakly, as an end in itself. It is a rationale, I think, in which the exceptional performer's position is secure enough to permit his serene acceptance of his fellows. The majority was not born to be like him and yet, dependent upon him, it has its place in the world. Thus, I suggest, we can account for Santiago's compassionate understanding of the shallow water fishermen, without forcing ourselves to ignore the positive emphasis upon exceptional achievement pervasive in the story.

Indeed, it is entirely wrong to regard Santiago's individual experience as valuable only as a lesson in the folly of isolated activity, and to suggest, therefore, that Santiago's reward comes at the end of his journey as he rejoins the community. For Santiago's reward comes, not on land but at the farthest point in his circular voyage, at the moment of his greatest isolation from other men. It comes when he plunges his lance into his quarry.

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comes up to die when he is at last facing exactly in the direction of the flow suggests that for him congruence with nature is tantamount to death, just as opposition to her equals life.

<sup>12</sup> Santiago has always had a significant affinity for the evening sun: "It has more force in the evening too. But in the morning it is painful" (*OMAS*, p. 36). Attuned to the strenuous purity of experience objectified by the intense evening light, he finds the unconcentrated and diffuse morning light alien and distasteful.

<sup>13</sup> Santiago remarks, "Once I could see quite well in the dark. Not in the absolute dark. But almost as a cat sees" (*OMAS*, p. 74). This reference to relative darkness reverberates in the "blackness," the diminution of corporeal sight, that later overcomes Santiago as he kills the marlin, yet permits the glimmer of spiritual insight which (as I shall consider presently) is his reward for having immersed himself in opposition to nature. Such insight is, of course, beyond the "younger fishermen," who never extend themselves against the sea. It is their conventional vision, in which the sea as mother should reward an exploitative relationship based upon passive cooperation with her moods and currents, that leads them to deny her maternity—to speak of her as masculine—because she disappoints their expectations (*OMAS*, pp. 32-33).

As Santiago concludes his awesome chase, the fish leaps high out of the water and dies. The marlin seems at the summit of his death leap "to hang in the air" above his slayer (*OMAS*, p. 104). Surely this is another of the moments of cessation occurring at the high points in the circular experiences of all Hemingway's major heroes, and serving to define the achievement of transcendent experience. Yet the point has not been commented upon. Frederic I. Carpenter, in a discussion of intensified experience in Hemingway's work generally, has noted that Santiago's realistic performance of the "ritual techniques of his trade," and his subsequent identification of "the intensity of his own suffering with that of the fish," contribute to an "occasional mysticism" in the story.<sup>14</sup> Some attention to the moment of the marlin's death, however, would have given greater point to Carpenter's thesis. For as the fish seems to Santiago to hang "motionless in the sky" before it falls (*OMAS*, p. 109), the old man is (like Robert Jordan when he feels the "earth move out and away" from him and Maria)<sup>15</sup> undergoing a sensation of timelessness in time—an ecstatic perception of what Carpenter calls the "eternal now." Santiago "was sure there was some great strangeness and he could not believe it" (*OMAS*, p. 109). The contest in which Santiago has been engaged is presented as a pattern of action in time so exactly in accord with what has always happened everywhere that there is no discrepancy between the immediate enactment and the eternal act. As the "now" and the perpetual become fused, relativity ceases; thus for the participants in the action all sensation of motion disappears. Santiago's reward for his struggle is, therefore, not in the nature of a lesson at all. It is that Lear-like perception of the eternal which the very rare creature can wrest from the round of existence, the one boon that cannot be reclaimed by the sea which has provided it.

But what is of greater importance is that Santiago's moment of "strangeness" marks the first time in Hemingway's major fiction in which the experience of ultimate participation culminates a hero's main endeavor. There are Jake Barnes' peaceful fishing trip above Burguete, and Lieutenant Henry's idyllic winter interlude away from the war; and Robert Jordan's ecstasy occurs, of course, during a lull in his preparation for the bridge. Thus each earlier case clearly suggests that the rest of the universe operates only according to the frictionless concord implicit in moments of ideal love—as a Shelleyan

cosmos, actually—and that man's manifest dedication to violence must leave him ultimately cut off from consonance with all that is universal and abiding, merely tantalized and diminished by what he has glimpsed. But Santiago's vision culminates his commitment to worldly struggle. Thus the compassionate violence implicit in his slaying of the marlin he loves is revealed as the key to a universal harmony in which man may partake. Hemingway has at last been able to employ the central paradox of the bullfight and the hunt<sup>16</sup> so as successfully to reconcile the forces of

<sup>14</sup> "Hemingway Achieves the Fifth Dimension," *PMLA*, LXIX (September 1954), 717. Cf. two subsequent analyses of Hemingway's use of time: Keiichi Harada, "The Marlin and the Shark: A Note on *The Old Man and the Sea*," in *Hemingway and his Critics*, pp. 274-276, and Earl Rovit, *Ernest Hemingway* (New York, 1963), pp. 130-146 esp.

<sup>15</sup> *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (New York, 1940), p. 159. Further references will be included in my text accompanied by the designation *FWBT*.

<sup>16</sup> Santiago's wonder and his admiration for his victim echo especially Hemingway's description of his response to the kudo he has killed in the climactic scene of *Green Hills of Africa* (New York, 1935): cf. "I stooped over and touched [the kudo] to try to believe it" (p. 231), and Santiago's "I want . . . to touch and to feel him . . . he could not believe his size . . . he could not believe it" (*OMAS*, pp. 105-106, 109). Cf. also Hemingway's initial refusal to watch as his quarry is skinned (*Green Hills of Africa*, p. 235), and Santiago's reluctance to look at his mutilated catch (*OMAS*, p. 121).

The matador motif in the story has been discussed, in contexts different from mine, by Melvin Backman, "Hemingway: The Matador and the Crucified," *MFS*, I (August 1955), 2-11, Joseph Waldmeir, "Confiteor Hominem: Ernest Hemingway's Religion of Man," *PMASAL*, XLII (1957), 354-355, and Robert O. Stephens, "Hemingway's Old Man and the Iceberg," *MFS*, VII (Winter 1962), 301-302. Backman (p. 10) calls attention to some similarities between the moment of the marlin's death and that of the bull's, but there are several specific details he overlooks. The calm deliberateness of both man and fish gives the entire conclusion of the struggle a ritualistic quality; Santiago's foreknowledge and premeditation of his every act, especially once the fish starts to circle, make his execution of the last stage of the combat as stylized and inevitable as that of the *faena*. The fish has been guided from his original position one-hundred fathoms away through progressively tighter circles until he is made to pass close by the old man several times, much as the bull is drawn in by the matador during the final series of passes (see Stephens, p. 302). As the two figures are at last united, the man directs his weapon behind the great chest fin that rises "into the air to the altitude of the old man's chest" (*OMAS*, p. 103). At the crucial moment, then, each reaches for the other's heart, as do the matador and the bull—the one with the sword and the other with the menacing horn. And the description of the death-thrust itself (when in accord with the story's theme of complete extension Santiago can touch the marlin's heart—achieve a union of love—only by pushing a second time on the shaft [*OMAS*, p. 105]) verbally echoes a celebrated passage in *Death in the Afternoon*. Cf. "He felt the iron go in and he leaned on it and drove it fur-

love and violence which have hitherto remained ironically separated in his major works of fiction.

His achievement is partly foreshadowed by two incidents in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. As Jordan sets up a machine gun, soon after his experience of sexual transport with Maria, she begs him to tell her that he loves her and at the same time to let her help him shoot. But Jordan still lives in the world of all Hemingway's earlier heroes, a world in which there can be no meeting ground for love and killing:

"Dejamos. Get thee back. One does not do that and love all at the same moment."

"I want to hold the legs of the gun and while it speaks love thee all in the same moment."

"Thou art crazy. Get thee back now." (*FWBT*, p. 270)

Only in the last chapter of the novel, just before he crosses the fatal road, does Jordan learn better.

He had never thought that you could know that there was a woman if there was battle; nor that if there was a woman that she should have breasts small, round and tight against you through a shirt; *nor that they, the breasts, could know about the two of them in battle*. But it was true and he thought, good. That's good. (*FWBT*, p. 456, italics mine)

It is good because it means that under certain conditions violence and love turn on the same axis, that the course of Jordan's return to worldly entanglement does not lead away from the meaningful continuity of the universe, but is only another part of its endless flux. Jordan's thoughts at this point mark a major advance in Hemingway's work, I think, for they express the insight which is modified and developed in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Jordan seems to realize as he lies alone at the end of the novel that by killing "to prevent something worse from happening to other people" (*FWBT*, p. 380) he is, in effect, committing an act of love.<sup>17</sup> And as he presses himself against the forest floor, his eyes fixed on the white clouds (*FWBT*, p. 471), there is the suggestion that he is once again caught up in natural order as he had been when making love to Maria.

Yet his violent delaying action against the fascists is to be, after all, not in itself an act of love, but an act in the service of love. Clearly Jordan's second feeling of consonance with nature is but a reward for his championship of the blissful ideal which informs the love scene. His experience is emphatically more intense in the earlier scene than in the later one. It is not until

*The Old Man and the Sea*, therefore, when Hemingway shifts his focus from human affairs to the vital contact between species—and between the creatures and the rest of nature—that he manages to compress the bases for Jordan's separate mystical experiences into a single culminative moment.

Now the fact that Hemingway is able at last to see the world "clear and as a whole" only by perceiving that love and violence may be simultaneously expressed—and that in order to do so he has had to replace the protective aspect of Jordan's love by Santiago's sense of identification with a respected adversary—leaves his new conception obviously vulnerable to all sorts of value judgments. His vision of something rather like a cosmic bull ring invites us to question whether there are not metaphysical, social, and even biological complexities which cannot be crowded into such an arena.<sup>18</sup> But I am concerned here with the specific way in which Hemingway extends *his* view of reality so as to discover a harmony between human and natural affairs as he sees them. And there is evidence beyond his published work that Hemingway was preoccupied during the last of his productive period with employing the paradoxical fusion of affection and violence more centrally in his fiction than he ever had earlier. In 1951 Professor Harry Burns of the University of Washington read manuscripts of *The Old Man and the Sea* and of the novella now tentatively entitled *The Sea Chase*, one of the series of works that we have heard Hemingway originally intended to publish with *The Old Man and the Sea*. Professor Burns has given me permission to report that Hemingway had been working back and forth between these other units and *The Old Man and the Sea* intermittently for ten years. He had indeed thought of publishing the whole group together.

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ther and then pushed all his weight after it" (*OMAS*, pp. 103-104), and "The beauty of the moment of killing is that flash when . . . the sword goes all the way in, the man leaning after it" (*Death in the Afternoon*, p. 247).

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Theodore Bardacke, "Hemingway's Women," in *Ernest Hemingway, The Man and His Work*, ed. J. M. McCaffery (Cleveland, 1950), p. 350: the love between Jordan and Maria is "of the social conflict rather than in opposition to it."

<sup>18</sup> The role of procreative love would seem to be both threatened and threatening, for example. This is an implication, not only of the present study, but of Verne H. Bovie's searching analysis of the male and female principles in Hemingway's work. See "The Evolution of a Myth: A Study of the Major Symbols in the Works of Ernest Hemingway," unpubl. diss. (Pennsylvania, 1955), Ch. viii esp.

And *The Sea Chase*, the other unit most nearly in finished form in 1951, dealt with an anti-submarine captain in the Caribbean whose animosity toward an enemy submarine commander developed into grudging admiration and finally into love, even as he intensified a deadly pursuit of his unseen undersea victim. The thematic parallel to *The Old Man and the Sea* is striking, of course.

But to return to *The Old Man and the Sea* itself, Santiago's epiphany is not our only indication that in their tense struggles the champions in the story act in accord with natural order. The marlin's fight lasts exactly forty-eight hours; it is seventy-two hours, from morning to morning, between Santiago's departure and his resurgence of vitality at the story's end; and another great primitive up against invincible odds, the "Great negro from Cienfuegos" whom Santiago defeats in "the hand game," struggles just twenty-four hours even—from dawn to dawn (*OMAS*, pp. 76-78). Thus the champions' ordeals achieve temporal synchronization with the larger units of natural order. Furthermore, the marlin's "strange" death occurs at noon. He dies at the crest of a leap as the sun is at its apex. And we are reminded that for the sun, too, the moment of defeat is also one of supreme victory.<sup>19</sup> The sun also falls, but like the marlin, the Negro, and the fisherman, it has lasted all the way around. Nor can we forget the shape of Santiago's entire sea-journey, far out to the moment of brief stasis in which victory and defeat are in fleeting balance—and then the return to port. This temporal and spatial coincidence between the journey of the sun and the various rounds of combat implies consonance with an order which is supra-animate—which is universal in the observable physical world.

Moreover, the emphasis upon temporal completion suggests specifically that nature sanctions the champions' intuitive maintenance of a precise degree of intensity—the source of that good pain, "the pain of life" (*OMAS*, p. 128), which comes to Santiago "easily and smoothly" (*OMAS*, p. 73, italics mine).<sup>20</sup> The marlin's aggressive reaction to the current is tempered by his calmness. He does not seek brief balance, but a prolonged approximate balance. Rather than run himself out in a futile flurry as do lesser fish (*OMAS*, p. 66), or break the line and immediately free himself, Hemingway makes clear (*OMAS*, p. 69), he seems to accept his inevitable sacrifice and, like Santiago against the sharks, seek rather to endure than to prevail—to last a

certain amount of time while fighting all the way. It is this ideal degree of force—not great enough to end the tension, and yet enough to keep up as much tension as possible—which earns him his harmony with the sun, and which emerges as the final dynamic principle of natural perpetuity. (The fishing line, stretched just under the breaking-point throughout the chase, is a suggestive symbol.) The fish has left just enough strength for his great leap as he dies, and Hemingway remarks, "Then the fish came alive, with his death in him" (*OMAS*, p. 104, italics mine). The marlin has found the most intense life in this kind of death—in having lasted all the way around while retaining enough strength to meet the final thrust of the harpoon with the same resolute aggression he has shown toward the stream and the weight of the boat.

And the sharks are to the man what the man and current have been to the fish. Led by the champion shark, they are the final overwhelming natural odds against which a champion must pit himself. As they do their work Santiago's material gain and his strength are eaten away as had been the marlin's heading against the Gulf Stream, so that the reader feels a parallel between the old man's continued struggle after his marketable take is gone and the marlin's stubborn resistance even when he is turned "almost east" with the current (*OMAS*, p. 93). But like the fish the man has paced himself. He fights the sharks until "something" in his chest is broken (just as the fish's heart had been pierced by the harpoon) and he notices the "coppery" taste of his blood in his mouth (*OMAS*, p. 131). Yet even at the end of the story, as he tells the boy of his broken chest, he undergoes a resurgence of life and plans another trip. He, too, comes alive "with his death in him." He will die. That is why the boy is "crying again" as he leaves the old man sleeping (*OMAS*, p. 139). Death is the final concomitant of life in a champion's combat with

<sup>19</sup> It is perhaps worth remembering also that while Christ did not die at noon, His ordeal began then, as does the marlin's, and that the observers of His death also had a strange vision.

<sup>20</sup> See also *OMAS*, p. 71: Santiago is "comfortable but suffering" as he rides out the last night of the chase. Further emphasis upon the ultimate harmony implicit in intense suffering is subtly embodied in minor statements of the Calvary motif. "Rest gently now against the wood," Santiago tells himself as he huddles in the bow (*OMAS*, p. 73, italics mine); and the great Negro's hand is described as having been forced down until it "rested on the wood" (*OMAS*, p. 77). In the context of this story, of course, Christ is seen to have been comfortable in His agony. Cf. Backman, pp. 10-11.

nature. And the only reason Santiago's death is not portrayed within the story is that his heart, like that of the great turtle he loves, will continue to beat "for hours after he has been cut up and butchered" (*OMAS*, p. 41).

But what matters is that as a champion he has contributed to the order of the universe: that like the great creatures he has opposed he possesses innate qualities which have permitted him to bring his struggle to cyclical completion without relaxing the tension of life even though he has felt his death in him.<sup>21</sup> I doubt that Hemingway could have found a more felicitous representation of this orderly opposition of forces than the twenty-four-hour hand-game which ends the great Negro's competitive career. As we have observed at length, the mechanistic principle of life objectified in that scene reverberates throughout the story. It insinuates itself kinesthetically into our nerves and muscles as we read. And this is what accounts, I suggest, for much of that extraordinary artistic impact which has for so long intrigued interpreters and eluded definition.

Clearly, then, the value of the rare act is found in the act itself, not in a reaction against it, as Burhans' thesis demands, nor even primarily in its power to inspire others in the community or yield satisfaction for its participants, as Earl Rovit has suggested.<sup>22</sup> Such an act—such a life—on the part of its exceptional creatures is valuable as the only means whereby each species is permitted its contribution to the systematic tension of the universe. And this contribution is the object of that mythic quest which Rovit quite rightly perceives in Santiago's journey.<sup>23</sup>

The sin for which Santiago apologizes, therefore, is not that of having left his "true place in the world," as Burhans claims (p. 453). Yet contrary to Rovit's feeling,<sup>24</sup> there is an element of tragic sin in the story. There is the suggestion that Santiago's slaying of the marlin and his responsibility for its mutilation are sins, and that they are tragic precisely because they are a necessary result of his behavior as a champion of his species. In Hemingway's work, generally, the destruction of beauty is a sin. We are reminded of the rhetorical question in *Death in the Afternoon*: "Do you know the sin it would be to ruffle the arrangement of the feathers on a hawk's neck if they could never be replaced?"<sup>25</sup> And within the context of *The Old Man and the Sea* Santiago's sin is even greater. For he has destroyed the huge fish's power of opposition, his spiritual as well as his physical beauty. Santiago does not want to look at the fish after the sharks have

started their attack because, "drained of blood and awash he looked the colour of the silver backing of a mirror and his stripes still showed" (*OMAS*, p. 121). The association with a mirror, which reflects whatever is before it, suggests complete passivity; and the stripes still show to remind Santiago that this champion once was predominantly blue, bright with the color of opposition. At the end of the story the lifeless tail of the great fish who has so resolutely battled the powerful current lifts and swings "with the tide," and his stripped skeleton waits "to go out with the tide" (*OMAS*, p. 139). Santiago has rendered his respected adversary devoid of autonomy in a world where autonomy is the supreme virtue.

Indeed, the old man's human consciousness of his guilt, his awareness that in order to be right he must also be wrong, is the most formidable obstacle to resolution which he encounters during his voyage. Perhaps this uniquely human handicap is the hampering "bone spur" Santiago ponders as he thinks of DiMaggio: "Maybe we have them without knowing of it," he reflects (*OMAS*, p. 107). At any rate, it is the one valid element of humanism in the story. In overcoming it Santiago demonstrates the one thing "that a man can do" that is not duplicated by the other natural aristocrats. In this limited sense the story can be seen as profoundly humanistic, as a modern parable of man's fallen state in which the universe requires man to overcome more in order to achieve what is necessary for all creatures.<sup>26</sup> But no reading should ignore the fundamental emphasis upon natural aristocracy which alone gives the book its value as a commentary upon man.

It is therefore unfortunate that Burhans, who is the only critic to direct sufficient attention to the concept of necessary sin in *The Old Man and the Sea*, is led astray by his need to make

<sup>21</sup> We notice here that the champion shark also "would not accept" his death, and plowed over the water after being fatally stabbed (*OMAS*, p. 113).

<sup>22</sup> *Ernest Hemingway*, pp. 89-90.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 88.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 90.

<sup>25</sup> P. 159.

<sup>26</sup> Although restrictive, such a conception of human uniqueness adequately accounts, I think, for the provisional title "The Dignity of Man," which Carlos Baker reports Hemingway to have considered for the story. See Baker's introduction in the collection, *Three Novels* (New York, 1962), p. vii. Nor should we overlook Hemingway's probable awareness of the implication that man is most dignified when he accepts and exploits in himself those traits most universal in nature.



Hemingway into something he is not. Burhans' approach may please those who are resigned to the absence of supernaturalism in great contemporary works, but who will not accept the pragmatic ethic they find in such works unless it happens to support the traditions of western humanism. Hemingway suffers as much from the rationalizations of such critics as he does from those of the Marxists.<sup>27</sup> For although man may be in the foreground he is not the measure of Hemingway's final world, and uniquely human qualities do not provide the norms of that world.

That is why Hemingway remained primarily fascinated by those rare men whose talents spring from their natural superiority rather than from their methodical application of experience. In the last published work of his lifetime, his magazine account of the contest between the matadors Dominguin and Antonio Ordoñez, Hemingway demonstrated his new-found tolerance and made a statement which might seem to bear out the contention that he had indeed abandoned his exclusivism. Contemplating a foolish chauffeur who once tried to make the sign of the cross a substitute for skill, Hemingway recalled: "Then I thought again and remembering . . . the need for solidarity in this passing world I repeated his gesture."<sup>28</sup> But the whole account of the contest itself turns upon a qualitative distinction between Dominguin, a skilled and intellectual performer, and Ordoñez, who is "a natural." Hemingway is first escorted to Ordoñez by a very successful matador: "Jesus Cordoba is an excellent boy and a good and intelligent matador and I enjoyed talking with him. *He left me at the door of Antonio's room.*"<sup>29</sup> With characteristic understatement, of course, Hemingway was suggesting the almost mystical reverence with which he observed a separation between the intelligent man and the natural rarity. Then, precisely echoing his description of another great man—and a marlin and a shark—he said, "I noticed the eyes first . . . those strange eyes."<sup>30</sup> Hemingway had mellowed, but he had abandoned nothing. He had simply moved forward.

What is new in *The Old Man and the Sea*, let me repeat, is Hemingway's discovery that the need for extended effort in the face of inevitable darkness is not merely a man-made hypothesis, not a masochistic sop to the unmoored human ego, but the reflection of a natural law man is permitted to follow. The idea of an immanent order based upon the tension between opposed forces is in one formulation or another a familiar

one, of course. We think of Heraclitus, and Hegel, as well as of more recent philosophers.<sup>31</sup> But the idea has perhaps never been so consummately concretized in a work of art as it is in *The Old Man and the Sea*, where its presence is in all likelihood almost entirely a product of Hemingway's life-long observation of man and nature. The order with which Santiago achieves consonance is indeed limited to the natural world. But within the observable physical universe of this story man is seen to play his part in a way which has not yet been sufficiently articulated by any critic.

We can see a way, then, in which Mr. Weeks is wrong to be disturbed by the several errors in factual observation in the story. Hemingway is working here partly with new artistic means to match his new vision. Formerly, convinced of the absence of a perceptible order in the world, Hemingway made a fetish of presenting objects exactly as they appeared, so that any latent meaning could shine through them without distortion. But here, convinced of the principle behind the facts, he can occasionally take poetic license and present objects for any kind of associational value they may have. Mr. Weeks thinks it merely a lazy error on Hemingway's part, for example, that Rigel, the first star Santiago sees one night, actually appears close

<sup>27</sup> For a recent discussion of the humanists' reservations about Hemingway see John A. Yunck, "The Natural History of a Dead Quarrel: Hemingway and the Humanists," *SAQ*, LXII (Winter 1963), 29-42.

<sup>28</sup> "The Dangerous Summer," Part I, *Life*, 5 September 1960, p. 94.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 86 [italics mine].

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> For example, the following remark by J. Novicow is especially relevant to the synthesis I have attributed to Hemingway: "The apologists of war are quite right in this, that struggle is life. Struggle is the action of the environment upon the organism and the reaction of the organism upon the environment, therefore a perpetual combat. . . . Without struggle and antagonisms societies would indeed fall into a state of somnolency, of most dangerous lethargy." See *War and its Alleged Benefits*, trans. T. Seltzer (New York, 1911), pp. 102-103, and quoted by Pitirim A. Sorokin in his *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1964), pp. 315-316. Novicow specifically departs from the quintessential vision of *The Old Man and the Sea*, however, when he adds: "Besides the physiological struggle, humanity has economic, political, and intellectual struggles, which do not exist among animals. It may even be stated that the physiological struggle, the dominant form in the animal kingdom, has ended among men, since they no longer eat one another" (p. 103). For recent and variant views of the psychological and sociological significance of struggle see Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, 1955), and Norman O. Brown, *Life Against Death* (Middletown, Conn., 1959).

to midnight in the Caribbean.<sup>32</sup> But Rigel, after all, is a first-magnitude star in the constellation of Orion, the hunter. And it is entirely appropriate, symbolically, to call attention to Santiago's attunement with the stars in this way. Hemingway is in this story at last attempting to pull the world together, rather than to reveal its ironic division. Thus "the way it was" need no longer be his sole guide as an artist.

If we are accurately to assess Hemingway's total achievement—and it is now our responsibility to begin that task—we must recognize that he was a writer who neither abandoned nor helplessly parodied his essential vision, but who significantly extended it, finding in paradox and symbolism the artistic means to do so.<sup>33</sup> However we may evaluate his advance, we must severely qualify our tendency to regard him as the champion of mindlessness in literature.<sup>34</sup> For we have evidence in the last great published work of his lifetime that either consciously or unconsciously he eventually became as concerned with perfecting what he had to say as he had always been with polishing his way of saying it.

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<sup>32</sup> Weeks, p. 192.

<sup>33</sup> Perhaps, indeed, in suggesting that Hemingway's essential method is a restrained, realistic exploitation of irony (rather than the free use of symbolism Carlos Baker finds), Mr. Halliday has confused matters by opposing symbolism and irony (Halliday, p. 22). I have assumed that it is *paradox* and irony which are appropriately opposed devices, differing in the direction of their operation—paradox stressing an unexpected unity between things conventionally considered different (as I have shown in discussing *The Old Man and the Sea*), and irony emphasizing unexpected differences between things conventionally considered together (as in Hemingway's earlier work). Symbolism, on the other hand, merely has to do with representation, I should think, and depending upon its use can emphasize either distinction or identification, either division or unity. For other objections to Halliday's approach see Bern Oldsey, "The Snows of Ernest Hemingway," *WSCL*, IV (Spring-Summer 1963), 195–198 esp. The issue is a significant one, as Philip Young has remarked in an evaluation of recent Hemingway criticism: "Our Hemingway Man," *KR*, xxvi (Autumn 1964), 695.

<sup>34</sup> The most forthright recent assertions of Hemingway's intellectual emptiness are those of Toynbee and Macdonald: Hemingway "had no extractable views on man's nature and destiny which bear a moment's scrutiny" (Toynbee, p. 87); "his one great talent" was for "aestheticism unsupported by thought or feeling" (Macdonald, p. 121). For succinct arguments supplementing the evidence I have presented against the validity of this persistent critical assumption see Baker's introduction to *Hemingway and His Critics*, pp. 14–18, and Rovit, pp. 165–173.