



# Uniqueness and Eccentricity in Ernest Hemingway's Character Santiago in the old Man and the Sea

DHRUV PURABIYA

R. D. Arts & Commerce College, Mundra- Kachchh, Gujarat.

## Abstract:

*Presented research paper is concerned with exploring the uniqueness characteristics that set Hemingway's protagonist and centre character, Santiago, away from the society among which he lives. The research paper starts with an introduction defining the concept of uniqueness as it is used throughout the research paper; this is followed by a historical background for the development of the term with references to schools of thought and their standpoint of the concept of uniqueness.*

*The research paper moves then to show how the main character in Hemingway's novella bridges the gap between the classical heroic and modern man types of protagonists. This is followed by a detailed revelation of how the character manages to transcend the frustrations and limitations imposed by the old man's bad luck and his mocking and disrespecting fellow citizens not only to survive, but also to regain respect in a world that seems to revere youth, sophistication and good luck. In order to do this, Santiago's uniqueness qualities are scrutinized and the emphasis is laid on the character's intrinsic intuition and his exceptional spiritual relationship with both the animate and inanimate objects in his world.*

*Besides, the old man's transcendentalism, isolation, liberty, primitivism and endurance are dissected. The research paper ends with a conclusion in which the main findings are outlined. This is followed by a list of references in which the sources and references consulted in this research paper are listed.*

## 1. Introduction

Hemingway's protagonist's bad luck is the reason behind his alienation from the society, while his romantic and humanitarian viewpoint enables him to get over social rejection towards self-assertion. The emphasis on the individual person and experience dates back to Hellenistic Greece manifested in the personally guided moral philosophy of the Greek philosopher *Epicurus* who claimed that the gods were detached from human concerns and had little interference with human affairs, and people, he saw, had better worry about life than death and its consequences.

Anti-uniqueness thought was encouraged also by the intense human injustices which represented the downside of the wide scale process of industrialization. The rise of communistic and fascist thought at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century brought, later on, uniqueness ideas into unpopularity; since these were political social theories that opposed uniqueness.

The original concept of uniqueness regained esteem and remerged after the collapse of the social and political apparatuses in the Soviet Union and the majority of the communist bloc. This was reflected in the appearance of movements like expressionism, surrealism, and dada that rely extensively on the free and independent personal artistic expression. In literature, uniqueness characters appeared in works such as *The Tragically History of Doctor Faustus*, *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe*, and *Don Juan*. As for

American literature, that has been often associated with uniqueness qualities, advocates of the free and independent self such as *Ralph Waldo Emerson*, *David Henry Thoreau*, *Emily Dickinson*, *Walt Whitman*, *Mark Twain*, and *Robert Frost* helped shape an American romanticism that is based on the break from the stiffness of society and civilization.

## 2. Santiago as an Eccentric

Hemingway's protagonist is a hybrid of the modern type and the classical one. *Santiago* is a poor. A fisherman, a representation the classists would unlikely use as a protagonist since they sought to represent figures of high social or political stature. Yet, the character's individual, superior, and sometimes heroic qualities would fit him into the classical mould. The transcendental merits of Hemingway's protagonist which are achieved through his natural intuition elevate him above human and physical restrictions and frustrations. Such an attitude was declared by *Emerson* and later by *Thoreau*. Nature for *Santiago* is his main source of insights and stimuli for self-analysis. His empathy for sea creatures, his dreams and moral strength are inspired by his close association with the environment.

*Santiago* who sails far away into the vast ocean crosses the usual boundaries of his everyday fishing trips; it is an indication of his adventurous character and his desire to get closer to the natural and primitive and farther from human society. It is a call for a break with human civilization. Such a break is necessary for *Santiago* to live simply and in harmony with nature. A similar bond, on the part of the other fishermen, does not exist as the development of uncongenial mechanization continued. It is a romantic attitude that reveres the simple and spontaneous rather than the sophisticated and artificial.

This oneness with nature and its living things is reflected also through the fisherman's attitude that man is part of the cycle of life; today's hunter could be tomorrow's prey and man should fight in order to win and survive; thus an is seen as an individualist within the larger system of life, this is seen through the general development of the plot in which *Santiago* wins over the great marlin but later losses it to the sharks. It is a paradoxical view point that applies to *Santiago's* outlook to the great marlin as well; he admires the fish and considers it sometimes near and sometimes beyond the human-animal boundary. He said, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends." so they could transcend humanity.

By linking himself with the marlin and the natural world Hemingway's protagonist is set apart from the rest of the world by his spontaneity and instinctiveness; qualities that associate the character with primitivism. *Abrams* and *Harpham* in their *Glossary of Literary Terms* see that a primitives acts on the pulse of instinct. Human culture, thought, and the complexity of modern civilized society are all artificialities that degenerate man's morality and spoil his inner goodness. *Santiago* values the instincts and the passions over thought and reason, and the freedom of expression over silence and repression. Social philosophy holds that the ideal state is the simple and natural forms of social and political orders. These should replace the frustrations of a complex and highly developed social organization. Isolation from society is considered by primitivisms as preferable to living in a highly developed society. Nature, unmodified by human intervention, is the Utopia of the primitives. Hemingway, by presenting a primitive heroic character, seems to allude to his dissatisfaction with modern Western life. *Santiago's* primitivism can be detected by examining some of his acts like slicing fish and chewing its raw meat swallowing its juices to keep himself strong, also the scene in which he recalls hooking a female marlin does not relate to social sophistication.

The old fisherman is portrayed her as an individual who fights to survive just like an untamed wild beast. Modern primitivisms consider pain a sign of that which is authentic, since pain is associated with the

hardness of primitive life: He had pushed his straw hat hard down on his head before he hooked the fish and it was cutting his forehead. Then he rested against the bow. He rested sitting on the unstopped mast and sail and tried not to think but only to endure. The wounds and scars on his body make him appear as a Christ-like figure; his pains and stigmata associate him with the highest Christian ideal of sacrifice and uniqueness.

The concept of the “noble savage” was not unpopular in the literature of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The term refers to a person who belongs to an “unrefined” group or tribe and is considered for this reason morally superior to people who live with civilization. The name of the French educator Jean Jacques Rousseau was particularly associated with this term. *Rousseau* in his influential novel entitled *Émile* (1762) advocates the idea that without the bounds of civilization man is essentially good. The wild untamed and unrestricted state of man which existed before the creation of civilization is the best condition for the flourishing of human goodness and happiness, people’s innate goodness and spiritual purity are corrupted by their experiences in society. *Rousseau* thus recommends that a child’s emotions be educated before his reason.

The idea that primitive people are “naturally intelligent, moral, and of high dignity in thought and deed” applies to Hemingway’s protagonist, Santiago. A close examination of this character would reveal that optimism and the ability to see hope even in hopeless situations is one quality that ranks Santiago as a dignified individual.

*Santiago*’s personality is differentiated from that of his fellow fishermen in his village; his romantic attitude to the sea emphasizes his uniqueness within his community. Hemingway’s protagonist demonstrates a tendency to identify himself with the world around him; this oneness applies not to his fellow citizens but rather to the inanimate universe around him also to his attitude toward the great marlin. The high regard with which he views the marlin calls to mind the tradition of “animality”. Animality is associated with the rise of primitivism as a philosophy, in which some advocates see that to correct the damage caused by modern society on man’s morality man should take animals as models of dignity and goodness. Animals are seen as noble, balanced, reasonable and in touch with nature; it is an extreme form of primitivism. Animality means also imitating animals or the desire to be animal-like. Animality in *The Old Man and the Sea* can be seen in the ways Santiago blurs the line between the human and animal.

This can be observed through the symbolic significance of the fishing line that connects the great fish with the old fisherman. Man is the only creature who is known to identify himself with animals; thus, such an act is an indirect assertion on man’s humanity. Santiago observes bondage of “brotherhood” with the marlin and green turtles; he calls the marlin “my brother”. However, the necessity of survival pushes Santiago on his battle with the fish,

“I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it.” (p. 49)

Hemingway seems to present a character who echoes Rousseau’s belief that society corrupts man. Santiago’s uniqueness is emphasized through setting him apart from urbanized society. Sophisticated and civilized life has resulted in cutting modern man off from the natural world and instinctive impulses.

References to Santiago’s alienation are found in his physical isolation from the main land going far into the wide ocean, his distinction from the other fishermen in his fishing techniques, his characteristic physical strength. Though the old man is aware of his alienation and independence, yet he often longs for

the boy's company and support. Such solidarity is not possible after the boy's parents ordered him to leave Santiago and join another more fortunate fisherman. However, they are united only when the old man returns home on land where they achieve integration with each other.

### 3. Conclusion

The theme in *The Old Man and the Sea* is the elevation of uniqueness and the subordination of the social whole. Santiago's uniqueness arises from the special and unique qualities of his character; his primitivism, noble savagery, the sense of oneness he has with the natural universe and the sea creatures, the blood brotherhood he feels with the marlin, his heroism, independence and alienation in a society that venerates youth, good luck, and social integration.

Yet, this uniqueness does not mark him as an alien in the universe; for he achieves a considerable level of integration with the world around him. Unlike Hemingway's other novels, "The Old Man and the Sea" emphasizes what man can do rather than what he is incapable of, the world is presented as a place in which the best can establish his heroic self, tragedy and pain are transcended by optimism and endurance. Santiago's voyage is a quest in which he searches for and establishes a unique identity within the inclusive universal structure. It has been emphasized that the American character features uniqueness and independence, Ernest Hemingway's novella frames this meaning giving it a heroic and epic dimension.

### References

1. Abrams, M.H. and Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. A Glossary of Literary Terms. Boston: Thomson and Wadsworth, 2005.
2. Avery, Karl, "Walden", Microsoft Student Encarta Encyclopedia (DVD), 2009.
3. Bloom, Harold. Ed. *The Old Man and the Sea: Modern Critical Interpretations*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers, 1999.
4. Brenner, Gerry. *The Old Man and the Sea: Story of a Common Man*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1991.
5. "Masculinity". New Jersey: Bucknell University Press, 1999.
6. DeMello, Margo. *Encyclopedia of Body Adornment*. Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 2007.
7. Hemingway, Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*. New York: Scribners, 1952.
8. Hornby, A. S. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989.
9. Jobs, Katherine T., *Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Old Man and the Sea*, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1968.
10. Kershner, R. Brandon, *Twentieth Century Novel: An Introduction*, Bedford: St. Martin's, 1997.
11. Meyers, Jeffrey. Ed. *Ernest Hemingway: The Critical Heritage*, London: Routledge Inc., 1982.
12. *Twentieth Century Literature*. Vol. 34. No. 2. Summer. New York: Hofstra University Press, 1988.
13. Microsoft Student 2009 [DVD]. Redmond, WA: Microsoft Corporation, 2008.