

Symbolism In Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man And The Sea

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Abstract: Masterful writers use literary devices and techniques in a unique way to exemplify their mastery in writing. In American literature, Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea* is a worthy symbolic novel which conveys the ability of the author to employ symbols to give literary value of the text. The objective of this work is to explore the symbols used in the novel to decode these symbols and identify the various interpretations that they stand for. This work divides into four chapters. The first chapter deals with aestheticism in general and tells about the common stylistic devices in literature such as simile, metaphor, irony and so on. The second chapter makes the connection with the concept of symbol and some theories that are related to symbols such as Langer's Theory, Whitehead Theory, Frye's Theory and Saussure's Theory. The third chapter gives the general overview about American literature and the major works of Ernest Hemingway focusing on his masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea* and its literary analysis while the fourth chapter stands for the symbols used in the novel and their interpretations. This work aims at showing the interest of Hemingway for symbols and his intention to represent themes behind the use of symbols in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Key words: American literature, Masterpiece, Aestheticism, Symbolism.

01. Introduction

Literature reflects the human lives and the society with its characteristics while gives the pleasure for the people. To tackle with different themes and subjects, writers use vivid styles, literary devices and language aspects. In American literature that has derived through its major eras such as Realism, Naturalism, Rationalism, and Romanticism, some authors tend to be used symbols to give an artistic beauty and a depth for their creations and for any other purposes such as criticizing society behind those symbols to avoid troubles and problems that may fall upon the writer. In this point of view, among the writers who belong to Romantic period, Ernest Hemingway is signified for his mastery of using symbols. Among the masterpieces of Hemingway including *In Our Time*, *The Torrents Of Spring* (1926), *The Sun Also Rises*, *Men Without Women*, *A Farewell to Arms* and *For Whom The Bell Tolls*, only *The Old Man and The Sea* (1952) was an immediate success by selling 50, 000 copies from the first edition and the five million copies of the *Life* magazine within two days. In *Old Man and the Sea*, the author uses number of symbols respectively to develop the themes of the novel.

02. Symbolism: A General Overview

Among the major literary devices, symbols grab the attention of the readers, because of its ability to broad the thinking capacity of the people. This chapter deals with the notion of symbolism as a movement and as a literary device and tries to introduce some theories of symbolism which are attributed to Whitehead, Langer, Frye and Saussure.

Symbolism: Symbol also a major figure of speech in which something [object, person, situation or action] means more than what it is. The term symbol has derived from Greek term "symballein" that means "to throw together" and Latin term "Symbolon" means "token of sign".

Writers use Symbols to grab a depth for the literary creations and to express the things ironically avoiding the problems that can come to them. Shaw (1881: 367) defines symbols as following. "(Symbol is) something used for, or regarded as, representing something else. More specifically, a symbol is a word, phrase, or other expression having a complex of associated meanings; in this sense, a symbol is viewed as having values different from those of whatever is being symbolized" And also Cuddon (1998) defines symbols as following. "The word symbol derives from the Greek verb "symballein", "to throw together", and its noun "symbolon", "mark" or "sign". It is an object, animate or inanimate, which represents or stands for something else" Symbolism as a movement relates with an aesthetic movement originated in France in the 19th century. And also it calls as "decadent movement", because they use imagination as a reality. Symbolism started as a reaction to the naturalism and realism movements. At the end of the nineteenth century, symbolism lost its popularity in France. Then the popularity increased and spread to the continental European countries such as England, Russian, the United States, and South America. The symbolists' experimental methods appealed to many English, Irish and American poets such as William Butler Yeats (1865-1939), Ezra Pound (1885-1972), T.S Eliot (1888-1965), and Wallace Stevens (1879- 1955). According to Perrine (1974), the meaning of the literary symbol should recognize from its context. That means the meaning of symbols should be identified inside the text, not in outside.

03. Theories of symbolism

Symbols stands for different interpretations and meanings. And also these meanings get different directions, because many theorists have given their contribution for the evolution of in various domains with their views and theories. "Rapoport (in Royce 1965), for whom symbols are "products of the human abstracting process" (p.97), Hayakawa (ibid), for whom symbolism is "that which shapes the entire psychic life of man" (p.92), and Whitehead (1927), for whom symbolism "is inherent in the very texture of human life" (p.60)" (illustrated from, Hadjira 2013.). With reference to the above quote, it is obvious that symbolism has various definitions and they differ according to the theorist's ideas and views about the term symbolism.

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Langer's Theory of Symbolism

Susanne Langer (1895-1985) is an American philosopher who has so far made the notion of the symbol as the specific aspect of her studies. She considers symbolism to be the central concern of philosophy because it underlies human knowledge and understanding. Langer tells that it is possible to perceive the interpretations of symbols when we conceive it. Langer (1954) distinguishes the difference between symbol and sign. She tells that symbol and sign are not the same though people use signs in addition of symbols. Signs can be used to react in the environment while symbols allow us to create imagery and ideas not directly related to the real world. Simply the difference between a sign and a symbol is that a sign causes us to think or act, whereas a symbol causes us to think about the things symbolized. In this light, it is possible to say that a symbol differs from a sign in that the symbol does not announce the existence of the object that is its meaning, but brings this thing to mind.

Whitehead's Theory

Alfred North Whitehead (1861-1947), is an English mathematician and philosopher who gave his cooperation for many subjects but symbolism was his most significant subject. Whitehead believes that symbolism represents the human imaginations and thoughts. According to his perception word also a symbol that denotes the ideas, emotions and images with its usage. According to Whitehead "Symbolism is very fallible in the sense that it may induce actions, feelings, emotions and beliefs about things which are only notions without exemplification in the world which the symbolism leads us to presuppose." (Whitehead, 1927:6) While Langer distinguishes the difference between sign and symbols, Whitehead (1927) claims the difference between symbolism and direct knowledge. Direct knowledge is infallible means there is no space for mistakes. It is correct and perfect. But symbolism is very fallible. It is open to mistakes. Within symbolism, it is possible to have we wrong interpretation of the symbol we have and also we are not sure that it is correct (Whitehead, 1927).

Frye's Theory

Herman Northrop Frye (1912- 1991) was a Canadian literary critic and literary theorist in 20th century. According to him "The word symbol means any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention" (Frye, 1957, p.71). Frye in his *Anatomy of criticism* asserts that when we are reading, we focus our attention for two directions at once. One direction is outward, in which we go outside with our reading, from the writers to the things they mean in the text. The second direction is the inward in which we try to appreciate and analyze the meaning from the word. Here Frye brings this notion to bring the concept symbol for the surface because in both cases readers deal with symbols. These two types of understanding take place simultaneously in all reading. However the verbal structure may be classified according to whether the final direction of meaning is outward or inward

Saussure's Theory

Ferdinand de Saussure is a Swiss linguistic who studied about semiotic during the 19th century. According to Reyes

(2008), semiotics came from the Greek word "Semiotikon" which means sign as well as the study of signs and their interpretation. Reyes states that Saussure described semiotics as connection between an object (the signified) and its linguistic representation (the signifier) and how the two are inter connected. Charles Peirce gave a more comprehensive definition of semiotics: "Is the doctrine of the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis. by semiosis I mean an action, an influence, which is, or involves, a cooperation of three subjects, such as sign, its object and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in anyway resolvable into action between pairs." (quoted, Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia) Semiotics studies not only the signs and symbols, but their meanings. And also other factors that affect them such as the encoder, interpreter and culture etc. Signs and symbols are not only limited to visual representation but also different from language, shapes, colors, textures, clothing, to actions, gestures, mannerisms, and facial expressions.

04. The Old Man and The Sea: A Critical Review

American literature has passed through a lot of periods by familiarizing number of masterpieces to vanish the literary thirsty of those who are fond of reading. So among many writers in nineteenth century, Ernest Hemingway is significant for his style. This chapter introduces an overview about American Literature in 19th century, Hemingway's major works, focusing on his masterpiece *The Old Man and The Sea* (1951) and its analysis.

Hemingway's style, themes and works

Ernest Miller Hemingway who is well known as a writer commences his writing for the first time as a reporter for "The Kansas City Star". The experiences that he got as a journalist make him famous among the readers for his style. He avoided complicated syntax in his writings. About 70 percent of the sentences are simple sentences—a childlike syntax without subordination. See the statements of some people and the institutes about his style. The New York Times wrote in 1926 of Hemingway's first novel, "No amount of analysis can convey the quality of *The Sun Also Rises*. It is a truly gripping story, told in a lean, hard, athletic narrative prose that puts more literary English to shame" And also when Hemingway was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954, it said that this is for "his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style." As many of the American writers, Hemingway also deals with popular themes of American literature such as love, war, wilderness and loss. The theme of women and death is evident in stories as early as "Indian Camp". The theme of emasculation is prevalent in Hemingway's work, most notably in *The Sun Also Rises*. Emasculation, according to Fiedler, is a result of a generation of wounded soldiers; and of a generation in which women such as Brett gained emancipation. Any how some critics have characterized Hemingway's work as misogynistic and homophobic. However he is famous among the readers for his masterpieces such as "Indian Camp" (1926), *The Sun Also Rises* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber"

(1935), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940) and *The Old Man and the Sea* (1951).

05. A Literary Analysis

The novel opens with the struggle of old Santiago who is the hero of the novel to catch a fish, because he has failed to bring a fish from eighty four days though he is an experienced fisherman in Cuba. And also the hero of Hemingway is a baseball lover. This failure of Santiago to catch a fish makes him the laughing stock in the village. Anyhow the little boy Manolin, the apprentice of Santiago, keeps his eye upon the old man to care about his meals and the things, though his parents force him to go with another boat, because of the bad luck of Santiago. Then to avoid his bad luck, Santiago plans to sail far in the sea, because he believes that man is not made for defeat. At the middle part of the story, it is possible to see the struggle of Santiago with the giant Marlin and also when he comes back he struggles with Sharks to save his great catch. Finally, though sharks destroyed the giant Marlin, Santiago becomes great among the fishermen in the village.

The Setting: Mainly the setting of the novel can be divided into two portions. At the beginning and the end the story takes place in the small fishing village Cuba that is situated near the Havana. Cuba is an island in the Caribbean, whose main industry is fishing. Hemingway lived in Cuba for a few years before the revolution of Fidel Castro, obtaining an intimate knowledge of the places that are described in *The Old Man and the Sea*. At the middle part of the story, it deals with the waves Gulf Stream that brings the giant marlins in the months of September and October. During the course of the novel, the setting also becomes symbolic, because the sea represents the total universe against the humanity represented by Santiago.

06. The Investigation of Symbolism in *The Old Man and The Sea* (1951)

Sea

Sea represents a great role in the novel as setting and a symbol. The main event of the story takes place in the sea. Here sea symbolizes the "universe" and the "Santiago's isolation in the universe". Though people have their own identity in their specific places, in an universe people are helpless from others and become alone. In Santiago's village, he has his identity as a fisherman and always gets the help of little Manolin and a few of others. However, it is at sea, that Santiago faces his ultimate challenge, with no help and no recognition. According to Hemingway, man was most able to prove himself worthy in isolation. The novel, in this regard, is an example of Naturalism in Literature that controls the lives by environment.

The Mast

At the end of *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago removes his mast from his skiff, and drags it from the beach, upon his shoulders by resting in several places on the way to his hut. "He started to climb again and at the top he fell and lay for some time with the mast across his shoulder. He tried to get up. But it was too difficult and he sat there with the mast on his shoulder and looked at the road." "Finally he put the mast down and stood up. He picked the mast up and put it

on his shoulder and started up the road" Here the mast symbolizes the cross that Jesus Christ was forced to drag. The desire of the author to represent Santiago as Christ like figure, mast symbolizes the cross in the novel.

Lost Harpoon

Harpoon is the power of fishermen in the sea. Simply the loss of harpoon symbolizes the loss of power of Santiago amidst the sea and the strength. "He hit it with his blood – mused hands driving a good harpoon with all his strength." "He took my harpoon too and all the rope, he thought, and now my fish bleeds again and there will be others" Santiago fights with Sharks by using his harpoon. However when he lost his harpoon, it reveals him for the vulnerability. So this loss of harpoon symbolizes the loss of power and the strength of Santiago.

Santiago's eyes

Though Santiago physically declined as an old man, his eyes stay in the same color without any change. So this eyes symbolizes the unchanged determination of Santiago to achieve his great catching in the life. "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated"

Symbolism of characters

Santiago

In *Old Man and the sea*, Santiago symbolizes the Jesus Christ and the nature of human beings who don't like to accept the defeat in their lives. When Santiago fights with Marlin, he suffers so much. However he bears all these sufferings without complaining about it. "He felt the line carefully with his right hand and noticed his hand was bleeding" "shifting the weight of the line to his left shoulder and kneeling carefully he washed his hand in the ocean and held it there, submerged, for more than a minute watching the blood trail away and the steady movement of the water against his hand as the boat moved" And also he doesn't like to accept the defeat, because he believes that man has made not for defeating.

Manolin

Manolin is the young boy, who follows Santiago. In *The old man and the sea*, Manolin symbolizes the youth of Santiago and the disciples of Jesus. And also he symbolizes the responsibility of youngsters upon the elders. When the old man would look at Manolin he would see himself at a younger age. Manolin symbolizes the disciples of Jesus. Manolin gives his care towards the old man and that represents the youngsters who look at the elders of the society. "I must have water here for him, the boy thought, and soap and a good towel. Why am I so thoughtless? I must get him another shirt and a jacket for the winter and some sort of shoes and another blanket."

Joe DiMaggio

Joe DiMaggio is the role model of Santiago's baseball world. At the sea when Santiago suffers greatly, he consoles his heart thinking about Joe DiMaggio and his sufferings. Here in the novel DiMaggio symbolizes the strength. Joe DiMaggio also represents hope that the old man has for Manolin. He wishes that the boy will grow up

and be like the great DiMaggio so that he will not be a poor fisher like he is.

Other Fishermen

All of the other fishermen in the story are the people who used new equipment for fishing while Santiago goes to fish in a small skiff. When Santiago brings the skeleton of the large Marlin, they try to put him down by saying the following. Hemingway uses these fishermen and the proprietors of the coffee shop for the symbolical representation of the people who don't like appreciate others. "What a fish it was. There has never been such a fish. Those were two fine fish you took yesterday too." The fishers represent anyone who would rather think about themselves rather than others. In ways the fishers are like the sharks wanting to take things away from Santiago while Santiago is much like the marlin

Marlin, Lions and the Sharks

Marlin is the ideal opponent of the novel and he symbolizes the last chance that can come for the individuals. Here in the novel, Marlin struggles to avoid his death. Death is the ultimate reality of the lives of all beings. The lions in Santiago's dreams represented his lost youth and his decreasing strength. For instance, when he needed strength on his long and strenuous voyage he thought of his dreams of the lions, and gets the strength through dreams. "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" The sharks could represent those who would tear apart anyone's successes, because they destroyed all the effort of Old man and his hopes. "the shark came in in a rush and the old man hit him as he shut his jaws. He hit him solidly and from as high up as he could raise the club"

07. Biblical Influence and Symbolism in The Old Man and the Sea

Ernest Hemingway's stories have much religious influence and symbolism. In *The Old Man and the Sea*, by Hemingway, many incidents can be seen similar to the life of Jesus. Santiago is an old man, who has young eyes. Though he defeated, he never show it and he looks only the brighter side of things. These traits make Santiago a god-like figure. Manolin, the term came from "Messiah" is Jesus. After catching the largest marlin, Manolin leaves his parents to follow the teachings of Santiago, his master, just as Jesus. Pedrico is actually Saint Peter, Jesus' closest apostle and a great fisherman. Peter helps Jesus fish for souls as Pedrico helped Manolin and Santiago by giving fish for food. Santiago gives Pedrico the head of the mutilated marlin which symbolizes Saint Peter as head of the Christian church and the first Pope.

Conclusion

It is obvious that the symbols in the novel and the different interpretations that are stand for the symbols. In *The Old Man and The Sea*, Hemingway depicts a struggle of an old man to acquire the greatest catching of his life and to protect his achievement from the predators who came to destroy it. So as the readers of the novel, it is not easy to get the ideas that lay behind the words, because the text is filled with symbols to convey different messages at the

same time. It is very important to say that the writer has used many symbols in the text to represent his hero of the text as a man who does not accept the defeat of the life. The hero of Hemingway finds the place of the human beings within the nature. Therefore, the writer overloads the novel with symbols to give the prominence for the hero of the text. As well as giving the importance towards the hero of the novel, the writer has used symbols in the novel to give the depth for the themes. It is very essential to grab the attention of the readers for the themes of the text, because themes are the messages that the writer wants to present for his readers. Using number of symbols, the writer has given his consideration with the attention of the readers towards the themes of the novel. In addition, Hemingway's symbolism is an essential tool in addressing topics indirectly, in the nineteenth century. Therefore, he used symbolism in an intelligent way to express his beliefs and his own views on human nature and religion, especially for Christianity. To conclude, Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea*(1951) is full of symbols. However, it would impossible to deal with all the symbols. The present study has focused more on the major ones and tried to explain their meanings in order to add an extra meaning to the novel.

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