

SANTIAGO, THE FISHERMAN-ARTIST: AUTO-
BIOGRAPHY AND AESTHETICS IN THE
OLD MAN AND THE SEA

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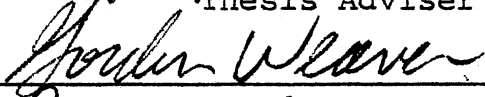


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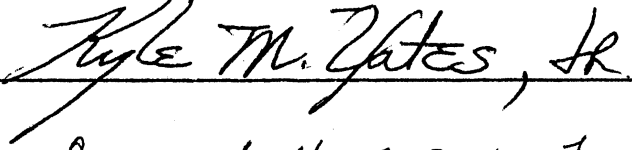
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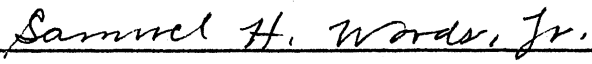
Gordon Weaver



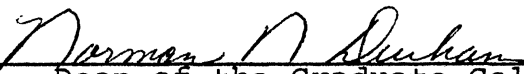
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PREFACE

By the general nature of his profession, a writer of fiction uses his imagination a great deal in creating his stories. Nevertheless, although he is working in a creative genre as opposed to an expository one, the writer of fiction without doubt leaves a portion of his real self among the many words that he spends portraying imaginary happenings. For this reason, in The Old Man and the Sea, I am able to examine autobiographical metaphors that reveal Ernest Hemingway's aesthetics as intimated by the symbolic words and actions of Santiago as the fisherman-artist. The existence of such an element in The Old Man has been publicly recognized by a handful of critics, but each of their published comments is short. Therefore, I have endeavored to amplify what up to now has received only cursory treatment.

I wish to express appreciation to the members of my dissertation committee. The main burden of supervising my project was ably handled by my committee chairman, Dr. Mary Rohrberger; therefore, to her, I express my gratitude for her patience and discernment. In addition, all of my committee members--Dr. Gordon Weaver, Dr. Samuel Woods, Dr. Thomas Warren, and Dr. Kyle Yates, Jr.--contributed to

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Also, to Dr. Frank Finney (Central State University), who
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

| Chapter | Page |
|---|------|
| I. INTRODUCTION. | 1 |
| II. SANTIAGO'S ISOLATION. | 12 |
| III. SANTIAGO'S RESOLUTION | 30 |
| IV. SANTIAGO'S ARTISTRY: BEFORE THE STRUGGLE . . . | 46 |
| V. SANTIAGO'S ARTISTRY: THE STRUGGLE AND AFTER. . | 65 |
| VI. THE SHARKS AND OTHER CREATURES: IN REAL LIFE . | 87 |
| VII. THE SHARKS AND OTHER CREATURES: IN THE NOVEL . | 118 |
| VIII. CONCLUSION. | 133 |
| A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF WORKS CITED. | 139 |

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway said that "The book which I wished to be the crowning work of my life was The Old Man and the Sea."¹ Although some critics consider The Sun Also Rises and A Farewell to Arms to be the better books, Hemingway's desire has in some measure been realized because The Old Man and the Sea has become a modern classic. Despite its brevity, its uninvolved plot, and its simple language in a century when many noted pieces of fiction have drawn critical acclaim because of their complication of syntax and structure, The Old Man is still a first-rate achievement. The plot of this short novel exemplifies a great conflict. An elderly fisherman not only fights a gigantic marlin but also engages against the mysterious elements of the sea in all its power and wonder. And the themes that issue forth from The Old Man--courage, faith, humility, suffering, endurance, optimism, professional ethics, etc.--serve to focus on Santiago as the ultimate Hemingway "code hero." But the book is more than simply a great story that illustrates admirable human qualities and inevitable human conditions; it is a book that is so tightly woven that virtually every word is of calculated importance much in the manner that

one finds in a well-constructed poem. As Carlos Baker points out about Hemingway's fiction:

under all [Hemingway's] brilliant surface lies the controlling Dichtung, the symbolic underpainting which gives so remarkable a sense of depth and vitality to what otherwise might seem flat and two-dimensional. . . . The cause behind the majority of these effects, the deep inner Dichtung which runs through all of his work from The Sun Also Rises to The Old Man and the Sea, has not until very recently been fully recognized or systematically explored.²

Since the time of Baker's statement in his book Hemingway: The Writer as Artist, much study has been devoted to the underside of the famous iceberg in Hemingway's fiction. Nevertheless, at least one aspect of The Old Man and the Sea has yet to be fully uncovered.

For nearly three decades, a few literary scholars have discussed allegorical overtones in The Old Man and the Sea. They have suggested that Santiago represents the writer (both Hemingway and the universal artist), that Santiago's marlin represents the author's writing, and that the scavenger sharks represent the literary critics. However, although this interpretation is intriguing, no one has attempted in any detail to support the contention. Perhaps one reason why scholars have not pursued the problem is that many specific details concerning the proposed allegory are not entirely clear from a reading of the novel. But ambiguity is not a fault; instead, it is a strength because, should pure allegory be explicit in the novel, the

story would lose some of the depth of meaning that is achieved via true symbolic representation. Hemingway himself once said about The Old Man and the Sea: "I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things."³

Even if a one-to-one allegorical relationship cannot be satisfactorily established, nevertheless, enough evidence exists to substantiate at least a portion of the tripartite fisherman-writer, marlin-writing, sharks-critics allegory. And from this basic outline, the realization of a symbolic fisherman-artist theme in The Old Man is derived. It is from this outline that one can explore autobiographical metaphors in the novel.

One cannot be certain of the exact time when Hemingway began to perceive or conceive of the autobiographical fisherman-artist theme in The Old Man. Maybe the story was essentially complete before he recognized the possibilities inherent in the book. But the allegorical tones and autobiographical flavor of The Old Man have been noticed by several critics in the years since 1952, when the novel was originally published in Life magazine.⁴ In fact, an editorial appearing in the same issue in which the novel was published mentioned the allegory:

The Old Man and the Sea seems perfect to us as it stands; but for those who like a little symbolism, we have tried to deduce some. Perhaps the old man is Hemingway himself, the great fish is this

great story and the sharks are the critics. Symbolism won't match up to real life here though: there is absolutely nothing the sharks can do to this marlin.⁵

Katherine T. Jobes remarks that

Life furthered the identification [of Hemingway with Santiago] by printing on p. 34, facing the first page of the text of the story, a full page photograph of Hemingway against the background of a "Cuban fishing village like the one used by the 'old man' of his story." In the Letters to the Editors section, Sept. 22, 1952, p. 12, Life printed a photograph of Hemingway beside a half-eaten marlin which he had landed.⁶

Although allegorical and autobiographical aspects of The Old Man have been discussed in print, comments have been brief and more suggestive than detailed. However, among the contributors to the scholarship on the topic are some well-known critics--for instance, Philip Young and Mark Schorer. Young says:

On another level the story can be read as an allegory entirely personal to the author, as an account of his own struggle, his determination, and his literary vicissitudes. Like Hemingway, Santiago is a master who sets out his lines with more care and precision than his competitors, but he has not had any luck in a long time. Once he was very strong, the champion, yet his reputation is imperiled now, and he is growing old. Still he feels that he has strength enough; he knows the tricks of his trade; he is resolute, and he is still out for the really big success. It means nothing that he has proved his strength before; he has got to prove it again, and he does. After he has caught his prize the sharks come and take it all away from him, as they will always try to do. But he caught it, he fought it well, he did all he could and it was a lot and at the end he is happy.⁷

Schorer makes a similar observation in fewer words:

. . . this appears to be not only a moral fable, but a parable and all the controlled passion in the story, all the taut excitement in the prose come, I believe, from the parable. It is an old man catching a fish, yes; but it is also a great artist in the act of mastering his subject, and, more than that, of actually writing about that struggle.⁸

In Hemingway: The Writer as Artist, Baker quotes Schorer's statement and agrees that the interpretation is valid:

"Such a view of Santiago's adventure can be made to stand up fairly well under hard-bitten scrutiny."⁹ But Baker offers no further explication of the topic on his own. And Jobs also comments:

Santiago's story has been widely interpreted as a symbolic representation of Hemingway's vision of himself in 1952. The typical biographical reading identifies Santiago--the meticulous craftsman dedicated to his vocation--with Hemingway as a writer; and Santiago's faded reputation as champion with Hemingway's literary reputation in the early 1950's. Santiago's suffering from the loss of his agonizingly won big fish to the sharks allegedly dramatizes Hemingway's suffering from the critics' attacks on Across the River and into the Trees, in which his ego, particularly his fear of aging and dying, was deeply engaged.¹⁰

Jobs' statement that the foregoing interpretation has been "widely" accepted seems hyperbolic. Indeed, any public proclamation of the idea has perhaps been limited more to the podium than to the published word. Jobs' overstatement is partially exemplified when one peruses the book in which her comment appears: her opinion is given in the "Introduction"

to Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Old Man and The Sea, yet only one of the essays in the volume contains any statements forwarding the autobiographical fisherman-artist interpretation.¹¹ And that essay simply contains some additional comments by Young:

The Old Man and the Sea is, from one angle, an account of Hemingway's personal struggle, grim, resolute and eternal, to write his best. With his seriousness, his precision and his perfectionism, Hemingway saw his craft exactly as Santiago sees his. The fishing and the fishermen turn out to be metaphors so apt that they need almost no translation

As for these lions, they play like cats on beaches "so white they hurt your eyes"--as white, we might think, as the "unbelievably white" top of Kilimanjaro that Harry dreamed of, the magical goal of the artist, where the leopard froze. And so we could say here, as Hemingway said of Harry, that Santiago is happy in the end because he knows that "there was where he was going."¹²

. . . .

It is not so much that Santiago was a fisherman in whom the writer saw himself; rather that Hemingway was a writer who thought he could disguise himself as Santiago. The autobiographical element unfortunately triumphs again: it wasn't Into the Caribbean but Across the River where somebody felt he went out too far. Hemingway, taking a view of that failed novel which occasionally overrode his concern for his sea story, went way out and hooked his great prize, a book to keep a man all winter, but then the critics ate away at it until there was nothing left. Not as strong as he had been once, he felt that he was still the master of many tricks and still up to bringing in the big one--which, in his

opinion, may have been the same small book that was the allegory of his vicissitudes.¹³

When Young uses the word unfortunately in reference to "The autobiographical element" in The Old Man, he apparently is expressing the view that an excessive amount of Hemingway's personal story appears in the novel, resulting in a lowering of the quality of the book. Two more brief references to the subject of this present study are worthy of mention. Ken Moritz says that "In The Old Man [Hemingway] has written an allegory of the writer wrestling with his art."¹⁴ But after that straightforward declaration, Moritz moves into more peripheral matters. And Daniel Fuchs says: "If the critics have been sharks to Hemingway's Santiago, it is also a case of man bites sharks. Who more proudly flaunted his contempt of them?"¹⁵

In addition, an Archibald MacLeish poem entitled "Poet" and dedicated to Hemingway belongs alongside the prose comments. Although there is no specific reference to The Old Man in the poem, nevertheless, MacLeish uses the craft of fishing as the metaphorical equivalent of the craft of writing. And MacLeish also suggests the poetic quality of Hemingway's fiction:

POET
for Ernest Hemingway

There must be
Moments when we see right through
Although we say we can't. I knew
A fisher who could lean and look
Blind into dazzle on the sea
And strike into that fire his hook,

Far under, and lean back and laugh
 And let the line run out, and reel
 What rod could weigh nor line could
 feel--
 The heavy silver of his wish,
 And when the reel-spoon faltered,
 kneel
 And with a fumbling hand that shook
 Boat, all bloody from the gaff,
 A shivering fish.¹⁶

With the exception of Schorer's rather liberal use of the word parable and Young's view that The Old Man is diminished by the presence of its autobiographical level, no basic problems exist in the aforementioned interpretations by Young, Schorer, Baker, Jobs, Moritz, Fuchs, and MacLeish. The shortcomings of their comments are simply in their brevity, a deficiency that should to some degree be remedied by this present book.

What has previously been merely suggested in outline or summary fashion can now be expanded and documented. In other words, if Santiago represents Hemingway the writer, then through a proper understanding of Santiago's words and actions the reader should be able to discover something of Hemingway's theories of writing and art in general. Furthermore, if the marlin is Hemingway's writing, then, in The Old Man, one should find evidence of the author's estimation of his own work. And if the sharks are the critics, then, in the novel itself, the reader should be able to locate passages that reveal Hemingway's hatred of the literary "experts." Certainly these fundamental investigations will bear fruit, which is precisely the reason behind this study.

And when possible, the various points being explicated in The Old Man will be documented with quotations from Hemingway's nonfiction and interviews in order that what the author himself has said more precisely might serve to magnify and define what he has composed in his fiction.

NOTES

- ¹"A Man's Credo," Playboy, Jan. 1963, p. 124.
- ²Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 289.
- ³Scott Donaldson, By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Penguin, 1978), p. 249.
- ⁴"The Old Man and the Sea," Life, 1 Sept. 1952, pp. 34-54.
- ⁵"A Great American Storyteller," Life, 1 Sept. 1952, p. 20.
- ⁶"Introduction," in Twentieth Century Interpretations of The Old Man and the Sea, ed. Katherine T. Jobes (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1968), p. 9.
- ⁷Ernest Hemingway, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 1 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1965), pp. 22-23. Rpt. "Ernest Hemingway," in Seven Modern American Novelists, ed. William O'Connor (New York: Mentor, 1968), pp. 159-160.
- ⁸"With Grace Under Pressure," New Republic, 6 Oct. 1952, pp. 19-20.
- ⁹Baker, Hemingway: The Writer, p. 322.
- ¹⁰Jobes, pp. 8-9.
- ¹¹Philip Young, "The Old Man and the Sea: Vision/Revision," pp. 18-26.
- ¹²Young, "Vision/Revision," p. 21.
- ¹³Young, "Vision/Revision," p. 26.
- ¹⁴"Ernest Hemingway," in American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize, eds. Warren G. French and Walter E. Kidd (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 191.

¹⁵"Ernest Hemingway, Literary Critic," in Ernest Hemingway: A Collection of Criticism, ed. Arthur Waldhorn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 92.

¹⁶"Poet," in New & Collected Poems, 1917-1976 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, 1976), p. 427.

CHAPTER II

SANTIAGO'S ISOLATION

At various times, authors have created fictional characters who are isolated artists, characters who must face the inherent dangers involved in their diverse insulations from society. For instance, there are Stephen Dedalus in James Joyce's fiction and Eugène Gant in Thomas Wolfe's first two novels. And there is Owen Warland in "The Artist of the Beautiful" isolating himself in a manner metaphorically reminiscent of the thirteen-year, self-imposed seclusion of the author of the short story, Nathaniel Hawthorne himself. In one passage in the story, Hawthorne, by describing the box that holds the butterfly that Owen has made, reveals symbolically the distance that the artist must go in his quest for the beautiful, his quest for art:

It was carved richly out of ebony by his own hand, and inlaid with a fanciful tracery of pearl, representing a boy in pursuit of a butterfly, which, elsewhere, had become a winged spirit, and was flying heavenward; while the boy, or youth, had found such efficacy in his strong desire that he ascended from earth to cloud, and from cloud to celestial atmosphere, to win the beautiful.¹

While there is little doubt that Hawthorne is warning of the perils of artistic isolation, nevertheless, he also believes that the artist must metaphorically ascend "from earth" on

occasion if he expects "to win the beautiful." Such experience is also understood by Santiago, the fisherman, albeit he is characterized as a more pragmatic individual than Owen Warland is.

Santiago is not simply the protagonist in The Old Man and the Sea; instead, Santiago is the story. That is, he sets out in his boat, he baits and maneuvers his lines, he hooks and subdues the marlin, he fights the sharks, and he sails home--all by himself. Not even the boy Manolin is there to assist the old man. From the opening sentence of the novel, the isolation of this fisherman-artist is a dominant theme, a theme that is emphasized by Santiago's understanding of his role as "an old man who fished alone" (p. 9).²

Santiago was aware both of his isolation and of the necessity of it. After finding himself tied to the enormous marlin, which tows him farther and farther from civilization, Santiago begins to feel more acutely his estrangement from human society. It is just the old man alone in head-to-head confrontation with the fish, and he silently meditates the matter of his self-imposed solitude: "My choice was to go there to find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world" (p. 50). Earlier, the narrator says that "The old man knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early smell of the ocean" (p. 28). After all, a fisherman is not likely to catch a prize marlin in

the harbor. And he will catch nothing at all if he does not leave "the land behind."

Just as Santiago must temporarily insulate himself from social involvement in order to properly perform his professional task, the writer also must isolate himself. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway tells of mentally withdrawing from the people around him while writing a story. Because during his early days in Paris Hemingway would often sit in a café while writing, he had to have the ability to lose himself in the stories that he wrote, ignoring the inevitable interruptions connected with a public place. He was not always successful at closing out the interference, but one incident illustrates something of what occurred in Hemingway's mind as he was composing, his consciousness switching back and forth from the story that he was writing and then to the menial tasks connected with the mechanics of writing and then to conversation in the room and again to the insulated world of his story and so on:

Some days it went so well that you could make the country so that you could walk into it through the timber to come out into the clearing and work up onto the high ground and see the hills beyond the arm of the lake. A pencil-lead might break off in the conical nose of the pencil sharpener and you would use it or else sharpen the pencil carefully with the sharp blade and then slip your arm through the sweat-salted leather of your pack strap to lift the pack again, get the other arm through and feel the weight settle on your back and feel the pine needles under your moccasins as you started down for the lake.

Then you would hear someone say, "Hi, Hem. What are you trying to do? Write in a café?"³

Another time an acquaintance did not speak to Hemingway because the author was so occupied with his work:

"You had the air of a man alone in the jungle," [the man said].

"I am like a blind pig when I work," [Hemingway replied].

"But were you not in the jungle, Monsieur?"

"In the bush."⁴

Hemingway was "In the bush" or, like Santiago, "Beyond all people in the world." Hemingway also once said that the "only thing that could spoil a day was people and if you could keep from making engagements each day had no limits."⁵

The old fisherman emphasizes his own circumstances when he thinks to himself, as if conversing with the marlin, that there is "no one to help either of us" (p. 50). In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Hemingway said that a writer is on his own when composing literature and that outside help is of dubious value: "Writing at best is a lonely life. Organizations for writers palliate the writer's loneliness but I doubt if they improve his writing."⁶ In Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway says, "All art is only done by the individual. The individual is all you ever have and all schools only serve to classify their members as failures."⁷ He also said that "It is in solitude that the passion for perfection best nurses itself."⁸ Furthermore, he stated that as a writer "sheds his loneliness . . . often his work deteriorates."⁹

Hemingway also related the writer's need for solitude to the experience of repeatedly proving himself by launching out anew after the previous work has been accomplished. He said that the writer "does his work alone, and if he is a good enough writer he must face eternity or the lack of it each day. For a true writer, each book should be a new beginning. . . ." ¹⁰ Santiago ponders a similar idea, thinking that he alone must continue to show himself worthy of his calling, never relying on past glory. After Santiago has begun playing the fish that he has hooked, he muses that "The thousand times that he proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again" (p. 66). As Hemingway felt that "each book should be a new beginning" to the writer, likewise Santiago feels that "Each time was a new time and he never thought about the past when he was doing it" (p. 66). Another time, Santiago says, "Every day is a new day" (p. 32). In other words, neither Hemingway nor Santiago felt that it was proper to rest on past successes because this type of behavior suppresses the individualism that the artist needs in order to continue performing on a level of excellence. If the writer should not rely on other writers, neither should he rely on anything at all besides his immediate talent, not even his own monuments of previous creativity, regardless of how great they may be.

As Santiago's situation becomes more complicated, he at times laments such utter isolation. He has a gigantic marlin pulling him around in a skiff that is two feet

shorter than the fish itself and another fish taking the bait on an extra line. And he says aloud, "'I wish I had the boy'" (p. 51). But there is no boy or no anyone else available. Hemingway once said that

Writers should work alone. They should see each other only after their work is done, and not too often then. Otherwise they become like writers in New York. All angleworms in a bottle, trying to derive knowledge and nourishment from their own contact and from the bottle. Sometimes that bottle is shaped art, sometimes economics, sometimes economic-religion. But once they are in the bottle they stay there. They are lonesome outside of the bottle. They do not want to be lonesome. They are afraid to be alone in their beliefs. . . .¹¹

And, despite being a rather famous party-goer at times, Hemingway himself knew how to play the hermit on occasion in order to work on his writing. In a book entitled Max Perkins: Editor of Genius, A. Scott Berg tells of Hemingway's isolating himself from as much social contact as possible at the time he was working on Death in the Afternoon. Hard at work on his nonfiction account of bullfighting, Hemingway was "getting no mail, had not looked at a newspaper for weeks."¹² According to Berg, Hemingway's "habits were Spartan":¹³

He worked six days of every week, and had produced over 40,000 words within a month. And he had six more cases of beer, he told Max, which was enough for another six chapters. When Perkins sent him the proofs of the new Scribners edition of the In Our Time stories along with suggestions for modifications and additional selections, Ernest threw them aside and said he was working too well breaking in this new book to "flay dead horses."¹⁴

Another time, Hemingway said that many of those who practice the arts "wish to cease their work because it is too lonely, too hard to do, and is not fashionable."¹⁵ Santiago, of course, is not intimidated by either the work or the loneliness; he is not like Hemingway's angle-worm writers. His lamentations simply show his humanity. Ultimately, he is not afraid to be alone. Santiago draws strength from within himself, not relying on fishing partners, and he sees the boy, as Hemingway says an artist should, only after the "work is done." Santiago not only "should work alone," as Hemingway says successful writers should do, but also must work alone because he has no choice in his present plight of having too many fish on the lines at once. As he realizes, "But you haven't got the boy" (p. 52). Therefore, the old man concludes that, if the job is done, he will have to do it himself: "You have only yourself and you had better work back to the last line now, in the dark or not in the dark, and cut it away and hook up the two reserve coils" (p. 52). The first sentence of the next paragraph sums up the matter: "So he did it" (p. 52).

If there is a certain pain connected with Santiago's isolation from humanity while far out in the Gulf of Mexico, there is also a unique satisfaction and fulfillment that the old man realizes is his. He feels the ache of solitude because "He looked across the sea and knew how alone he was

now," but he also "knew no man was ever alone on the sea" (p. 60). So there must be something "on the sea" that Santiago identifies with in a special way, something that eases the anguish of estrangement from human voices. Certainly, the healing power of nature itself is evident in Hemingway's fiction, but Santiago is thinking of more than a romantic view of his environment. In Green Hills of Africa, Hemingway says that his artistic endeavors offer a satisfying substitute for involvement with mankind:

If you serve time for society, democracy, and the other things quite young, and declining any further enlistment make yourself responsible only to yourself, you exchange the pleasant, comforting stench of comrades for something you can never feel in any other way than by yourself. That something I cannot yet define completely but the feeling comes when you write well and truly of something. . . .¹⁶

And in the same paragraph of Green Hills, Hemingway, almost as a harbinger of Santiago, uses both the sea and the Gulf Stream to emphasize the special isolation that comes from one's choosing to be a writer. He says that "the feeling comes" also

when you do something which people do not consider a serious occupation and yet you know, truly, that it is as important and has always been as important as all the things that are in fashion, and when, on the sea, you are alone with it and know that this Gulf Stream you are living with, knowing, learning about, and loving, has moved, as it moves, since before man, and that it has gone by the shoreline of that long, beautiful, unhappy island since before Columbus sighted it and that the things you find out about it, and those

that have always lived in it are permanent and of value because that stream will flow, as it has flowed, after the Indians, after the Spaniards, after the British, after the Americans and after all the Cubans and all the systems of governments . . . and the empty condoms of our great loves float with no significance against one single lasting thing--the stream.¹⁷

Santiago, too, knows that the Gulf Stream is of indestructible value. The old man, with hands sore and bleeding from hours of battling the marlin, dips them into the sea because "the salt water will heal them" (p. 99). And he concludes that "The dark water of the true gulf is the greatest healer that there is" (p. 99). In a simple description or factual representation, the word true would not have been necessary; it would have been superfluous. But, in the metaphorical context of the fisherman-artist theme, the true symbolizes the authentic world of the artist--in other words, the sphere of the genuine work of art as opposed to the inferior or the fake. Hemingway, of course, was constantly using the words true and truly in his discussions of writers and writing. Furthermore, the adjective dark in the quotation also connotes Santiago's--or any artist's--isolated but healing escape into the realm of art, that necessary excursion, as Robert Frost states it, into "The woods" that "are lovely, dark and deep"¹⁸ or, as the same poet says in another poem, past "the furthest city light"¹⁹ so that he can proclaim, "I have been one acquainted with the night."²⁰ Before leaving the harbor, Santiago tells

Manolin, "'I want to be out before it is light'" (p. 14). And when he returns to the harbor three days later, again it is dark. In the same paragraph in which Santiago feels both "how alone he was" and that "no man was ever alone on the sea," he, true artist that he is, notices images as etchings in his surroundings. Hemingway on more than one occasion discussed the relationship between painting and writing. For instance, he told George Plimpton that "I learn as much from painters about how to write as from writers."²¹ In A Moveable Feast, he said: "I was learning something from the painting of Cezanne that made writing simple true sentences far from enough to make stories have the dimensions that I was trying to put in them."²² And Santiago, in his artistic retreat, "could see the prisms in the deep dark water" (p. 60), a phrase with adjectives that again suggest those describing Frost's woods. Santiago also sees that "The clouds were building up now for the trade wind and he looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, then blurring, then etching again and he knew that no man was ever alone on the sea" (p. 60). When Santiago saw the etchings, when he saw art in the making, he could rise above the pangs of isolation. He was not alone in his solitude in the same manner that he was not alone when he was working the big fish.

There is no question that Santiago or Hemingway or any true artist must separate himself in order to properly devote

his mind to the task of composition. But, in addition, the healing aspect of isolation is more important than one might at first suspect. For instance, Hemingway said: "Sometimes I write all day from loneliness."²³ In this context, it is interesting that so much space in The Old Man is given to the brotherhood between Santiago and his marlin, or, on the symbolic level, to the artist's relationship to and need for his art. In many ways, art and artist are inseparable. And not long after Santiago has hooked the marlin, he ponders that, although he is "Beyond all people in the world," at least he and the marlin "are joined together" (p. 50). This fraternal relationship between the fisherman-artist and the fish-book is one of the most emphasized in the novel:

"But I am with a friend" (p. 55).

I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother (p. 59).

There are three things that are brothers: the fish and my two hands (p. 64).

It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers (p. 75).

"The fish is my friend too," he said aloud (p. 75).

Then he was sorry for the great fish that had nothing to eat . . . (p. 75).

"But I have killed this fish which is my brother . . ." (p. 95).

I want to see him, he thought, and to touch and to feel him (p. 95).

But they were sailing together lashed side by side . . . (p. 99).

The closeness between Santiago and the fish is accentuated in some other passages, too. For instance, in anticipation of the Mako shark's strike, the old man says that "I cannot keep him from hitting me" (p. 101--my italics). And after this shark does attack, Santiago considers that "When the fish had been hit it was as though he himself were hit" (p. 103). Also, near the end of the fight with the marlin, when the old man is trying for the kill, several incidents stand in relief, pointing to the unity between the fisherman and his fish. Initially, there is the action immediately following Santiago's harpooning of the marlin. At this point, the fish is not yet finished, although he "came alive, with his death in him" (p. 94). Therefore, the marlin

rose high out of the water showing all his great length and width and all his power and his beauty. He seemed to hang in the air above the old man in the skiff. Then he fell into the water with a crash that sent spray over the old man and over all of the skiff (p. 94).

The picture is full color here: (1) When the marlin hangs "in the air above the old man," the fish's image suggests that of a trophy of the artist's accomplishment indelibly photographed in the sky; (2) When the marlin splashes "spray over the old man," the two brothers share more intimately the sea, that Gulf Stream that both Hemingway and Santiago conclude is "the greatest healer that there is"

(p. 99). Then, after the old man is sure that the fish is dead, he reflects on the preceding action with a meditation that is not likely to come from most fishermen. He says that, although the marlin "is my fortune," the possible temporal gain "is not why I wish to feel him" (p. 95). Santiago wants again to have physical contact with his catch because, during the harpooning, "I think I felt his heart" (p. 95). Just as the bullfighters in Hemingway's fiction become one with the bull as the sword goes into the animal, Santiago, the fisherman-artist, becomes one with the fish. At the moment of truth, the moment of completion, they become inseparable; they become more brother than before. An additional indicator of the brotherhood between the old man and his fish is the result of a play on the word strange, which is applied to both Santiago and the marlin. In contradistinction to Manolin's father, who is afraid to go out very far in the Gulf, Santiago says that "'I am a strange old man'" (p. 14). Later, when he is bolstering himself for the fight against the mighty fish, Santiago says, "'I told the boy I was a strange old man. . . . Now is when I must prove it'" (p. 66). The autobiographical significance is amplified by the statement that Hemingway made to Lillian Ross: "'I am a strange old man.'"²⁴ Not long after hooking the marlin, Santiago describes the fish with the same term that he has used on himself: "He is wonderful and strange. . . . Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely" (p. 48). Another time Santiago says: "'If

you're not tired fish . . . you must be very strange'" (p. 67). Also, on page 48, the old man's advanced age is connected with the fish when Santiago wonders, "Who knows how old he is[?]."

The theme of isolation is dominant not only when Santiago is out to sea fighting the fish or its attackers but also toward the end of the novel when he is nearing home. Tired beyond words, the old man brings his skiff into the harbor late at night after "the lights of the Terrace were out and he knew everyone was in bed" (p. 120). It is "quiet in the harbour" (p. 120), and there is "no one to help so he pulled the boat up as far as he could" (p. 120). Then Santiago's lone figure is again identified with that of his solitary stripped marlin: "He stopped for a moment and looked back and saw in the reflection from the street light the great tail of the fish standing well behind the skiff's stern. He saw the naked line of his backbone and the dark mass of the head with the projecting bill and all the nakedness between" (p. 121). Two more solitary figures in a populated area would be hard to imagine. And if one has experienced the deserted streets of the wee hours, he knows how totally alone a person can be among the thousands who inhabit the immediate locale because, while they sleep, he wakes. On the way to his house, Santiago meets only a stray cat, but the cat is hardly a welcoming party; it passes "on the far side going about its business" (p. 121), and the old man is still alone. But having seen nothing remotely

domestic for three days, Santiago watches the cat for a while. Then, in his solitude, the old man "just watched the road" (p. 121). No one came along. Like the writer who has labored alone and then finished his work for the moment, Santiago too faces no ticker-tape reception, only the knowledge that he has worked with integrity.

Finally, Santiago arrives home and falls asleep. And when Manolin aids the old man the next morning, the theme of isolation persists. Santiago asks the boy, "'Did they search for me?'" (p. 124) to which Manolin replies: "'Of course. With coast guard and with planes'" (p. 124). But the old man makes it clear that in his secluded position he was difficult to locate: "'The ocean is very big and a skiff is small and hard to see'" (p. 124). Through his conversation with the boy, Santiago emphasizes his lack of social contact while out to sea. The old man has spent three days talking mostly to himself and to various fish. And the contact with human voices seems to bolster his spirits: "He noticed how pleasant it was to have someone to talk to instead of speaking only to himself and to the sea" (p. 124). As he tells Manolin, "'I missed you'" (p. 124). Hemingway once wrote that "A writer should not live apart from the world when he is not writing."²⁵ Also, Santiago wants to catch up on any news that he has missed while out in the gulf, so he asks Manolin to "'Bring any of the papers of the time that I was gone'" (p. 126). And as Santiago shows his desire to stay abreast of contemporary events and human

thought, one can almost see Hemingway reading the various periodicals and the literature of the masters during his nonwriting hours. A student once asked Hemingway, "Do you read a good deal?" to which the author answered: "Yes, all the time. After I quit writing for the day, I don't want to keep thinking about it, so I read."²⁶

NOTES

¹"The Artist of the Beautiful," in Nathaniel Hawthorne: Selected Tales and Sketches (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1967), p. 262.

²The Old Man and the Sea (New York: Scribner's, 1952). All subsequent references to The Old Man will be handled parenthetically in the body of the text.

³A Moveable Feast (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 91.

⁴Hemingway, Feast, p. 99.

⁵Hemingway, Feast, p. 49.

⁶Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, in American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize, eds. Warren G. French and Walter E. Kidd (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 162.

⁷Death in the Afternoon (New York: Scribner's, 1960), pp. 99-100.

⁸"A Man's Credo," Playboy, Jan. 1963, p. 175.

⁹Hemingway, Nobel Speech, p. 162.

¹⁰Hemingway, Nobel Speech, p. 162.

¹¹Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1963), pp. 21-22.

¹²Max Perkins: Editor of Genius (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), p. 199.

¹³Berg, p. 200.

¹⁴Berg, p. 200.

¹⁵Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 109.

¹⁶Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 148.

¹⁷Hemingway, Green Hills, pp. 149-50.

¹⁸"Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening," in Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 275.

¹⁹"Acquainted with the Night," in Complete Poems of Robert Frost (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 324.

²⁰Frost, "Acquainted with the Night," in Complete Poems, p. 324.

²¹Robert O. Stephens, Hemingway's Nonfiction: The Public Voice (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 223.

²²Hemingway, Feast, p. 13.

²³Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 175.

²⁴Portrait of Hemingway (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 46.

²⁵Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 175.

²⁶A. E. Hotchner, Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir (New York: Bantam, 1967), pp. 219-20.

CHAPTER III

SANTIAGO'S RESOLUTION

Hemingway once said that "In the affairs of life or of business, it is not intellect that tells so much as character, not brains so much as heart."¹ And Santiago has character because he has heart. If Santiago lives the isolated existence of the fisherman-artist, the individual who must go "beyond all people in the world" (p. 50), then he also lives it by his own choosing. No one requires him to sail so far from land and its inhabitants, but the old man does it anyway because it was "My choice" to hunt the marlin (p. 50). As he tells Manolin early in the story: "'I have resolution'" (p. 23).

In the opening paragraphs of the novel, the reader sympathizes with Santiago. He is an old fisherman who has "gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish" (p. 9), and it is understandable why Manolin was "sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty" (p. 9). Santiago's "sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat" (p. 9). Although Santiago's hands have "deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords," pathos is present because "none of these scars were fresh. They were as old as erosions in

a fishless desert" (p. 10). But this initial description of Santiago is incomplete because beneath the inevitable emotional scars resulting from a "fishless desert" is the will power of a hero, the resolution of the artist who never lets himself be dejected or unsuccessful for very long. And because he is resolute, the old man does sail again and does catch a prize marlin. In the third paragraph of the book, a hint of Santiago's true character is evident when it is learned that, although "Everything about him was old," this fisherman has eyes that are "cheerful and undefeated" (p. 10). His sail may appear to be a symbol of "permanent defeat," but the old man himself will not be subjugated. He not only hooks the marlin but also lands him. And he fights the sharks that attack his fish. Soon after he kills the first shark, he says aloud, as if to reinforce the narrator's proclamation from the third paragraph: "'man is not made for defeat. . . . A man can be destroyed but not defeated'" (p. 103).

Like Santiago, Hemingway would not allow the difficulties of his craft to discourage him. Sometimes, at the outset of a new venture, Hemingway found it hard to get started. He said that when working on a story he preferred to stop writing each day "when I knew what was going to happen next. That way I could be sure of going on the next day."² But beginning a new story was often more difficult. Hemingway tells how in his younger days in Paris he would sometimes be failing in his effort to start a story but

would nevertheless look deep within himself for the strength to continue:

I would sit in front of the fire and squeeze the peel of the little [mandarin] oranges into the edge of the flames and watch the sputter of blue that they made. I would stand and look out over the roofs of Paris and think, "Do not worry. You have always written before and you will write now. All you have to do is write one true sentence that you know." So finally I would write one true sentence, and then go on from there.³

Both Hemingway and Santiago had the resolution to continue until the first sentence had been written or the big fish hooked and "then go on from there."

While the old man and the boy talk before separating for their respective fishing jaunts, Santiago is optimistic about his chances for the day. Alluding to the eighty-four fishless days, he tells the boy that "Eighty-five is a lucky number" (p. 16). Then he further demonstrates his positive attitude by asking Manolin, "'How would you like to see me bring one in that dressed out over a thousand pounds?'" (p. 16). Later, he tells the boy, "'I feel confident today'" (p. 27). Another time he says to himself, "My big fish must be somewhere" (p. 35). Just before hooking the marlin, Santiago's resolution as related to his dedication to his profession becomes clearer. Santiago does not resolve to fight his streak of bad fortune simply because he feels lucky. In fact, he admits that "I have no luck any more" (p. 32). Instead, he continues on because he

must "think of only one thing. That which I was born for" (p. 40). There is no doubt what the old man's calling in life is; however, toward the end of the story, he makes the matter explicit by telling himself, "You were born to be a fisherman" (p. 105). Such words are reminiscent of those spoken by Manuel in Hemingway's short story entitled "The Undefeated." Hemingway, of course, also used bullfighting as a metaphor for art. And, in this story, Manuel tells Retana, "'I don't want to work [at another job]. . . . I am a bull-fighter.'" When Retana questions this unsuccessful bullfighter's statement, Manuel only repeats himself: "'I'm a bullfighter.'"⁴

Just as Santiago is "born to be a fisherman," Hemingway is born to be a writer. In Green Hills of Africa, Hemingway told an acquaintance, "'I am interested in other things. I have a good life but I must write because if I do not write a certain amount I do not enjoy the rest of my life.'"⁵ In the same conversation, he said that "'the one altogether pleasant thing'" about writing is that it is rewarding as an end in itself.⁶ Another time, he wrote: "I am a writer by determination."⁷ After having spent four months as a consultant for the filming of The Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway revealed his writer's itch by declaring that he would "never again" delay his writing, the craft that he was "born and trained to do."⁸

Hemingway also spoke negatively of those individuals who simply dabble at the business of art, those who could

not persevere with the knowledge that they were "born to be fishermen," so to speak. In Green Hills of Africa, he compared the process of composing art with the sport of hunting, saying that a person who creates art must undertake the practice with the utmost seriousness, approaching his craft as his full-fledged way of life. Initially, he said that "it is pleasant to hunt something that you want very much over a long period of time, being outwitted, outmanoeuvred, and failing at the end of each day, but having the hunt and knowing every time you are out you will get the chance that you are seeking."⁹ Then, stressing that the hunter cannot be pleased if he has a "time limit"¹⁰ in which to bag his game, Hemingway gradually moved into the hunting-art comparison:

It is not the way hunting should be. It is too much like those boys who used to be sent to Paris with two years in which to make good as writers or painters after which, if they had not made good, they could go home and into their fathers' business. The way to hunt is for as long as you live against as long as there is such and such an animal; just as the way to paint is as long as there is you and colors and canvas, and to write as long as you can live and there is pencil and paper and ink or any machine to do it with, or anything you care to write about. . . .¹¹

And Hemingway had especially harsh words for the Bohemian pretenders who were patrons of the Left Bank cafés of Paris in the early 1920's. In a March 25, 1922, dispatch to The Toronto Star Weekly, Hemingway pulled no punches:

PARIS, FRANCE--The scum of Greenwich Village, New York, has been skimmed off and deposited in large ladlesful on that section of Paris adjacent to the Cafe Rotonde. New scum, of course, has risen to take the place of the old, but the oldest scum, the thickest scum and the scummiest scum has come across the ocean, somehow, and with its afternoon and evening levees has made the Rotonde the leading Latin Quarter show place for tourists in search of atmosphere.

. . . .

You can find anything you are looking for at the Rotonde--except serious artists. The trouble is that people who go on a tour of the Latin Quarter look in at the Rotonde and think they are seeing an assembly of the real artists of Paris. I want to correct that in a very public manner, for the real artists of Paris who are turning out creditable work resent and loathe the Rotonde crowd.¹²

And Hemingway became even more specific about the shortcomings of these pseudo-artists:

They are nearly all loafers expending the energy that an artist puts into his creative work in talking about what they are going to do and condemning the work of all artists who have gained any degree of recognition. By talking about art they obtain the same satisfaction that the real artist does in his work. That is very pleasant, of course, but they insist upon posing as artists.

Since the good old days when Charles Baudelaire led a purple lobster on a leash through the same old Latin Quarter, there has not been much good poetry written in cafes. Even then I suspect that Baudelaire parked the lobster with the concierge down on the first floor, put the chloroform bottle corked on the washstand and sweated and carved at the Fleurs du Mal alone with his ideas and his paper as all artists have worked

before and since. But the gang that congregates at the corner of the Boulevard Montparnasse and the Boulevard Raspail have no time to work at anything else; they put in a full day at the Rotonde.¹³

But Hemingway himself was resolved to avoid useless hobnobbing and instead to diligently practice his art. As Ernest Walsh said about Hemingway: "Thank God he will never be satisfied."¹⁴

Santiago, too, has totally dedicated himself to his profession. At the beginning of the fight with the marlin, the old man eats some fish that he has caught in order to strengthen himself. His left hand has cramped from holding the thick line, and he hopes that the nutrients from the fish will make him better able to perform his job. "Come on," he tells himself. "Eat it now and it will strengthen the hand. It is not the hand's fault and you have been many hours with the fish" (p. 58). Then he summons more resolution: "But you can stay with him forever. Eat the bonito now" (p. 58). So he does eat. But after he is actually full, Santiago realizes that the remaining fish might become spoiled by sitting in the sun; therefore, the old man decides that he should eat it while it is good because, otherwise, he might not have any more food from which to draw strength for the tedious and debilitating hours ahead. "I will eat it all and then I will be ready," he says (p. 59). Then the narrator emphasizes the old man's dedication by saying that Santiago "conscientiously . . .

ate all of the wedge-shaped strips of fish" (p. 59--italics are mine).

And the old man is just as conscientiously resolved to deal with the fish itself. For instance, when he discovers that the marlin has the power to remain submerged for an indefinite period of time, Santiago meets the challenge firmly: "Then I will stay down with him forever" (p. 60). Earlier, he had said, "'Fish . . . I'll stay with you until I die'" (p. 53). Hemingway once said, "I am going to keep on writing as well as I can and as truly as I can until I die. And I hope that I never die."¹⁵ And despite the normal fluctuations of emotion that serve to make the character of Santiago believable as a human being--a "round" character, as E. M. Forster would say--the old man does not waver in his basic intent. Santiago's compassion may be showing when he feels "sorry for the great fish that had nothing to eat" (p. 75), but, as the narrator makes clear, Santiago's "determination to kill [the marlin] never relaxed in his sorrow for him" (p. 75). The old man himself says: "'The fish is my friend. . . . But I must kill him'" (p. 75). This resolution of Santiago's to complete the job once it has begun and to do it properly is a controlling factor in the story. He is not like Hemingway's "two-year artists" or the Bohemian pseudo-artists; he is like the Hemingway who wanted to hunt and to write for "as long as you live." Santiago is the fisherman who says, "'Sail on this course and take it when it comes" (p. 103).

He is the man who says, while admitting that he is "too old to club sharks to death," that he will nevertheless "try it as long as I have the oars and the short club and the tiller" (p. 112). Or, as Hemingway said, as long as the writer has the "pencil and paper and ink or any machine to do it with. . . ."

Even Santiago's dreams and recollections illustrate his resolution. Long before he is able to turn the fish, the old man begins to tire, so "he tried to think of other things" (p. 67). For instance, he thought of Hall of Fame baseball player Joe DiMaggio, who, because of playing under a handicap, was a model of courage for the old man: "I must have confidence and I must be worthy of the great DiMaggio who does all things perfectly even with the pain of the bone spur in his heel" (p. 68). Then he says: "Do you believe the great DiMaggio would stay with a fish as long as I will stay with this one? . . . I am sure he would and more since he is young and strong" (p. 68). And Santiago draws even more courage from his identification with DiMaggio by saying that "Also his father was a fisherman" (p. 68). Quite soon after thinking of DiMaggio's youth, the old man "remembered, to give himself more confidence," a specific incident when he himself, as a younger man demonstrated great strength and resolution in winning an arm wrestling match in a tavern at Casablanca (pp. 68-69). Santiago "had played the hand game with the great negro from

Cienfuegos who was the strongest man on the docks. They had gone one day and one night with their elbows on a chalk line on the table and their forearms straight up and their hands gripped tight" (p. 69). Santiago recalls that he had finally beaten the other man and had become known as "The Champion" (p. 70). As a result, "He decided that he could beat anyone if he wanted to badly enough" (p. 70), an attitude that carries over to his fishing experience.

Another part of the dream and recollection theme is present when Santiago dreams of the lions, a reminiscence that again reminds him of his youth, a time when he was blessed with more vigor. The narrator says that the old man "dreamed of . . . the lions on the beach," apparently a beach in the Canary Islands, and that, furthermore, "he loved them as he loved the boy" (p. 25). And the final sentence in the book reveals that Santiago, despite his exhaustion from the intense physical and emotional experience he has just faced, is still full of life and resolution because he is "dreaming about the lions" (p. 127). The connection between the dreams of Santiago and the goals of the fisherman-artist become more apparent when one recalls Hemingway's declaration that The Old Man "was the biggest and most beautiful lion of my life."¹⁶ At one point in the story, the dream itself dramatically merges with Santiago's ultimate goal, the landing of the marlin. The old man has just finished killing the fish and tying him to the side of the skiff. Then he recalls that "At one time when he was feeling so

badly toward the end, he had thought perhaps it was a dream. Then when he had seen the fish come out of the water and hang motionless in the sky before he fell, he was sure there was some great strangeness and he could not believe it" (p. 98). The dream and the dream's trophy are the same for this moment--and forever.

The third day out to sea, Santiago becomes "faint and dizzy and that . . . worried him" (p. 87). He has been "seeing black spots before his eyes" for an hour, but "He was not afraid of the black spots. They were normal at the tension that he was pulling on the line" (p. 87). Nevertheless, the old man will not forgive himself if he gives in to his suffering, and the very sentence following the one in which he worries about his wooziness demonstrates his dedication to himself and to his task: "'I could not fail myself and die on a fish like this,' he said" (p. 87). Hemingway once said concerning his approach to writing that

If you anticipate failure you'll have it.
 . . . Now I don't want you to think I've
 never been spooked, but if you don't take
 command of your fears, no attack will
 ever go.¹⁷

As he comes near to the time when the marlin will be close enough for the kill, Santiago worries about the extent of his endurance: "I must get him alongside this time, he thought. I am not good for many more turns" (p. 92). But, again, the old man quickly counters with something to bolster his resolution: "Yes you are, he told himself. You're good for ever" (p. 92). The next time the fish comes near

the skiff, the old man is still not able to complete the landing, and he begins to babble a bit in his thoughts. He quickly recognizes his instability, however, and resolves to remedy the situation: "Now you are getting confused in the head. . . . You must keep your head clear. Keep your head clear and know how to suffer like a man" (p. 92). Then he actually speaks: "'Clear up, head' . . . in a voice he could hardly hear. 'Clear up'" (p. 92). But the fish still can not be landed, and during two more turns by the marlin, Santiago has "been on the point of feeling himself go each time" (p. 93). Admitting to himself that "I do not know" whether enough strength remains, he nevertheless musters the courage to think positively: "But I will try it once more" (p. 93). And he does, as exemplified in a passage that focuses on the resolution theme through the repetition of the words try, tried, and again:

He tried it once more and he felt himself going when he turned the fish. The fish righted himself and swam off again slowly with the great tail weaving in the air.

I'll try it again, the old man promised, although his hands were mushy now and he could only see well in flashes.

He tried it again and it was the same. So he thought, and he felt himself going before he started; I will try it once again (p. 93--my italics in the emphasized words).

And his resolution pays dividends because Santiago "took all his pain and what was left of his strength and his long gone pride and he put it against the fish's agony and the fish

came over onto his side" (p. 93). And when he drives the harpoon into the marlin (probably only seconds later), Santiago does it with "more strength he had just summoned" for the occasion (pp. 93-94).

Santiago's determination is also displayed when he gallantly fights the sharks round after round even when he knows that the defense is impossible. Just before the Mako shark hits the marlin, Santiago sees the attacker and decides that there is "little hope" (p. 101) to save the fish that he has so courageously and skillfully brought in. Nevertheless, the old man remains "full of resolution" (p. 101). He feels that, although he cannot scare the shark away, "maybe I can get him. Dentuso, he thought. Bad luck to your mother" (p. 101). Later, the scavenger sharks begin tearing the marlin apart, so "What can you do?" he thinks (p. 115). Aloud he proclaims: "'Fight them. . . . I'll fight them until I die'" (p. 115). Manuel, the aging bullfighter in "The Undefeated," is likewise fighting an uphill battle. He is too old and unskilled to compete in the ring, but, despite being thrown several times by the bull, he shows the courage to finally kill the animal; he simply was resolved to complete the job. And Manuel's inner strength is further documented when he at the end of the story retains his coleta. Hemingway once wrote that people are often discouraged from practicing the arts because the "lice who crawl on literature will not praise them."¹⁸

There is no doubt that the "lice" to which Hemingway refers are the critics--or in Santiago's case, the sharks. Hemingway finished his point by saying that, although writing is "very hard to do" with all the problems of the artist's loneliness and his attacks from critics, there is no real reason to stop writing.¹⁹ In Hemingway's exact words, "So what?" if these seemingly negative factors exist!²⁰ The writer can win even when seemingly losing, if he has the resolution of a Santiago.

NOTES

- ¹"A Man's Credo," Playboy, Jan. 1963, p. 124.
- ²A Moveable Feast (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 12.
- ³Hemingway, Feast, p. 12.
- ⁴The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Scribner's 1953), pp. 236-37.
- ⁵Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 25.
- ⁶Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 26.
- ⁷Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.
- ⁸"A Situation Report," in By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, ed. William White (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 413.
- ⁹Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 11.
- ¹⁰Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 11.
- ¹¹Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 12.
- ¹²"American Bohemians in Paris," in By-Line, pp. 21-22.
- ¹³Hemingway, "American Bohemians," pp. 22-23.
- ¹⁴Carlos Baker, Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton, Univ. Press, 1973), p. 26.
- ¹⁵Ivan Kashkeen, "Alive in the Midst of Death," in Hemingway and His Critics, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 166.
- ¹⁶Kurt Singer and Jane Sherrod, Ernest Hemingway: Man of Courage (Minneapolis: T. S. Dennison and Co., 1963), p. 167.
- ¹⁷A. E. Hotchner, Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 218.

¹⁸Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 109.

¹⁹Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 109.

²⁰Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 109.

CHAPTER IV

SANTIAGO'S ARTISTRY: BEFORE THE STRUGGLE

Santiago's display of manual dexterity and physical stamina is evident. The old man is certainly remembered for enduring three days and nights in the Gulf of Mexico while battling the marlin, the dozens of sharks, and the elements. However, it is Santiago's mental qualifications that help him survive. That is, although he is physically competent as a deep-sea fisherman, the old man is also a man of special perceptions, perceptions that are seen in his ability both to understand his job and to perform with a high degree of skill.

If Santiago's eyes are "cheerful and undefeated," they are also "the same color as the sea" (p. 10), which is to say symbolic of the unique vision of the true fisherman. Of course, the exact hue of the old man's eyes is not revealed in this passage because the color of the sea changes according to the day and its conditions. But this ambiguity is significant, suggesting that Santiago is perceptive enough and flexible enough to cope with the varying temperaments of the deep. The sea, in fact, belongs uniquely to the fisherman-artists because they are the persons who understand it best. Santiago emphasizes his special position

when, in his mind, he makes a comparison between those persons who are "at sea" and those persons who are "ashore" (p. 61). And those "at sea" have the most insight because, for instance, they can "always see the signs of a hurricane in the sky for days ahead," whereas those on land "do not see . . . because they do not know what to look for" (p. 61). The old man feels that a view from "The land must make a difference . . . in the shape of the clouds" (p. 61). However, being out to sea, where the cloud forms are easier to interpret, Santiago is in a position to understand the weather, and he does know what to look for, concluding that "we have no hurricane coming now" (p. 61). The importance of Santiago's eyes is also shown in a comparison between the vision of the old man and that of Manolin's father: whereas Manolin's father is "'almost blind,'" Santiago's discernment is symbolized through eyes that are still "'good'" (p. 14).

Hemingway believed that a writer too cannot function properly unless he has discernment. Like Santiago, the writer must be able to interpret what he sees. Hemingway explains that "Only when a man has clear insight into the springs of human action can he truly begin to write well."¹ He told Lillian Ross that the critics were unable to evaluate great writing. Being akin to Santiago's "shore" people, not being able to understand what they physically see, the critics are "like those people who go to the ball games and can't tell the players without a score card," Hemingway said.² Also showing disdain for personal acquaintances who

did not seem to show an aptitude for literature, Hemingway said to his son Gregory that he told the "'stupid ones'" that he was writing "'the greatest thing since Shakespeare," and that shuts them up.'"³ Then he said that he told "'my intelligent friends,'" the ones who might identify somewhat at least with what the author was speaking of, "'that I'm working on a trilogy about the land, the sea, and the air. And I am.'"⁴ He further said that he could count his intelligent friends "'on the fingers on one hand.'"⁵ Of course, the two tourists at the end of The Old Man show that they are "shore" people by thinking that the tail from Santiago's marlin belonged to a shark (p. 127).

Santiago also distinguishes between himself and those other fishermen who "feared being out of sight of land in a small boat" (p. 63). Carlos Baker, although not pursuing the fisherman-artist theme, points out the difference between Santiago and the other fishermen by saying that

Very early in the book the contrast is established between the lee shore and the Gulf Stream. There are inshore men, those who work within sight of land because it is easier, safer, and less frightening, and those like Santiago who have the intrepidity to reach beyond the known towards the possible.⁶

Perceiving that Manolin's father, who is also the boy's fishing boss, is one of those fishermen who are afraid to wander greatly from the shore, Santiago tells the boy:

"'He does not like to work too far out'" (p. 14). As Baker says:

The boy hopes to persuade his father to work far out that day in order to provide help for Santiago if it should be necessary. But this will not happen. Manolo's father is plainly an inshore man, one who does not like to work far out, one who prefers not to take chances, no matter how great the potential gain might be.⁷

Manolin's father and Santiago are in different leagues as fishermen; the other man may fear being too far from shore, but Santiago does not. On the morning that the old man begins his three-day ordeal, "There were other boats from the other beaches going out to sea" (p. 28). Soon "They spread apart after they were out of the mouth of the harbour and each one headed for the part of the ocean where he hoped to find a fish" (p. 28). Santiago is aware that he must separate himself from the others if he is to find a large fish; therefore, he is determined to travel "far out" in his quest (p. 28). But, as the old man disunites himself from the other fishermen, more than an isolation theme is present: the suggestion in the harbor scene and throughout the novel is that Santiago unavoidably separates from others because he is the master fisherman, the great artist, while others are simply average. In "Big Two-Hearted River," another story in which the artistry theme appears (although with less intensity than in The Old Man), Nick, a writer like Hemingway, must separate himself from other fishermen, too:

He had wet his hand before he touched the trout, so he would not disturb the delicate mucus that covered him. If a trout was touched with a dry hand, a white fungus attacked the unprotected spot. Years

before when he had fished crowded streams, with fly fishermen ahead of him and behind him, Nick had again and again come on dead trout, furry with white fungus, drifted against a rock, or floating belly up in some pool. Nick did not like to fish with other men on the river. Unless they were of your party, they spoiled it.⁸

On the metaphorical level, Nick and Santiago are of the same party, although the short story indicates that Nick is not yet experienced enough for the quality of fish that the old man can handle.

Santiago is not only resolute in isolating himself from both the land people and the other fishermen but also conscious of what he is doing. That is, the narrator says that the old man "knew" that "he was going far out" (p. 28). In his Nobel Prize acceptance speech, Hemingway made almost explicit reference to The Old Man and the Sea by using the expression "far out," publicly suggesting the writer theme in his novel. He said: "It is because we have had such great writers in the past that a writer is driven far out past where he can go, out to where no one can help him."⁹ And Santiago was beyond the reaches of the other fishermen because they simply were not qualified to work beside the master fisherman.

Manolin is concerned about Santiago because of the age of the old man. When the boy asks Santiago whether he is really "'strong enough for a truly big fish?'" (p. 14), the old man explains that, even if he no longer has his youthful vigor, he does have the experience of years to aid him.

So he tells the boy that "'there are many tricks'" available for a seasoned fisherman (p. 14). Before leaving the harbor, Santiago repeats the thought to his young friend and student, saying that "'I may not be as strong as I think. . . . But I know many tricks'" (p. 23). And this fisherman-artist does know: he plays the fish and the sea like a master musician bringing forth the most from a piece of music and from his musical instrument.

That Santiago is indeed a fisherman-artist is strongly suggested early in the novel when the narrator says that the old man's fishing lines were "as thick around as a big pencil" (p. 31). The hint is unmistakable: a pencil, of course, is a writer's tool. And Santiago is expert at using the tools of his trade. The old man has not only the desire to go farther out to sea than the other fishermen but also the skill to keep his lines "straighter than anyone else did" (p. 32). Other fishermen allowed their lines to "drift with the current and sometimes they were at sixty fathoms when the fisherman thought they were at a hundred" (p. 32). But Santiago is different because he controls his lines in such a manner "that at each level in the darkness of the stream there would be a bait waiting exactly where he wished it to be for any fish that swam there" (p. 32). As he tells himself, "I keep them [the lines] with precision" (p. 32). The old man is very conscious that handling his lines "with precision" is an important part of catching a big fish. He is aware that he has the choice to "just drift," if he so

desires, "and sleep" in Tom Sawyer fashion simply putting "a bight of line around my toe to wake me" (p. 41). However, such methods are not for the true artist, and Santiago does not believe in them. Neither did Hemingway believe in them; he said that, although his novels were "drawn from the depths of my heart and experience," nevertheless, "I am not content to give them forth . . . thoughtlessly."¹⁰ And just as Santiago began fishing only after very meticulously setting out his lines, Hemingway would "never begin to write until [my] ideas are in order."¹¹ So the old man decides that, although his luck has been down for some time, "Every day is a new day" (p. 32). Knowing that he must remain well prepared in case opportunity shows itself, he says to himself, "I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready" (p. 32).

Just as Santiago feels that he must be "exact" in the way he manages his fishing lines, Hemingway felt that the writer must be honest (or "exact") in the composition of fiction. In Esquire, Hemingway wrote:

Good writing is true writing. If a man is making a story up it will be true in proportion to the amount of knowledge of life that he has and how conscientious he is; so that when he makes something up it is as it would truly be.¹²

Maxwell Perkins, the late editor for Charles Scribner's Sons, and Hemingway were once fishing together near Key West, Florida. Perkins asked Hemingway, "'Why don't you write about [the Gulf Stream]?" About that time a pelican flew over.

Hemingway said: "'I might someday but not yet. . . . Take that pelican. I don't know yet what he is in the scheme of things here.'"¹³ Carlos Baker elaborates on Hemingway's compulsion for "true" writing, first quoting Hemingway himself on the subject:

"A writer's job is to tell the truth," said Hemingway in 1942. He had believed it for twenty years and he would continue to believe it for as long as he lived. No other writer of our time had so fiercely asserted, so pugnaciously defended, or so consistently exemplified the writer's obligation to speak truly. His standard of truth-telling remained, moreover, so high and so rigorous that he was ordinarily unwilling to admit secondary evidence picked up from other sources than his own experience. "I only know what I have seen," was a statement which came often to his lips and pen. What he had personally done, or what he knew unforgettably by having gone through one version of it, was what he was interested in telling about. This is not to say that he refused to invent freely. But he always made it a sacrosanct point to invent in terms of what he actually knew from having been there.¹⁴

And in composing The Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway was certainly able to draw from actual experience because he had done much deep-sea fishing, a fact that even the amateur Hemingway buff is acquainted with. In Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway said that he had attempted to write about bullfighting before he understood it well enough to be accurate:

the bull fight was so far from simple and I liked it so much that it was much too complicated for my then equipment for writing to deal with and, aside from four very short sketches, I was not able to

write anything about it for five years--
and I wish I would have waited ten.¹⁵

Hemingway's knowledge of the sport is indicated by Lillian Ross's statement that American bullfighter Sidney "Franklin told me that Hemingway was the first American male who had ever spoken to him intelligently about bullfighting."¹⁶

Also, in Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway wrote sarcastically about those writers who do write before adequately digesting their subjects:

The longest books on Spain are usually written by Germans who make one intensive visit and then never return. I should say that it is probably a good system, if one has to write books on Spain, to write them as rapidly as possible after a first visit as several visits could only confuse the first impressions and make conclusions much less easy to draw. Also the one-visit books are much surer of everything and are bound to be more popular.¹⁷

Hemingway felt too that the writer must attempt to create living people in his fiction, not just characters, and, in addition, that he must avoid overusing his knowledge of various subjects in his fiction as a means of flaunting his intellect:

When writing a novel a writer should create living people people not characters. A character is a caricature. If a writer can make people live there may be no great characters in his book, but it is possible that his book will remain as a whole; as an entity; as a novel. If the people the writer is making talk of old masters; of music; of modern painting; of letters; or of science then they should talk of those subjects in the novel. If they do not talk of those subjects and the writer makes them talk of

them he is a faker, and if he talks about them himself to show how much he knows then he is showing off. No matter how good a phrase or simile he may have if he puts it in where it is not absolutely necessary and irreplaceable he is spoiling his work for egotism. Prose is architecture, not interior decoration, and the Baroque is over. For a writer to put his own intellectual musings, which he might sell for a low price as essays, into the mouths of artificially constructed characters which are more remunerative when issued as people in a novel is good economics, perhaps, but does not make literature. People in a novel, not skillfully constructed characters, must be projected from the writer's assimilated experience, from his knowledge, from his head, from his heart and from all there is of him. If he ever has luck as well as seriousness and gets them out entire they will have more than one dimension and they will last a long time. A good writer should know as near everything as possible.¹⁸

The numerous comments that Hemingway made extolling the necessity of integrity and accuracy in writing bring additional meaning to Santiago's concern for exactness. And both Santiago's and Hemingway's concern add significance to Krebs' (in "Soldier's Home") worry about the lies that are told about war:

Krebs acquired the nausea in regard to experience that is the result of untruth or exaggeration, and when he occasionally met another man who had really been a soldier and they talked a few minutes in the dressing room at a dance he fell into the easy pose of the old soldiers among soldiers.¹⁹

Scott Donaldson points out that "Hemingway reserved his deepest scorn for those who faked a knowledge of what they were writing about, especially if the subject was war."²⁰ Santiago

feels that, although luck is important, preparedness via precision is the formula for success. The old man prefers to be awake and knowledgeable so that he has a better chance to take advantage of good fortune when it appears. But he does not believe that luck alone will suffice. In a posthumous article in the January, 1963, issue of Playboy, Hemingway wrote that

where young men have made a lucky stroke, the result is too often a misfortune. They neglect the necessary, persistent effort. The habit of industry is ignored. Work becomes distasteful, and life is wrecked, looking for chances that never come.

People are always seeking shortcuts to happiness. There are no shortcuts.²¹

In the same article, he said that he applied his "broad critical powers to my own work as if it were the production of another. I have not hesitated many times to reject that which a less conscientious writer would have left unquestioned."²² Hemingway continued in the Esquire piece to say that if the writer

doesn't know how many people work in their minds and actions his luck may save him for a while [or implicitly that his luck alone will not save him for long], or he may write fantasy. But if he continues to write about what he does not know about he will find himself faking. After he fakes a few times he cannot write honestly any more.²³

To Hemingway, true and exact writing also must be characterized by the absence of superfluity. And he not only promoted economy of style but also exemplified it with the succinctness of style that is characteristic of much of his

fiction. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway tells of his struggling during the early days in Paris in order to create well-written stories. He said that "it was difficult," sometimes taking "me a full morning of work to write a paragraph" because "I had started to break down all my writing and get rid of all facility."²⁴ Hemingway also said, "If I started to write elaborately, or like someone introducing or presenting something, I found that I could cut the scroll-work or ornament out and throw it away and start with the first true simple declarative sentence I had written."²⁵ Another time he wrote:

The greatest writers have the gift of brilliant brevity. . . . The greatest literary faults of modern writers are their tendencies to overornament and their fondness of superficial glitter. . . . The story is at times tediously spun out, running on and on like the tale of a garrulous storyteller. They seem to have little idea of what the next chapter of their novel will contain.²⁶

Those authors who Hemingway felt did not know what would appear in their novels from chapter to chapter seem much like the "other" fishermen in The Old Man, those fishermen whose lines drifted "with the current and sometimes they were at sixty fathoms when the fishermen thought they were at a hundred." Sometimes, Hemingway also named names when he accused modern writers of being verbose. For instance, in 1940, Hemingway said that if he wrote as loosely as Sinclair Lewis he could write 5,000 words a day throughout the year.²⁷ After reading Thomas Wolfe's You Can't Go Home Again the

same year, Hemingway bragged that he could portray Maxwell Perkins better in 1,000 words than Wolfe had in 10,000.²⁸

Related to the matter of superfluity of wordage is the practice of covering one's ineptness by adding mysticism to one's stories, according to Hemingway. And he attacked this practice with strong words:

This too to remember. If a man writes clearly enough any one can see if he fakes. If he mystifies to avoid a straight statement, which is very different from breaking so-called rules of syntax or grammar to make an effect which can be obtained in no other way, the writer takes a longer time to be known as a fake and other writers who are afflicted by the same necessity will praise him in their own defense. True mysticism should not be confused with incompetence in writing which seeks to mystify where there is no mystery but is really only the necessity to fake to cover the lack of knowledge or the inability to state clearly. Mysticism implies a mystery and there are many mysteries; but incompetence is not one of them; nor is overwritten journalism made literature by the injection of a false epic quality. Remember this too: all bad writers are in love with the epic.²⁹

The view expressed in the preceding sentence is no doubt hyperbolic--some bad writers are not in love with the epic--nevertheless, one can follow Hemingway's generalization with another that says that Santiago, the fisherman-artist, prefers to work in an aboveboard manner, not doing anything for the sake of appearance, regardless of how sophisticated or romantic it may seem to be. For instance, it is "the younger fishermen," those who speak of the sea

"as a contestant or a place or even an enemy," who use the flashy equipment--"buoys as floats for their lines and . . . motorboats" (pp. 29-30). There is a possible pun on the word buoys because one theme in the paragraph in which the word appears is the contrast between the mature and the immature ways of viewing the sea and the profession of fishing. But Santiago is not a boy. Unlike the writers who unadvisedly add mysticism to their works, the old man does not use modern or fancy methods while performing his task; he simply does it in a straightforward manner metaphorically suggestive of the type of writing that Hemingway supported. Santiago's approach was not necessarily the easiest, however, even if it was the most effective. At one point in the fight with the marlin, the old man thinks about "How simple it would be if I could make the line fast" (p. 77). Then he admits that such a device would demonstrate his own incompetence because "with one small lurch [the marlin] could break [the line]" (p. 77), ending the old man's primary reason for being out that far to sea, that is, to successfully land the fish. The distinction between appearance and reality in the artist's working methods is basically the same one that Hemingway used when he presented bullfighting as a metaphor for art. Reacting to Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway's nonfiction treatise on bullfighting, Robert O. Stephens said:

The decadent style in bullfighting came with the emphasis on capework rather than on killing the bull. As the popular

matadors put on more and more florid shows with their capes, using the butterfly pass and all the other passes with names ending in illa and ina, they left the true meaning of capework to be carried out by the picadors and banderilleros; that is, to prepare the bull for killing. And with such decadent styles the matadors finally made killing the bull a virtual anticlimax. They emphasized the manner of execution instead of the end result; they ignored the effect of the suertes on the bull. To Hemingway it was too often that way with writing also. Style in writing, as he noted more than once, was keyed to efficiency, to attaining the end result of effect on the reader, of giving him the sense of reality that both the good writer and the good bullfighter could provide. But style for itself was meretricious and narcissistic.³⁰

When luck appears in the form of a magnificent fish, Santiago is ready because his lines are ready: "Just then, watching his lines, he saw one of the projecting green sticks dip sharply" (p. 41), indicating that a fish is interested in the old man's bait. "'Yes," he said. 'Yes'" (p. 41), showing both his excitement and awareness of what was about to happen. However, despite his knowledge that a big one is within possible reach, Santiago remains the composed craftsman, not attempting to force the situation, but holding the line "softly" (p. 41). He knows that there is no reason to become impatient. Hemingway more than once commented on the penalties of writing too hurriedly. In the Playboy article, he said:

Much writing published today is crude and defective in art [because] Too many authors write rapidly and carelessly, seldom correcting their first manuscript dashed off in the heat of

composition. As a result, the faults of their style are very glaring. Their dialogs are far from natural, their words ill-chosen, their English often slovenly in the extreme. Many of their novels are without unity of plot and action.³¹

Another time he said:

Our writers when they have made money increase their standard of living and they are caught. They have to write to keep up their establishments, their wives, and so on, and they write slop. It is slop not on purpose but because it is hurried.³²

According to Carlos Baker, when Hemingway was completing The Sun Also Rises, "He did not really regard the book as finished" because "he knew that the task of revision ought not to be rushed and resolved to take his time about it through the fall and winter."³³ And Maxwell Perkins once

recounted to a class of students who were studying the book publishing trade that Hemingway "'once told me that he had written part of A Farewell to Arms fifty times.'"³⁴

Philip Young says that the novelist "claimed to have rewritten the last page of A Farewell to Arms thirty-nine times, and to have read through the manuscript of The Old Man and the Sea some two hundred times before he was finished with it."³⁵

Santiago, like Hemingway, does not become hurried. Instead, he remains collected in his every move. For a while, the old man "felt no strain nor weight"; he "held the line lightly. Then it came again. This time it was a tentative pull, not solid nor heavy" (p. 41). And the "tentative pull" is signal enough for the fisherman-artist because with

his keen perception "he knew exactly what it was. One hundred fathoms down a marlin was eating the sardines that covered the point and shank of the hook where the hand-forged hook projected from the head of the small tuna" (p. 41). Still utilizing his skill in his calmness, Santiago continues to hold the line "delicately, and softly, with the left hand" (p. 41). Then he manages the line so that it can "run through his fingers without the fish feeling any tension" (p. 41). Even though the old man is meticulous in dealing with the marlin, he is actually exhibiting the control that comes from physical strength in much the same way that a concert pianist has the touch to control the soft tones because of the strength in his hands.

This soft-but-strong combination in Santiago's hands is indicative of more than the old man's ability to wait patiently for the fish to make the proper move. It is suggestive of his ability to handle the entire operation of landing an enormous marlin--or, metaphorically, of composing a superior work of art, an undertaking that calls for much self-imposed regulation on the part of the individual artist. Such deliberate control is no doubt what Hemingway had in mind when he said that he approached his writing very meticulously, working "with a tireless hand."³⁶ And, before the novel ends, Santiago certainly demonstrates his own "tireless hand," despite the physical exertion and pain that naturally accompany his exhausting bout with the prize marlin.

NOTES

- ¹"A Man's Credo," Playboy, Jan. 1963, p. 124.
- ²Portrait of Hemingway (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 34.
- ³Papa: A Personal Memoir (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p. 124.
- ⁴Gregory Hemingway, p. 124.
- ⁵Gregory Hemingway, p. 124.
- ⁶Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), p. 318.
- ⁷Baker, Hemingway: The Writer, p. 318.
- ⁸The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Scribner's, 1966), p. 225.
- ⁹Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, in American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize, eds. Warren G. French and Walter E. Kidd (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1969), pp. 161-62.
- ¹⁰Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.
- ¹¹Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.
- ¹²"Monologue to the Maestro: A High Seas Letter," in By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, ed. William White (New York: Bantam, 1970), pp. 186-87.
- ¹³A. Scott Berg, Max Perkins: Editor of Genius (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), p. 177.
- ¹⁴Baker, Hemingway: The Writer, p. 48.
- ¹⁵Death in the Afternoon (New York: Scribner's, 1960), p. 3.
- ¹⁶Ross, p. 11.
- ¹⁷Hemingway, Death, pp. 52-53.
- ¹⁸Hemingway, Death, p. 191.

- ¹⁹Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 146.
- ²⁰By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway (Dallas, Penn.: Penguin, 1978), p. 248.
- ²¹Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 175.
- ²²Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.
- ²³Hemingway, "Monologue to the Maestro," p. 187.
- ²⁴A Moveable Feast (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 154.
- ²⁵Hemingway, Feast, p. 12.
- ²⁶Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 124.
- ²⁷Carlos Baker, Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 440.
- ²⁸Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 448.
- ²⁹Hemingway, Death, p. 54.
- ³⁰Hemingway's Nonfiction: The Public Voice (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), p. 227.
- ³¹Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 124.
- ³²Ernest Hemingway, Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 23.
- ³³Baker, Hemingway: The Writer, p. 34.
- ³⁴Berg, p. 8.
- ³⁵Ernest Hemingway, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 1 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 37.
- ³⁶Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.

CHAPTER V

SANTIAGO'S ARTISTRY: THE STRUGGLE AND AFTER

The comparison between Santiago as fisherman and Hemingway as writer becomes more apparent as the old man continues to play the marlin. Exhibiting the vision and skill of the fisherman-artist, he shows his professionalism throughout the time-consuming ordeal. And, although Santiago is not always able to control the fish, he is able to control himself enough of the time to eventually master the extraordinary example of life on the end of his line.

Before the marlin takes the bait, Santiago allows the huge fish to dictate the action, knowing that otherwise the catch might be lost. And when the marlin is finally hooked, of course, the old man has no choice but to follow his giant of the sea wherever he might go. As Santiago says, "I'm being towed by a fish and I'm the towing bitt" (p. 45). Sometimes, in his routine of writing, Hemingway also went through the process of--to borrow Santiago's words--"being towed by a fish." For instance, in A Moveable Feast, Hemingway explains how, as he sat in a Paris café writing, he went through two stages in the composition of a particular story: one in which "The story was writing itself and I was having a hard time keeping up with it";¹ another in which

"I was writing now and it was not writing itself."² The first stage apparently was the type of situation in which an author has a story, or at least part of a story, in him, and the story must come out on paper in a very free or automatic flow in a basically unedited manner. Hemingway once condemned some writing that he was doing as "'not going good'" because "'Writing's got to flow and come easy if it's good and this stuff 'smells of the lamp.'"³ But he had better luck sometimes. While composing The Old Man and the Sea, for example, Hemingway said that, although the "'prose is Homeric, maybe too Homeric, like I'm reaching for greatness,'" nevertheless, "'It's coming out naturally.'"⁴ The second stage that Hemingway went through in the Paris café seems to exemplify the point at which the writer takes more conscious control of the direction of a story--becoming more aware of plot and theme--or perhaps begins the editing process.

Ever since his first contact with the marlin, Santiago has known of the fish's superior size and strength. While the fish is still nibbling at the bait, the old man is thinking that "This far out, he must be huge in this month" (p. 41). Then, just before actually hooking the marlin, Santiago becomes more positive of the fish's size: "He knew what a huge fish this was and he thought of him moving away in the darkness with the tuna held crosswise in his mouth" (p. 43). And Santiago demonstrates cautious skill by allowing his line to reel out as the fish is taking the bait: "At

that moment he felt him stop moving but the weight was still there. Then the weight increased and he gave more line" (p. 43). A short time later, while the fish is actually eating the bait, the old man lets "the line slip through his fingers" (p. 44). Soon thereafter, Santiago sets the hook in the marlin only to find that "Nothing happened. The fish just moved away slowly and the old man could not raise him an inch" (p. 44). The fish, like the early stages of Hemingway's story, was controlling the man. But, as Santiago thinks, "I have a big reserve of line; all that a man can ask" (p. 52). Later, he says to himself: ". . . let him [the fish] work until your next duty comes" (p. 76).

As soon as the old man discovers that he is "the towing bitt," he decides that he must continue to be cautious. "'I could make the line fast,'" Santiago says aloud, but "'then he could break it. I must hold him all I can and give him line when he must have it'" (p. 45). Another time, he thinks: "I must . . . at all times be ready to give line" (p. 77). From that moment until the time that Santiago secures the marlin to the side of the skiff, the old fisherman's thoughts are controlled by the fact that his huge fish can break the line, if proper skill is not asserted. And throughout the battle, the rhetoric of the novel emphasizes this "breaking point" motif. For instance:

He tried to increase the tension, but the line had been taut up to the very edge of the breaking point . . . and [he] knew he could put no more strain on it. I must not jerk it ever, he thought (p. 54).

. . . when he was touching the breaking point he held steady and settled back against the strain of the line (p. 56).

The old man was trying with both hands to keep the line just inside of breaking strength. He knew that if he could not slow the fish with a steady pressure the fish could take out all the line and break it (p. 63).

Then [the marlin] jumped again and again and the boat was going fast although the line was raising the strain to breaking point and raising it to breaking point again and again (p. 82).

But finally Santiago, after many times withholding pressure as the line approaches the "breaking point," begins to gain some ground on his fish: "He just felt a faint slackening of the pressure on the line and he commenced to pull on it gently with his right hand. It tightened, as always, but just when he reached the point where it would break, line began to come in" (p. 86). This motif is also present in Hemingway's "Big Two-Hearted River" when Nick is fishing for trout:

Nick struck and the rod came alive and dangerous, bent double, the line tightening, coming out of the water, tightening, all in a heavy, dangerous, steady pull. Nick felt the moment when the leader would break if the strain increased and let the line go.⁵

And a short time later, the same

huge trout went high out of the water. As he jumped Nick lowered the tip of the rod. But he felt, as he dropped the tip to ease the strain, the moment when the strain was too great; the hardness too tight.⁶

The "breaking point" theme is of interest because it suggests not only that free flow of original expression that Hemingway spoke of--that "writing itself" stage of the process that occurs prior to the time the writer can begin to dominate his piece--but also the possible artistic lengths to which a work of fiction can be carried by the artist. In other words, Santiago time after time draws his line, his "big pencil," to the threshold of fracture, yet, because of his control, disaster is averted. How far a writer can go in prose before he "breaks" the genre is certainly not made clear by any statement in The Old Man; what is suggested, however, is that there are possibilities in the writing of fiction that are beyond what is normally accepted. After all, the old man's feat in itself is nearly impossible. Whereas, in "Big Two-Hearted River," Nick loses a trout that was "the biggest one I ever heard of."⁷ Santiago catches "the biggest fish that he had seen and bigger than he had ever heard of" (p. 63). So, when Santiago goes "far out" and when Hemingway says that a writer must be "driven far out past where he can go,"⁸ much more than an isolation theme is involved. In his Nobel Prize speech, Hemingway had said that a writer "should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed."⁹ Stating it another way, Hemingway might have said that the writer should always try to come as close as possible to the "breaking point." In 1935, Hemingway wrote: "There is no use writing anything that has been written

before unless you can beat it. What a writer in our time has to do is write what hasn't been written before or beat dead men at what they have done."¹⁰ And in Death in the Afternoon, he said that "the great artist goes beyond what has been done or known and makes something of his own."¹¹

So the obvious question: How far did Hemingway believe that a writer can extend himself in the writing of fiction? Although he discusses the matter without giving exact answers, Hemingway does have some comments on the subject. As early as Green Hills of Africa (1935), Hemingway discussed the possibility of building extra, or poetic, dimensions into his fiction. Admitting the difficulty of such an undertaking, he said:

"The reason every one tries to avoid it, to deny that it is important, to make it seem vain to try to do it, is because it is so difficult. Too many factors must combine to make . . . possible. . . . the kind of writing that can be done. How far prose can be carried if any one is serious enough and has luck. There is a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten."¹²

The man, a Mr. Kandisky, whom Hemingway had met by chance in Africa and was conversing with at the time, questioned the author: "'You believe it?'"¹³ Hemingway agreed that he did, to which the other man asked: "'And if a writer can get this?'"¹⁴ "'Then nothing else matters,'" Hemingway answered.¹⁵ "'It is more important than anything he can do. The chances are, of course, that he will fail. But there is a chance that he succeeds.'"¹⁶ Kandisky then told Hemingway

that the subject of their discussion must actually be poetry.¹⁷ But Hemingway said:

"No. It is much more difficult than poetry. It is a prose that has never been written. But it can be written, without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards."¹⁸

Hemingway told Kandisky that such writing had not been produced before

"Because there are too many factors. First, there must be talent, much talent. Talent such as Kipling had. Then there must be discipline. The discipline of Flaubert. There must be the conception of what it can be and absolute conscience as unchanging as the standard meter in Paris, to prevent faking. Then the writer must be intelligent and disinterested and above all he must survive. Try to get all these in one person and have him come through all the influences that press on a writer. The hardest thing, because time is so short, is for him to survive and get his work done. But I would like us to have such a writer and to read what he would write."¹⁹

Interestingly enough, the key characteristics of such a writer, as indicated by Hemingway--talent, discipline, conscience, etc.--are found in Santiago, who is not only Hemingway's ultimate "code hero" but also a metaphorical extension of the author's own personality by virtue of being the master fisherman-artist. Carrying the point a step further, one can find evidence that Hemingway felt that he had created poetic qualities in the The Old Man itself. Carlos Baker reports from Mary Hemingway's diary entry for August

25, 1952, in which Hemingway is quoted to have said concerning the short novel that "'Nobody really knows or understands and nobody has ever said the secret. The secret is that it is poetry written into prose. And it is the hardest of all things to do.'"²⁰ Evidently, Hemingway believed that the wording of The Old Man is so concentrated that it will yield to the scrutiny of the explicator in the same manner that a well-constructed poem will. Of course, it is recognized by many critics that certain of Hemingway's short stories also contain this poetic texture. Max Beerbohm said about The Old Man: "'It's a poem. I must read more of what I suppose I ought to call old man Hemingway.'"²¹ Hemingway said concerning the novel: "'Even now that it's done, finished and through, when I pick it up it's like I had finally got what I'd been working for all my life.'"²² Baker said that The Old Man "is perhaps [Hemingway's] most sustained attempt to write the actual and the symbolic under one continuous narrative roof."²³

Evidence of Santiago-Hemingway's knowledge of the greatness of the fish-book that is being wrestled with is present in the novel itself. And Hemingway symbolically takes to the megaphone, almost shouting of the prime quality of Santiago's fish. Earlier in the novel, the marvelous size and strength of the marlin had been emphasized:

"He is two feet longer than the skiff,"
the old man said (p. 63).

The old man had seen many great fish.
He had seen many that weighed more than

a thousand pounds and he had caught two of that size in his life. . . . Now . . . he was fast to the biggest fish that he had ever seen and bigger than he had ever heard of. . . (p. 63).

"I have never seen or heard of such a fish" (p. 75).

Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother (p. 92).

When he was even with him and had the fish's head against the bow he could not believe his size (p. 96).

He's over fifteen hundred pounds the way he is, he thought. Maybe much more (p. 97).

A similar intimation of how big a fish an individual fisherman-artist can handle and how intricate he can become in landing the catch is present in "Big Two-Hearted River." Nick is younger and less experienced than Santiago. In this short story, Nick considers the swamp farther up the river to be hazardous, a place where the fish may be larger but also where the landing of the fish may be more difficult: "in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing would be tragic. In the swamp fishing was a tragic adventure."²⁴ Because he had not yet reached Santiago's maturity, Nick "did not want to go down the stream any further today."²⁵ The final sentence of the story, however, reveals that Nick is somewhat optimistic about his future as a fisherman-artist: "There were plenty of days coming when he could fish the swamp."²⁶ In other words, there would be remaining years for Nick to catch that large

fish that had broken his line earlier in the story or for Hemingway to write his masterpiece. And in The Old Man, shortly before the first scavenger hits, Hemingway again underscores the superlative characteristics of Santiago's catch:

[Santiago] leaned over the side and pulled loose a piece of meat where the [Mako] shark had cut him. He chewed it and noted its good quality and its good taste. It was firm and juicy, like meat, but it was not red. There was no stringiness in it and he knew that it would bring the highest price in the market (p. 106).

Considering the foregoing passage from the fish-book standpoint, one might wonder just what cosmic dimension Hemingway felt that his writing had reached. He apparently believed that The Old Man and the Sea (and perhaps other of his works) was practically faultless. For instance, Philip Young observes that Hemingway thought that "At Sea," the section of Islands in the Stream from which The Old Man was taken, was above criticism "like Beethoven's last quartets or something."²⁷ Hemingway even tenaciously defended the unsuccessful Across the River and into the Trees, saying that the critics were not equipped to understand the greatness of his book²⁸ (later, he seemingly tempered his opinion of Across the River²⁹). Gertrude Stein said that "Hemingway also said once, I turn my flame which is a small one down and down and then suddenly there is a big explosion. If there were nothing but explosions my work would be so exciting nobody could bear it."³⁰ Perhaps he expected

almost in advance to be awarded literary prizes. After all, according to Santiago's thoughts, the marlin "was a fish to keep a man all winter" (p. 111). And the morning after the old man has returned to land, the proprietor at the Terrace says, "'What a fish it was. . . . There has never been such a fish'" (p. 123). Furthermore, Santiago thinks that his fish is of such nobility that it should be considered un-touchable:

How many people will he feed, he thought. But are they worthy to eat him? No, of course not. There is no one worthy of eating him from the manner of his behavior and his great dignity (p. 75).

The quality of the fish-book shows through in this latter passage. But some of Hemingway's spite does, too. He was still burning from the scorching reviews of Across the River and into the Trees, and perhaps there was a side of him that still wanted to say that he would just as soon withhold his masterpiece from the world because "no one [was] worthy" of treating himself to a work of such "great dignity." According to A. Scott Berg, this type of attitude had surfaced in Hemingway at least once before. After receiving poor reviews for Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway "Still infuriated . . . admitted to [Maxwell] Perkins that he was tempted never to publish another damned thing, because the droves of critical 'swine' simply were not worth writing for."³¹

Part of Hemingway's theory on how far the writer can go in his fiction is exemplified in the author's famous

"iceberg principle." It was during an interview with George Plimpton that Hemingway said:

"If it is any use to know, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show."³²

Years before in Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway had also discussed the same theory:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only makes hollow places in his writing.³³

In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway remembers his early experience with the "iceberg principle." Although he does not use the term in this particular reminiscence, Hemingway leaves no doubt as to what he is discussing:

It was a very simple story called "Out of Season" and I had omitted the real end of it which was that the old man hanged himself. This was omitted on my new theory that could omit anything if you knew that you omitted and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood.

Well, I thought, now I have them so they do not understand them. There cannot be much doubt about that. There is most certainly no demand for them. But they will understand the same way that they always do in painting. It only takes time. . . .³⁴

Hemingway also recalls his composing a story "about coming back from war but there was no mention of the war in it" (probably a reference to "Big Two-Hearted River").³⁵ Related to Hemingway's "iceberg" statements is the fact that Santiago's marlin, like most of the iceberg, is underwater most of the time before finally being surfaced by Santiago, the fisherman-artist. And as the old man finally begins bringing the fish in, two conspicuous phrases occur in one sentence: that is, even though the marlin is "still too far away," he nevertheless is beginning to be "higher out of water" (p. 91). Of, if the metaphor holds, the fish-book is becoming more evident. As Hemingway said: at first, "they do not understand. . . . But [eventually] they will understand the same way that they always do in painting. It only takes time. . . ." ³⁶ In other words, if the fish is skillfully handled--if the piece of fiction is written well enough that the "iceberg" can function properly--then both the fisherman and any other interested persons will have the opportunity to see and understand more of the glory of the fish whenever it is surfaced. And, given the time, the old man does land the marlin in masterful fashion. Berg provides some insight into the metaphors in Hemingway's mind by telling of an incident in which Hemingway himself connected fishing with the art of writing:

Perhaps the contest between writer and critics inspired his choice of title for his new collection of stories: Winner Take Nothing. Hemingway sent it off to Perkins with a brief parable,

whose moral was never to lose confidence in old Papa. If at the end of the first hour the fish was killing him, at the end of two hours Hemingway would always kill the fish.³⁷

Perkins wired back to Hemingway, implying that Ernest's fish were above critical reproach, saying, "THINK TITLE EXCELLENT AND YOU ARE ABSOLUTELY INVULNERABLE TO EASTMAN AND OTHERS"

[Max Eastman, who had recently attacked Hemingway for Death in the Afternoon with an article entitled "Bull in the Afternoon"].³⁸

At the point where the "line began to come in," Santiago reaches a second stage in his battle with the fish. Whereas the marlin was doing the leading before, now the old man begins to gain more control of the situation. Just as Hemingway progressed from the point at which "the story was writing itself" to one at which "I was writing it now," Santiago moves to step two in his job of landing the fish. The old man realizes that he now has the marlin almost under control, and he begins to calculate how long it will be until the end of his fish-catching story. The marlin has begun circling, which indicates that the conclusion is near, so the old man is gaining confidence. And after several turns by the fish, Santiago reaches a milestone in his effort to catch the creature; that is, although the old man previously cannot even budge the marlin, now he can say aloud, "'I moved him. . . . I moved him then'" (p. 91). And, even if he still is drained of strength and still must be careful not to make costly mistakes, Santiago nevertheless

begins to have the upper hand. The marlin remains strong and avoids immediate landing, causing the old man to be "on the point of feeling himself go" (p. 93), but the tenacious fisherman gains little by little and at last harpoons the fish. The fisherman-artist has finally killed his fish--or, written his story.

But ever since the "breaking point" was successfully passed, Santiago has undergone the tiring process of putting the finishing touches on the job of catching the marlin. Early in the battle, the fish is going out; after the "breaking point," the fish is being brought in for the kill, for the finale of the drama. This latter process of bringing the fish in after he has ceased leading the fisherman--this metaphorical representation of the controlled writing or the editing process--is what, in Hemingway's eyes, separates the true artists from the other writers. Hemingway believed that writing must be cut to its simplest terms in order to diminish its resistance to comprehension: "The value and charm of a book lie in its perfect simplicity, its frankness and its seemingly unconscious revelation of character and motive. It is simplicity both in language and thought. It is artless and free from conscious literary effort. But writing with straightforward simplicity is more difficult than writing with deliberate complexity."³⁹ Likewise, Santiago decides that he must "convince" the fish or reduce his resistance before killing him (p. 87). And as the old man continues working the fish, he accurately

predicts that "The strain will shorten his circle each time" (pp. 86-87)--or, as Hemingway might say: succinct writing and proper editing reduce the distance between the reader and the piece of literature. William Faulkner, whose writings are sometimes anything but succinct, once challenged Hemingway for not using words that might cause the reader to occasionally use a dictionary.⁴⁰ According to Hotchner, Hemingway replied to the news of Faulkner's observation by saying:

"Poor Faulkner. Does he really think big emotions come from big words? He thinks I don't know the ten-dollar words. I know them all right. But there are older and simpler and better words, and those are the ones I use."⁴¹

More and more line is gained by Santiago, but the job is very difficult. After working to bring the marlin closer and closer, "The old man was sweating now but from something else besides the sun" (p. 90). The perspiration is brought on both by the hard work and by Santiago's awareness that the fish he is landing is so large: "'No,' he said. 'He can't be that big'" (p. 90). But it is the old man's selective maneuvers--metaphorically, his editing--with his fishing line, his "big pencil," that makes such an enormous catch possible. Superior to the other fishermen, Santiago is clearly the maestro. And Hemingway continued throughout his career to stress that one of the distinguishing characteristics between the masters of writing and the also-rans is the matter of proper editing. In the

Playboy article, he said:

What many another writer would be content to leave in massive proportions, I polish into a tiny gem. I have the rare gift of being able to apply my broad critical powers to my own work as if it were the production of another. I have not hesitated many times to reject that which a less conscientious writer would have left unquestioned.⁴²

And Santiago has the editor's mind all along because, even before the major editing process begins, he makes the decision to dispense with a smaller fish that would only be in the way while he is working with the larger one (p. 51). Again, there is a thematic parallel in "Big Two-Hearted River." Nick has his eye on a big fish, so, although "He was certain he could catch small trout in the shallows . . . he did not want any of them."⁴³ Like Santiago, Nick is interested in something of more value; therefore, he wastes no time in the shallows. Hemingway too said that he did not mind dispensing with the superfluous:

I take great pains with my work pruning and revising. . . . I have the welfare of my creations very much at heart. I cut them with infinite care, and burnish them until they become brilliants.⁴⁴

Furthermore, he said that the writer

must have sound judgment and an accurate sense of proportion to select and reject among ponderous masses of material, and to arrange all with due subordination of part and with a true perspective.⁴⁵

Thus, using his own "sound judgment," Santiago forsakes all other possibilities that he has working in order to

concentrate on the fish. Hemingway's ability to "prune" his own work was exhibited when he, according to Carlos Baker, "decided . . . to omit the first fifteen pages [of the original The Sun Also Rises manuscript], which consisted of short biographies of Brett Ashley and Mike Campbell, as well as a quick sketch of Jake Barnes."⁴⁶ Santiago emphasizes to himself that whenever the fish starts to circle, signalling the start of step two in the metaphorical writing process, "Then our true work begins" (p. 84). And, in fact, Hemingway felt that writers who do not edit their work are lazy. For instance, even though he gave Gertrude Stein credit for discovering "many truths about rhythms and the uses of words in repetition," Hemingway thought that his Paris acquaintance was negligent in revising her own writing.⁴⁷ Stein "disliked the drudgery of revision and the obligation to make her writing intelligible," Hemingway said.⁴⁸ Concerning Stein's long book entitled The Making of Americans, Hemingway concluded that, although it "began magnificently [and] went on very well for a long way with great stretches of great brilliance," it also had sections that "went on endlessly in repetitions that a more conscientious and less lazy writer would have put in the waste basket."⁴⁹ Hemingway also tells of his having to provide proofreading service for Stein after he had first aided in getting her novel accepted for publication by The Transatlantic Review: "For publication in the review I had to read all of Miss Stein's proof for her as this was

a work which gave her no happiness."⁵⁰ And during the time that he associated with Stein and worked for The Transatlantic Review, Hemingway himself religiously practiced revision not only with his own stories but also with the writings of others.⁵¹ Carlos Baker reports that "for fun and practice," Hemingway "would sometimes try his hand at rewriting stories [that were rejected by The Transatlantic Review], thus earning intangible profits from his post on the magazine."⁵²

In conclusion, Santiago's skillful handling of the marlin suggests that he is more than a practitioner of the "Hemingway code"--that unstated creed calling for a conscientious effort to be adept at whatever a person calls his life's profession. Santiago is also a metaphorical extension of Hemingway the writer in that the old man is the fisherman-artist. Hemingway once wrote that "No man can ever reveal me to the world more vividly than I have chosen to reveal myself. . . . I tell people all about myself in my books."⁵³ And when the reader of The Old Man and the Sea boards Santiago's skiff and vicariously joins the old man's fight with the fish and knows the ebb and flow of the aged fisherman's physical and emotional involvement in his work, he has the opportunity to learn, via a symbolic rendering, of one man's experience as a writer of fiction.

NOTES

- ¹A Moveable Feast (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 6.
- ²Hemingway, Feast, p. 6.
- ³Gregory Hemingway, Papa: A Personal Memoir (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p. 124.
- ⁴Gregory Hemingway, p. 146.
- ⁵The Short Stories of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Scribner's, 1966), p. 226.
- ⁶Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 226.
- ⁷Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 227.
- ⁸Nobel Prize Acceptance Speech, in American Winners of the Nobel Literary Prize, eds. Warren G. French and Walter E. Kidd (Norman: Univ. of Oklahoma Press, 1969), p. 162.
- ⁹Hemingway, Nobel Speech, p. 162.
- ¹⁰"Monologue to the Maestro: A High Seas Letter," in By-Line: Ernest Hemingway, ed. William White (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 189.
- ¹¹Death in the Afternoon (New York: Scribner's, 1960), p. 100.
- ¹²Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1963), pp. 26-27.
- ¹³Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.
- ¹⁴Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.
- ¹⁵Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.
- ¹⁶Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.
- ¹⁷Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.
- ¹⁸Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.
- ¹⁹Hemingway, Green Hills, p. 27.

- ²⁰Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 911.
- ²¹Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 911.
- ²²Kurt Singer and Jane Sherrod, Ernest Hemingway: Man of Courage (Minneapolis: T. S. Dennison and Co., 1963), p. 167.
- ²³"Introduction to The Old Man and the Sea," in Three Novels of Ernest Hemingway (New York: Scribner's, 1962), p. vi.
- ²⁴Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 231.
- ²⁵Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 231.
- ²⁶Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 232.
- ²⁷"Posthumous Hemingway and Nicholas Adams," in Hemingway In Our Time, eds. Jackson J. Benson and Richard Astro (Corvallis: Oregon State Univ. Press, 1974), pp. 14-15.
- ²⁸A. E. Hotchner, Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 75.
- ²⁹Gregory Hemingway, p. 148.
- ³⁰The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas (New York: Vintage, 1961), p. 220.
- ³¹Max Perkins: Editor of Genius (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), p. 273.
- ³²"An Interview with Ernest Hemingway," in Hemingway and His Critics, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 34.
- ³³Hemingway, Death, p. 192.
- ³⁴Hemingway, Feast, p. 75.
- ³⁵Hemingway, Feast, p. 76.
- ³⁶Hemingway, Feast, p. 75.
- ³⁷Berg, p. 273.
- ³⁸Berg, p. 274.
- ³⁹"A Man's Credo," Playboy, Jan. 1963, p. 124.
- ⁴⁰Hotchner, p. 75.

- ⁴¹Hotchner, p. 75.
- ⁴²Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.
- ⁴³Hemingway, The Short Stories, p. 225.
- ⁴⁴Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.
- ⁴⁵Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 124.
- ⁴⁶Ernest Hemingway: The Writer as Artist (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 43-44.
- ⁴⁷Hemingway, Feast, p. 17.
- ⁴⁸Hemingway, Feast, p. 17.
- ⁴⁹Hemingway, Feast, p. 17.
- ⁵⁰Hemingway, Feast, p. 18.
- ⁵¹Baker, Hemingway: The Writer, p. 22.
- ⁵²Baker, Hemingway: The Writer, p. 22.
- ⁵³Hemingway, "A Man's Credo," p. 120.

CHAPTER VI

THE SHARKS AND OTHER CREATURES:

IN REAL LIFE

Ernest Hemingway was never one to sit quietly by and lose a battle. He may have written about men who are disgusted, disillusioned, or even apathetic after their experiences with war. These "lost generation" heroes who meander through Hemingway's fiction are often without urgent goals, feeling that there is little or nothing meaningful in life for which to fight. However, at least one thing really mattered to Hemingway: his writing. For other causes he might conduct himself with stoicism or with dignity (as is expected of his "code heroes"), but at the same time, he could be acting without great purpose. Yet, for the honor of his literary reputation, he would fight as a zealot.

Thus, Hemingway was a literary "minuteman," always ready to defend the homestead, his alma mater of real experience that produced real writing. Both as young Ernest and as Papa Hemingway, this writer of crisp novels and short stories was known to be extremely tenacious. In fact, as Irving Howe said, Hemingway "saw literature as a vast boxing tournament."¹ Early in his career, he worked

religiously to learn his craft, and he continued on diligently to practice his discoveries, producing stories characterized by physical realism and controlled emotion. Perhaps it was this integrity towards his art--an incessant drive that led him to study, practice, and produce in such a rigidly scheduled manner--that also caused Hemingway to be generally on the defensive concerning his own writing, sometimes going to great lengths to prove his writing's worth and to attack well-known critics and artists of his day both in speech and in writing.

Certainly it was at least Hemingway's "drive" that motivated his behavior. But, in addition, maybe he received so much negative criticism throughout his career that he allowed the critics to tap his weak spot, his inability to accept criticism without revolting. Maxwell Perkins, Hemingway's editor at Charles Scribner's Sons, once told his daughter that "'When you have a suggestion for Ernest you have to catch him at the right time.'"² Kurt Singer and Jane Sherrod wrote:

The incongruity in the Hemingway make-up lay in the fact that he, the man who lived a wild, violent life heedless of convention and traditions, was a pot of jello when it came to criticism. His reaction to negative remarks was defensive. His arguments to explain away his shortcomings were elaborate.³

And Hemingway was a priority target for some critics. As Jackson J. Benson said, Hemingway

became a source of constant irritation, especially as his popularity grew and he became one of the best known of American

writers: he was good enough, despite his Esquire-like heroines, his guns, his blood, and tough talk, so that he could not be entirely erased from the rolls of the literarily respectable. But many critics were certain that he would eventually fade or fall--his view of life was too superficial, and he would eventually be destroyed in the flap of his own flamboyance.⁴

But Hemingway endured as a literary artist. He was read not only by the man on the street but also by the intellectual. And he was studied and discussed in university classrooms. Yet there remained an antagonism between this writer and certain critics. The emotions were so strong that Benson feels that "it is entirely possible that more critics, reviewers, and scholars may have despised Hemingway than any other modern writer of similar stature."⁵ And it was not one of those cases of passive hate, one in which the hater simply gives his recipient the cold shoulder of disregard; it was one in which vehemence ruled and gossip reigned. Benson explains that "For some of these [attackers], every book published by Hemingway became a test case. They had predicted his decline for so long that they could view the course of his career in no other way."⁶ They had their telescopes out and their microscopes ready, and with any hint of a Hemingway slip, they were ready to pounce on both man and book.

With the appearance of To Have and Have Not (1934) and Green Hills of Africa (1935), various critics were beginning to bask in what they felt to be the inevitable finale;

they were sure that these books were of lesser quality than Hemingway's earlier work and that the future promised more decline. Although early opinion was somewhat split on For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940), this novel did draw enough adverse criticism that readers of contemporary literary reviews had no trouble deciding that many critics were not in Hemingway's corner.⁷ Then the big problem came when Across the River and into the Trees (1950) was published, since even the former Hemingway supporters thought that this novel was a literary dud, a piece of self-parody that certainly could signal the author's premature senility and his termination as a major writer. "Almost everyone seemed to agree," Benson says, "that Across the River and into the Trees was a disaster of magnificent proportions. Critics seemed to lick their chops as they pounced on Hemingway's unabashedly personal and maudlin picture of his own middle-age in the character of Colonel Cantwell."⁸

But Hemingway himself was not endowed with the cool reserve of a diplomat whom a President might trust as a mediator between opposing nations. He had pride in what he did, and he was not characterized by humility. As Benson states it: "There is no record that Hemingway ever went out of his way to ingratiate himself with anyone."⁹ When critics or other artists punched, Hemingway countered. Sometimes, even when the reviews were only mildly critical, Hemingway led with his right. So, although it is not clear who threw the first punches--Hemingway or his critics--open

warfare existed for years. And Hemingway's biography is filled with incidents of his receiving and giving criticism.

The battle between Hemingway and his adversaries began early. In 1917, when Hemingway was a senior at Oak Park High School in Oak Park, Illinois, he showed an appreciation for Ring Lardner's work by writing some articles in the style of Lardner and by publishing them in the Trapeze, the school newspaper. For instance, young Hemingway wrote one column ("Ring Lardner Returns") "with a sly gibe at Oak Park conservatives," according to Charles Fenton.¹⁰ In The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway, Fenton writes that the Oak Park superintendent of schools, M. R. McDaniel, "chided" Hemingway's faculty sponsor, John Gehlmann, "about Hemingway's columns":¹¹

"I was always having to fight criticism by the superintendent," Gehlmann once said, "that Ernie was writing like Ring Lardner--and consequently a lost soul!" McDaniel remained unimpressed by Hemingway's mature work. Ultimately the Trapeze material of Hemingway's adolescence became one of McDaniel's favorite jests; he was fond of reminding Gehlmann that Hemingway got his start under the history instructor's sponsorship. "He held me responsible for the malodorous writings from Ernie's pen," Gehlmann remembered.¹²

But even at the young age of seventeen, Hemingway took the challenge when his writing was criticized. Following one attack by the superintendent, Hemingway "was back in strength in the next issue," according to Fenton.¹³ This particular column was entitled "SOME SPACE FILLED BY ERNEST

MACNAMARA HEMINGWAY" and was accompanied by an ironic sub-head: "Ring Lardner Has Objected to the Use of His Name."¹⁴

Fenton says that "Hemingway bowed out of Oak Park in the role of professional iconoclast" by writing in his May 25 column in the Trapeze that among those not able to be present at a "'dinner dance tomorrow at the Country Club'" were "'Messers Morris Musselman, Fred Wilcoxon, Ernest Hemingway, Abraham Lincoln and General Joffre, all [of whom have] perfect alibis.'"¹⁵

At the time of his first volume, Three Stories and Ten Poems (1923), Hemingway was criticized by his home-town community. Perhaps such a reaction was to be expected because Oak Park was a conservative, religious town, and Hemingway was rebelling against its standards. According to Kurt Singer and Jane Sherrod,

The Oak Park Library proudly ordered three copies and circulated them. The tempest brew in the teapot. The staid residents were horrified. What language! And Hemingway wrote about things that should not be thought of, much less made permanent on paper. Had Ernest been hanged for murder in the village park the friends of the family could not have been more shush-shush and sympathetic toward the horrified and embarrassed Mrs. Hemingway.

He was criticized in letters from home, but he couldn't have cared less. "I was considered a bad boy all my life," he said, "even a bad son. I tried to be a champion since I was sixteen at many things. Writing was the one I chose for my bed. I have spent my life with champions since I was a kid. Certainly Oak Park critics could not insult me."¹⁶

What Hemingway may have meant is that the Oak Park residents were not important enough in the literary world to really bother him. But these voices added to the many that would follow built up to quite a chorus. At any rate, Hemingway many times through the years "protested too much about his indifference to assaults" on his writing, according to A. Scott Berg, author of Max Perkins: Editor of Genius.¹⁷ But few people ever believed that Hemingway was really indifferent. And quite soon enough, some professional literary persons began to add their opinions concerning Hemingway's worth as a serious writer.

In 1922 when Hemingway was attempting to move out of the journalistic profession and to publish something more artistic than news or feature articles, the editor of The Dial suggested that Hemingway stay in reporting. Nicholas Joost said in his study of Hemingway and the Little Magazines: "Often times being turned down acts not as a discouragement but as a spur to gallop faster toward the goal and win the prize, and it may well be that Hemingway's rejection by The Dial inspired him all the more determinedly to forsake journalism for his more serious vocation as a writer of stories and novels."¹⁸

The Oak Park critics were not the only ones to declare war on the language and tone of Hemingway's fiction. In Paris sometime in 1921-26, Gertrude Stein gave Hemingway a lecture on propriety in literature pertaining to the type

of language and situations that can be presented for public consumption. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway reported the scene:

Miss Stein sat on the bed that was on the floor and asked to see the stories I had written and she said that she liked them except one called "Up in Michigan."

"It's good," she said. "That's not the question at all. But it is inaccrochable. That means it is like a picture that a painter paints and then he cannot hang it when he has a show and nobody will buy it because they cannot hang it either."

"But what if it is not dirty but it is only that you are trying to use words that people actually use? That are the only words that can make the story come true and that you must use them? You have to use them."

"But you don't get the point at all," she said. "You mustn't write anything that is inaccrochable. There is no point in it. It's wrong and it's silly."¹⁹

Stein also, like the editor of The Dial, openly questioned Hemingway's skill as a writer at that time. Hemingway said:

She herself wanted to be published in the Atlantic Monthly, she told me, and she would be. She told me that I was not a good enough writer to be published there or in The Saturday Evening Post but that I might be some new sort of writer in my own way but the first thing to remember was not to write stories that were inaccrochable. I did not argue about this nor try to explain again what I was trying to do about conversation.²⁰

Hemingway was reminded of the problems associated with four-letter words when he published his first two novels, The Sun Also Rises (1926) and A Farewell to Arms (1929). Prior to the completion of The Sun Also Rises, Maxwell Perkins wrote Hemingway concerning some of the questionable areas

in the novel, the inaccrochable elements, as Stein would have said. Berg reports Perkins' feelings in the matter:

The problems of The Sun Also Rises, he [Perkins] felt, had less to do with entire sections than with individual words and phrases--profanities and unacceptable characterizations which Perkins knew could result in the book's suppression and in libel suits. As for language, he wrote the author, the "majority of people are more affected by words than things. I'd even say that those most obtuse toward things are most sensitive to a sort of word. I think some words should be avoided so that we shall not divert people from the qualities of this book to the discussion of an utterly unpertinent and extrinsic matter." Max thought there were a dozen different passages in The Sun Also Rises that would offend most readers' sensibilities. "It would be a pretty thing," he said, "if the very significance of so original a book should be disregarded because of the howls of a lot of cheap, prurient, moronic yappers."²¹

Perkins continued by explaining to Hemingway that he might not be able to "appreciate this disgusting possibility" of the censorship of four-letter words "because you've been too long abroad, and out of that atmosphere. Those who breathe its stagnant vapors now attack a book, not only on grounds of eroticism, which could not hold here, but upon that of 'decency,' which means words."²² Hemingway accepted criticism from Perkins more easily than he did from most people, so the young author agreed to tone down the language of the book.²³ But the novel still offended some readers, Berg says:

Irate reactions to the novel filled the Scribners mailbag almost every week, and

they were delivered to Perkins. The Sun Also Rises was banned in Boston, and there were disgusted readers everywhere demanding, if not an apology, then at least an excuse for Scribners' pandering to the public's basest tastes.²⁴

When the manuscript to A Farewell to Arms was on Perkins' desk, once more he had to wrestle with the problem of obscene wording. Again, however, Hemingway agreed to eliminate some of the offensive language.²⁵

Hemingway also had to deal with the home crowd again because, after in our time (the 1923 edition of what was later to become In Our Time) was originally published in Paris, strong words were issued in Oak Park. Hemingway's parents ordered six copies of the book, but the volumes did not find permanent lodging in the Hemingway home. Joost quotes Hemingway's sister, who related that her father "was so incensed that a son of his would so far forget his Christian training that he could use the subject matter and vulgar expression this book contained that he wrapped and returned all six copies."²⁶ Apparently, Mrs. Hemingway was worried about having the books sent back, to which Dr. Hemingway let it be known that he would not accept questionable reading materials in his home. Leicester Hemingway says in his biographical work about his brother that, after the in our time incident, Hemingway was hesitant to forward any of his writing home:

Ernest also promised to try to get a copy of This Quarter for Father when it came out because he was sure he would like "Big Two-Hearted River."

He said the river was really the Fox above Seney.

Then he threw a straight ball. He said the reason he had not sent more copies of his work home was because Mother and Dad, having prejudged his work with a puritanical viewpoint, had returned the copies of In Our Time. That had looked to him as if they did not want to see anything more.²⁷

By 1924, Hemingway's feelings toward professional reviewers were beginning to show. And, while helping Ford Madox Ford with The Transatlantic Review, Hemingway was known to have taken an occasional crack at the critics. In the May, 1924, issue, he wrote:

For every writer produced in America there are produced eleven critics. Now that the Dial prize has gone to a critic [Van Wyck Brooks] the ratio may be expected to increase to 1/55 or over. As I have always regarded critics as the eunuchs of literature . . . But there is no use finishing that sentence.²⁸

In a 1927 issue of The Saturday Review of Literature, Lee Wilson Dodd reviewed Hemingway's Men Without Women. Dodd suggested in his article, "Simple Annals of the Callous," that Hemingway's goal in writing was simply to transfer onto paper the sensations that seemed attractive to him at the time with little care for real art. Dodd said that, since Hemingway was so good at this type of realism, he had fully realized his goals, having climbed to the status of a Shakespeare.²⁹ Of course, the whole treatment is sarcastic:

If it be true that a critic's whole duty with respect to a given writer is, first,

to discern "what the poet's aim really and truly was, how the task he had to do stood before his eye," and, second, to judge "how far, with such materials as were afforded him, he had fulfilled it," then, with respect to Mr. Ernest Hemingway, the present critic's whole duty can be swiftly and certainly disposed of. Mr. Hemingway's aim is obvious, how his task stood before his eye is obvious; and it is equally obvious that he does thoroughly the particular job he set for himself; a little better, indeed, than anyone else now writing has been able to do it.

The job Mr. Hemingway sets for himself is to make a literal report of such aspects of life as happen to have engaged his attention. He writes of what he has seen, heard, touched, tasted, smelled--provided, always, that it has spontaneously caught his interest. He desires to make a direct transcript of facts from his varying environments, to put down on paper a series of artistically accurate statements--statements, that is to say, fitting his immediate impressions and perceptions as glove fits hand. There are to be no wrinkles and no decorations; the perfect fit is the goal. As for the selection of facts to be transcribed, he leaves that, without further care, to whatever it is that holds him together as an individual, a simple separate person. He did not make himself nor the world as it impinges upon him; but, because he is himself, certain aspects of the impinging world strongly fix his attention and he is strongly moved to reproduce them in prose. To reproduce such things with a spare, hard undeviating precision is the entire scope and meaning of his art; and in this restricted endeavor he is triumphant. For what they may or may not be intellectually, esthetically, or morally worth, he makes his facts ours. It would seem, then, that by all good practitioners of the Creative Criticism, which Mr. J. E. Spingarn has so sedulously propagated among us, Mr. Hemingway must be proclaimed a master, an

authentic artist in prose. For does he not accomplish precisely all that he sets out to accomplish? And did Shakespeare invariably do as much? Or could Plato have done more?³⁰

Hemingway, who rarely disguised his repulsion for the critics prior to writing The Old Man and the Sea, responded with a satirical poem for the edification of Dodd and the other critics. The piece was composed sometime in 1927 in Paris, according to Nicholas Gerogiannis, editor of Ernest Hemingway: 88 Poems, but not published until its appearance in the May, 1929, issue of Little Review:

VALENTINE

For a Mr. Lee Wilson Dodd and Any of
His Friends who Want it.

Sing a song of critics
pockets full of lye
four and twenty critics
hope that you will die
hope that you will peter out
hope that you will fail
so they can be the first one
be the first to hail
any happy weakening or sign of quick
decay.
(All are very much alike, weariness too
great, sordid small catastrophies,
stack the cards on fate,
very vulgar people, annals of the cal-
lous,
dope fiends, soldiers, prostitutes,
men without a gallus)
If you do not like them lads
one thing you can do
stick them up your asses lads
My Valentine to you.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY³¹

But "Valentine" was hardly Hemingway's only poetic response to the critics. And other writers were also the recipients of Hemingway's venom. In 1924, Der Querschnitt

carried his two-part poem, "The Soul of Spain with McAlmon and Bird the Publishers," which showed little reverence toward several leading literary persons of the day. For instance: "Menken is the shit. / Waldo Frank is the shit."³² Although the name is misspelled in the poem if the reference is to H. L. Mencken, it calls to mind Harvey's statement in The Sun Also Rises concerning Mencken's literary decline: "'He's through now,' Harvey went on. 'He's written about all the things he knows, and now he's on all the things he doesn't know.'"³³ However, Gerogiannis feels that the reference may be to S. Stanwood Menken, a reformer.³⁴ But the Waldo Frank reference is clear enough because, in Death in the Afternoon, Hemingway attacks Frank's book, Virgin Spain, as being filled with "that unavoidable mysticism of a man who writes a language so badly he cannot make a clear statement, complicated by whatever pseudo-scientific jargon is in style at the moment."³⁵ In 1926 in Paris, Hemingway had written in an untitled poem that "Mr. Hemingway now wears glasses / Better to see to kiss the critics' asses--."³⁶ Then, in 1930, Edmund Wilson was also the subject of Hemingway's verse. Gerogiannis says that "In November 1930 EH was in the hospital in Billings, Montana, with a broken right arm. Edmund Wilson's novel, I Thought of Daisy (1929), came under his scrutiny, and he was angered by Wilson's introduction to the new 1930 edition of In Our Time. . . . Left-handed, he scribbled the caustic 'Little Mr. Wilson . . .' on the

back of an x-ray department form":³⁷

[Little Mr. Wilson . . .]

Little Mr. Wilson
 Wrote a little book
 Maxie Perkins published it,
 (A friend of Mr. Snook)
 No one liked to screw in it
 Wilson is pedantic
 So if you liked to screw your girl
 Chirps Wilson "Too Romantic"
 All the ball-less critics
 All their cuntless wives
 Give to Mr. Hemingway
 A violent case of Hives.³⁸

A typical potshot was taken at Hemingway when Men Without Art by Wyndham Lewis was published in 1934. The first chapter, entitled "Ernest Hemingway: The 'Dumb Ox,'" is less than complimentary. Lewis attacked Hemingway's famous style and questioned his heroes and plots. For instance, Lewis said:

In A Farewell to Arms the hero is a young American who has come over to Europe for the fun of the thing, as an alternative to baseball, to take part in the Sport of Kings. It has not occurred to him that it is no longer the sport of kings, but the turningpoint in the history of the earth at which he is assisting, when men must either cease thinking like children and abandon such sports, or else lose their freedom for ever, much more effectively than any mere king could ever cause them to lose it. For him, it remains 'war' in the old-fashioned semi-sporting sense. Throughout this ghastly event, he proves himself a thorough-going sport, makes several hairbreadth, Fenimore Cooper-like, escapes, but never from first to last betrays a spark of intelligence. Indeed, his physical stoicism, admirable as it is, is nothing to his really heroic imperviousness to thought. This 'war'--Gallipoli,

Paschendaele, Caporetto--is just another 'scrap.' The Anglo-Saxon American--the 'Doughboy'--and the Anglo-Saxon Tommy--join handle, in fact, outrival each other in a stolid determination absolutely to ignore, come what may, what all this is about. Whoever may be in the secrets of destiny--may indeed be destiny itself--they are not nor ever will be. They are an integral part of that world to whom things happen: they are not those who cause or connive at the happenings, and that is perfectly clear.

Pack up your troubles in your
old kit bag,
Smile boys, that's the style

and keep smiling, what's more, from ear to ear, a should-I-worry? 'good sport' smile, as do the Hollywood Stars when they are being photographed, as did the poor Bairnsfather 'Tommy'--the 'muddled oaf at the goal'--of all oafishness!

. . . .

But there it is: if you ask yourself how you would be able to tell a page of Hemingway, if it were unexpectedly placed before you, you would be compelled to answer, Because it would be like Miss Stein! And if you were asked how you would know it was not by Miss Stein, you would say, Because it would probably be about prize-fighting, war, or the bullring, and Miss Stein does not write about war, boxing or bullfighting!

It is very uncomfortable in real life when people become so captivated with somebody's else tricks that they become a sort of caricature or echo of the other: and it is no less embarrassing in books, at least when one entertains any respect for the victim of the fascination.³⁹

As if he had not already said enough, Lewis concluded by saying that

The expression of the soul of the dumb ox would have a penetrating beauty of its

own, if it were uttered with genius-- with bovine genius (and in the case of Hemingway that is what has happened): just as much as would the folk-song of the baboon, or of the "Praying Mantis." But . . . if we take this to be the typical art of a civilization--and there is no serious writer who stands higher in Anglo-Saxony today than does Ernest Hemingway--then we are by the same token saying something very definite about that civilization.⁴⁰

There seems to be no record of a direct public comment by Hemingway on the "Dumb Ox" article. However, Carlos Baker relates that Hemingway was extremely angry when he first saw a copy of the essay at Silvia Beach's bookshop in Paris: "He was so much enraged that he punched a vase of tulips on Silvia's table."⁴¹ In A Moveable Feast (1964), Hemingway did comment on Lewis but made no reference to the stinging review. Although his recollections in A Moveable Feast are from a time before Lewis wrote the comment, Hemingway, whose later reminiscence nevertheless could have been colored by the Lewis review, remembered the critic as "the nastiest man I've ever seen."⁴²

In Green Hills of Africa (1935), Hemingway says that critics sometimes ruin good writers because the writers believe inaccurate estimations of their work: ". . . they read the critics. If they believe the critics when they say they are great then they must believe them when they say they are rotten and they lose confidence."⁴³

At the time that Hemingway was writing Green Hills of Africa, he and Leicester Hemingway were enjoying some deep-sea fishing excursions together. Hemingway showed his

brother some letters from the readers of Esquire. Some of these readers had doubted the veracity of Hemingway's fictional presentations, so Hemingway told his brother that

"They're the people who hear an echo and think they originated the sound. . . . They hear or read somewhere I'm a phony and it's suddenly a fact in their minds. . . . I'm getting sick and tired of this branding. . . . Young man, the only way I'm a phony is in the sense that every writer of fiction is: I make things up so they'll seem real. But you really know me on fishing, on shooting, on boxing. Do I deliver?"
 "Like nobody else."⁴⁴

Hemingway even had physical fights with various literary persons. Once in 1935 after returning from fishing, Hemingway was met at the dock by a man who wanted to challenge the author's manhood. According to Leicester Hemingway, Ernest tried to avoid the scrap but finally had to whip the fellow. The man turned out to be Joe Knapp, owner and publisher of Collier's and other magazines. Later, Knapp apparently admitted his wrongdoing.⁴⁵ Carlos Baker reports that Hemingway was proud of his feat,⁴⁶ although Leicester Hemingway said that his brother worried about having hurt Knapp.⁴⁷ Hemingway also had an abbreviated match with Max Eastman in Maxwell Perkins' office at Scribner's. According to Berg, "Hemingway dropped by Scribners without calling ahead."⁴⁸ At the time, Perkins and Eastman were in Perkins' office planning a new edition of Eastman's Enjoyment of Poetry.⁴⁹ Apparently, Hemingway entered the office itself with no prior notice to Perkins and then quickly discovered that

Eastman was in the room, a situation that immediately frightened Perkins.⁵⁰ Berg says: "Because Hemingway had often told Perkins what he would do if he ever met Eastman, because of that piece Eastman had written several years earlier, 'Bull in the Afternoon,' Perkins swallowed hard and thought fast. Hoping humor would work, Perkins said to Eastman, 'Here's a friend of yours, Max.'"⁵¹ Berg continues by describing the events that followed:

Hemingway shook hands with Eastman and they swapped amenities. Then Ernest, with a broad smile, ripped open his shirt and exposed a chest which Perkins thought was hirsute enough to impress any man. Eastman laughed, and Ernest good-naturedly reached over and unbuttoned Eastman's shirt, revealing a chest as bare as a bald man's head. Everyone laughed at the contrast. Perkins got ready to expose his chest, sure that he could place second, when Hemingway truculently demanded of Eastman, "What do you mean [by] accusing me of impotence?"⁵²

Eastman disputed the accusation that he had accused Hemingway of impotence. And a verbal fight began.⁵³ Eventually, Eastman challenged Hemingway to reread the article in question. Since a copy of Art and the Life of Action, which contained the essay, was available on Perkins' desk, Eastman picked up the book and handed it to Hemingway. Berg says that "instead of reading the passage Eastman had pointed out, Ernest began part of another paragraph, and trailed off into muttered profanity. 'Read all of it, Ernest,' Eastman urged him. 'You don't understand it. . . . Here, let Max read it.'"⁵⁴ Perkins decided that the conversation was

becoming much too vigorous for everybody's good, so he did begin reading, hoping that the participation of a third party might divert the attentions of the other men from each other and perhaps help avoid the possibility of a physical confrontation.⁵⁵ But Hemingway grabbed the book away from Perkins and said, "'No, I am going to do the reading.'"⁵⁶ Berg describes the actual fight that followed:

As he started [reading] again, [Hemingway's] face flushed, and he turned and smacked Eastman with the open book. Eastman rushed at him. Perkins, fearful that Ernest would kill Eastman, ran around his desk to grab Hemingway from behind. As the two authors grappled, all the precariously balanced books and papers on Perkin's desk toppled off, and both men fell to the floor. Thinking he was restraining Hemingway, Perkins grabbed the man on top. But when Max looked down, there was Ernest on his back, gazing up at him, his broken glasses dangling and a naughty grin from ear to ear. Apparently he had regained his composure instantly upon striking Eastman and put up no resistance whatever whenever Eastman landed on top of him.

. . . .

According to the Times, "Mr. Hemingway explained that he had felt sorry for Mr. Eastman, for he knew he had seriously embarrassed him by slapping his face. 'The man didn't have a big of fight. He just croaked, you know, at Max Perkins, "Who's calling on you, Ernest or me?" So I got out.'"⁵⁷

Reviews of For Whom the Bell Tolls (1940) were varied, some containing attacks not only on Hemingway's art but also on his politics.⁵⁸ Edmund Wilson's review in New Republic was partly favorable, hailing the novel as Hemingway's

best in some years, but the article also included some negative remarks:

The novel has certain weaknesses. A master of the concentrated short story, Hemingway is less sure in his grasp of the form of the elaborated novel. The shape of "For Whom the Bell Tolls" is sometimes slack and sometimes bulging. It is certainly quite a little too long. You need space to make an epic of three days; but the story seems to slow up toward the end where the reader feels it ought to move faster; and the author has not found out how to mold or to cut the interior soliloquies of his hero. Nor are the excursions outside the consciousness of the hero, whose point of view comprehends most of the book, conducted with consistent attention to the symmetry and point of the whole.

There is, furthermore, in "For Whom the Bell Tolls" something missing that we still look for in Hemingway. . . . It lacks the true desperate emotion of the love affairs in some of Hemingway's other stories. And in general, though the situation is breathless and the suspense kept up all through, the book lacks the tensivity, the moral malaise, that made the early work of Hemingway troubling.⁵⁹

Hemingway was upset with the review, expressing disappointment that Wilson did not appreciate Maria.⁶⁰ According to Carlos Baker, Hemingway said that Wilson "was no longer interested in good writing but only in sectarian politics. . . . He scornfully recalled Wilson's statement of 1929 that Lieutenant Henry could not possibly have rowed Catherine Barkley to Switzerland against the wind for thirty miles. In fact, said EH, Henry had sailed with the wind, using the umbrella as a sail, and the distance was only sixteen miles."⁶¹

Only two years prior to the 1952 publication of The Old Man and the Sea, Hemingway's Across the River and into the Trees had appeared. Across the River was appraised as being perhaps Hemingway's worst book, and many critics decided that Hemingway was an old man whose heyday had become history. Some critics went easy on Hemingway, but others were extremely harsh. E. B. White went so far as to write a parody of the novel, labeling his piece "Across the Street and into the Grill" and publishing it in the New Yorker. With a spoof on the protagonist of the novel, Colonel Cantwell, and on Hemingway's famous style, White begins his parody in the following manner:

This is my last and best and true and only meal, thought Mr. Pirnie as he descended at noon and swung east on the beat-up sidewalk of Forty-fifth Street. Just ahead of him was the girl from the reception desk. I am a little fleshed up around the crook of the elbow, thought Pirnie, but I commute good.

He quickened his step to overtake her and felt the pain again. What a stinking trade it is, he thought. But after what I've done to other assistant treasurers, I can't hate anybody. Sixteen deads, and I don't know how many possibles.

The girl was near enough now so he could smell her fresh receptiveness, and the lint in her hair. Her skin was light blue, like the sides of horses.⁶²

And White continues by parodying additional recognizable characteristics of the Hemingway style, for instance, the novelist's frequent use of the word true in its various forms:

She stepped into a public booth and dialled true and well, using her finger. Then she telephoned.

. . . .

In the elevator, Pirnie took the controls. "I'll run it," he said to the operator. "I checked out long ago." He stopped true at the third floor, and they stepped off into the men's grill.⁶³

In Papa Hemingway, A. E. Hotchner reports Hemingway's reaction to White's parody:

Roberto had just come from a jai-alai game in Havana and Ernest discussed it with him in Spanish. While they were talking, I picked up a copy of The New Yorker in which E. B. White had written a parody of Across the River, calling it "Across the Street and into the Grill."

When I finished reading, Ernest interrupted talking to Roberto and said, "The parody is the last refuge of the frustrated writer. Parodies are what you write when you are associate editor of the Harvard Lampoon. The greater the work of literature, the easier the parody. The step up from writing parodies is writing on the wall above the urinal."⁶⁴

Philip Young observes that "with . . . Across the River and into the Trees, the death of his [Hemingway's] once-great gifts was very widely advertised by the critics and reviewers."⁶⁵ Young continues:

To be sure this is a poor performance. . . . There are . . . many signs of the "code." But the code in this book has become sort of a joke; the hero has become a good deal of a bore, and the heroine has become a wispy dream. The distance that Hemingway once maintained between himself and his protagonist has disappeared, to leave us with a self-indulgent chronicling of the author's

every opinion; he acts as though he were being interviewed. The novel reads like a parody of the earlier works.⁶⁶

During a 1949 conversation with Lillian Ross, Hemingway referred both to the then unfinished Across the River story and to the critics. He was enroute to Europe with his wife, Mary, and had the manuscript with him. After spending some time explaining various topics--from boxing to baseball to growing old properly--Hemingway let it be known that Across the River would definitely be his best performance to date.⁶⁷ Several times, he said, "'How do you like it now, gentlemen?'"--a question that must certainly have referred to the critics.⁶⁸ Ross added that of all the people Hemingway "did not wish to see in New York, the people he wished least to see were critics."⁶⁹ Joseph Warren Beach borrowed Hemingway's rhetoric for the title of his article, "How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" Although the essay deals with more than Across the River, the general tone of Beach's opening statement is representative of what Hemingway was facing from the critics:

With his latest novel, Ernest Hemingway has caused a good deal of embarrassment to the many eminent critics and the large body of readers who have whole-heartedly admired him and defended him against all who challenged his perfection as an artist. . . . He is making it necessary for them . . . [to] satisfy themselves whether the faintly disagreeable odor that emanates from Across the River and into the Trees is an evidence of decay.
 . . .⁷⁰

One could wonder if Hemingway, upon reading of his alleged "decay," recalled lines from his "Valentine" poem: "so they

can be the first one / be the first to hail / any happy weakening or sign of quick decay."⁷¹ When the critics began to question Hemingway's mythical and self-proclaimed title as champion novelist of the twentieth century, he immediately rebelled. To say that the author was upset with the literary "experts" was no news: Hemingway was irate and everyone knew it. Hotchner records a conversation that reveals Hemingway's embitterment:

[HEM] Refuse to read any reviews on Across the River, not for blood pressure but they are about as interesting as reading other people's laundry lists.

[HOTCH] John O'Hara's review in The New York Times called you the greatest writer since Shakespeare.

[HEM] That would have sent the old pressure up to around two forty. I have never learned anything from the critics. In this book I moved into calculus, having started with straight math, then moved to geometry, then algebra; and the next time out will be trigonometry. If they don't understand that, to hell with them.⁷²

When, during the same conversation, Hotchner said that "Mr. William Faulkner got into the act" by criticizing Hemingway's writing, Hemingway fired back by saying: "'Did you read his last book? It's all sauce-writing now.'"⁷³ Hemingway then admitted that Faulkner

"was good once. Before the sauce, or when he knew how to handle it. You ever read his story 'The Bear'? Read that and you'll know how good he once was.

But now . . . well, for a guy who runs as a silent, he sure talks a hell of a lot. Okay, now, let's write off Black-Ass as a subject."⁷⁴

"Black-Ass" was apparently Hemingway's own designation for his currently sour mood, a condition that the author had warned Hotchner of by mail prior to their visit at that particular time.⁷⁵ Hotchner concluded that the unfavorable reviews of Across the River were "probably the leading cause of [Hemingway's] Black-Assedness."⁷⁶

Whether or not this negative condition was still present at the time is not clear; however, in 1952, Hemingway had some problems with two biographers. Philip Young had a then unpublished manuscript that was not fully approved by Hemingway. But, after Young had written a letter explaining that his academic future would be enhanced by the publication of the book, Hemingway finally honored the request by informing the young critic that he had "formal permission" to continue the project.⁷⁷ The same year, Charles Fenton, who was working on The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway, had apparently bothered Hemingway by being extremely inquisitive. Carlos Baker summarizes the dispute by saying that

Rumors had reached Ernest that Fenton was probing into his private life, and he hotly protested that it was like being tailed by the FBI--or even the OGPU or the Gestapo. Fenton replied in anger and Ernest tried a softer line. He had once had a wonderful novel to write about Oak Park, he explained, but had never written it for fear of hurting people. All he had ever wanted was to be a good writer. Now he knew that

jackals, laundry-listers, and hyenas would be chewing away at his corpse the minute he died. Once more Fenton's answer was an angry one, and on the night of July 13th Ernest beat out a letter in which he said that he was going to enclose a check for \$200 to pay Fenton's way to Cuba and back. If Fenton dared to come down, Ernest would like nothing better for a fifty-third birthday present than to get Fenton in any enclosed place. Fenton replied patiently, explaining his position once again, and Ernest quieted down with a long letter in which he pointed out the flaws of fact and interpretation that appeared in an article Fenton had sent about the early days in Kansas City.⁷⁸

Hemingway's battles with critics and other literary persons could well fill a large volume. He had much pride in his writing. And when someone attacked his work, he became defensive. Thus, after reviewing only an abbreviated history of these incessant literary wars, one might have little trouble believing that Hemingway would consider characterizing the critics as sharks in his short novel The Old Man and the Sea (see next chapter). After all, Hemingway had previously called the critics "eunuchs," "swine" (see Berg, p. 273), and "lice" (Green Hills of Africa, p. 109). Why not "sharks," too?

NOTES

¹Sherwood Anderson (New York: William Sloan, 1951), p. 244.

²A. Scott Berg, Max Perkins: Editor of Genius (New York: Pocket Books, 1978), p. 409.

³Ernest Hemingway: Man of Courage (Minneapolis: T. S. Dennison, 1963), p. 81.

⁴Hemingway: The Writer's Art of Self-Defense (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), p. 48.

⁵Benson, p. 48.

⁶Benson, p. 48.

⁷Benson, p. 48.

⁸Benson, p. 48.

⁹Benson, p. 48.

¹⁰The Apprenticeship of Ernest Hemingway: The Early Years (New York: Mentor, 1961), p. 29.

¹¹Fenton, p. 30.

¹²Fenton, p. 30.

¹³Fenton, p. 30.

¹⁴Fenton, p. 30.

¹⁵Fenton, p. 30.

¹⁶Singer and Sherrod, p. 61.

¹⁷Berg, p. 388.

¹⁸Ernest Hemingway and the Little Magazines: The Paris Years (Barre, Mass.: Barre Publishers, 1968), p. 15.

¹⁹A Moveable Feast (New York: Bantam, 1969), p. 15.

²⁰Hemingway, Feast, p. 15.

- ²¹Berg, p. 122.
- ²²Berg, p. 122.
- ²³Berg, p. 123.
- ²⁴Berg, p. 125.
- ²⁵Berg, pp. 5, 177-80.
- ²⁶Joost, pp. 87-88.
- ²⁷My Brother, Ernest Hemingway (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier, 1962), p. 82.
- ²⁸"And to the United States," The Transatlantic Review, May-June 1924, p. 355. Rpt. Kraus Corp., 1967.
- ²⁹"Simple Annals of the Callous," The Saturday Review of Literature, 19 Nov. 1927, pp. 322-23.
- ³⁰Dodd, pp. 322-23.
- ³¹Ernest Hemingway: 88 Poems, ed. Nicholas Gerogiannis (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979), p. 93.
- ³²Hemingway, 88 Poems, p. 70.
- ³³The Sun Also Rises (New York: Scribner's, 1954), p. 43.
- ³⁴Hemingway, 88 Poems, p. 144.
- ³⁵Death in the Afternoon (New York: Scribner's, 1960), p. 53.
- ³⁶Hemingway, 88 Poems, p. 86.
- ³⁷Hemingway, 88 Poems, p. 152.
- ³⁸Hemingway, 88 Poems, p. 97.
- ³⁹Men Without Art (New York: Russell and Russell, 1934), pp. 22, 24-25.
- ⁴⁰Lewis, pp. 40-41.
- ⁴¹Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 330.
- ⁴²Hemingway, Feast, p. 109.
- ⁴³Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1963), p. 23.

- ⁴⁴Leicester Hemingway, p. 161.
- ⁴⁵Leicester Hemingway, p. 167.
- ⁴⁶Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story (New York: Bantam, 1970), p. 349.
- ⁴⁷Leicester Hemingway, p. 167.
- ⁴⁸Berg, p. 410.
- ⁴⁹Berg, p. 410.
- ⁵⁰Berg, p. 410.
- ⁵¹Berg, p. 410.
- ⁵²Berg, p. 410.
- ⁵³Berg, pp. 410-11.
- ⁵⁴Berg, pp. 410-11.
- ⁵⁵Berg, p. 411.
- ⁵⁶Berg, p. 411.
- ⁵⁷Berg, p. 411.
- ⁵⁸Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 856.
- ⁵⁹"Return of Ernest Hemingway," New Republic, 28 Oct. 1940, p. 591.
- ⁶⁰Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 855.
- ⁶¹Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 855.
- ⁶²"Across the Street and into the Grill," New Yorker, 14 Oct. 1950, p. 28.
- ⁶³White, p. 28.
- ⁶⁴Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 76.
- ⁶⁵Ernest Hemingway, Univ. of Minnesota Pamphlets on American Writers, No. 1 (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1965), p. 20.
- ⁶⁶Young, Ernest Hemingway, Minn. Pamphlet, pp. 20-21.

⁶⁷Portrait of Hemingway (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), pp. 24-25, 34.

⁶⁸Ross, pp. 37, 46, 54.

⁶⁹Ross, p. 34.

⁷⁰"How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?" in Hemingway and His Critics, ed. Carlos Baker (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 227.

⁷¹Hemingway, 88 Poems, p. 93.

⁷²Hotchner, pp. 74-75.

⁷³Hotchner, p. 75.

⁷⁴Hotchner, p. 75.

⁷⁵Hotchner, p. 72.

⁷⁶Hotchner, p. 74.

⁷⁷Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 637.

⁷⁸Baker, Hemingway: A Life, p. 637.

CHAPTER VII

THE SHARKS AND OTHER CREATURES: IN THE NOVEL

Through the years, Hemingway's resentment towards the critics and others in the field of literature at large had become obsessive. His case of "Black-Assedness," as he and Hotchner had called it, was apparently uncontrollable. Therefore, from the purely biographical standpoint, reason for accepting the scavenger sharks in The Old Man and The Sea as depicting the critics is no doubt justified. According to Hemingway, these so-called experts spend their lives as literary scavengers, devouring writers. In Green Hills of Africa, he said:

At present we have two good writers who cannot write because they have lost confidence through reading critics. If they wrote, sometimes it would be good and sometimes not so good and sometimes it would be quite bad, but the good would get out. But they have read the critics and they must write masterpieces. The masterpieces the critics said they wrote. They weren't masterpieces, of course. They were just quite good books. So now they cannot write at all. The critics made them impotent.¹

But Hemingway also, of course, believed that critics damage writers via truculence. As he said in "Valentine": they "hail any . . . any sign of quick decay." And if they

were going to challenge his own dominance in literature, then he would fight them through literature. He would write a prize-winning novel, one in which he would defeat them by being masterful, but one in which he would also portray the critics as vicious, foul-smelling sharks.

Such a plan was not one that was conveniently claimed by Hemingway after some critic had theorized concerning the author's intentions and explicated them for the literary world. In point of fact, while The Old Man was still in progress, Hemingway himself brought up the sharks-critics subject. In a private conversation with his son, Gregory Hemingway, the writer said:

". . . on this fish story, we can get Lillian Ross, on a day when the wind's right and smell's not too bad for her, to do another deadpan piece on me chopping up sharks in the shark factory across the bay, mumbling in incoherent Spanish that it's an end all critics deserve."²

Hemingway's earthy sense of humor is obviously at play in the "shark factory" statement. But beneath the levity was the soberness that pervaded the strong words previously issued about Lee Wilson Dodd, Edmund Wilson, Wyndham Lewis, and other critics. And in the opening pages of The Old Man, another "shark factory" statement appears, one that echoes Hemingway's conversation with Gregory Hemingway:

Those who had caught sharks had taken them to the shark factory on the other side of the cove where they were hoisted on a block and tackle, their livers removed, their fins cut off and their hides

skinned out and their flesh cut into strips for salting (p. 11).

One gets the idea that the author has a special destiny for the sharks-critics, that he is quite ready to torture them. When he told Gregory that "it's an end all critics deserve," Hemingway was serious. That is, the "shark factory" statement that appears in The Old Man suggests not only Hemingway's oral "shark factory" comment but also his "Valentine" poem in which he had wished for the critics to "die." In the novel, the narrator also points out that

When the wind was in the east a smell came across the harbour from the shark factory; but today there was only the faint edge of the odour because the wind had backed into the north and then dropped off and it was pleasant and sunny on the Terrace (p. 12).

The vile smell that is associated with the shark factory is at its worst when the wind is from the east, according to the narrative. And the play on the word east reminds one of the special distaste that Hemingway had for the New York critics in particular. Daniel Fuchs, in his article entitled "Ernest Hemingway, Literary Critic," speaks of New York critics as "the mythical New York beasts [Hemingway] excoriates."³ Fuchs' choice of the word excoriates is suggestive, indeed, because on the same page he also gives credence to the concept that the sharks are to be accepted as the critics.⁴ The point concerning excoriates is that it not only means "to censure strongly" or "to denounce" but also denotes "to tear or wear off the skin of," a thought that one would have little

problem connecting with Hemingway's desires towards the New York sharks-critics. A specific written document revealing Hemingway's hatred of New York critics appears in his introduction to Elio Vittorini's novel In Sicily (1949). Hemingway contrasted the writings of efficient creative writers with those of the New York literary reviewers, revealing the aridity of the latter:

Rain to an academician is probably, after the first fall has cleared the air, H₂O with, of course, traces of other things. To a good writer needing something to bring the dry country alive so that it will not be a desert where only such cactus as New York literary reviews grow dry and sad, inexistent without the watering of their benefactors, feeding on the dried manure of schism and the dusty taste of disputed dialectics, their only flowering a dessicated criticism as alive as stuffed birds, and their steady mulch the dehydrated cuds of fellow critics; such a writer finds rain to be made of knowledge, experience, wine, bread, oil, salt, vinegar, bed, early mornings, nights, days, the sea, men, women, dogs, beloved motor cars, bicycles, hills and valleys, the appearance and disappearance of trains on straight and curved tracks, love, honor and disobey, music, chamber music and chamber pots, negative and positive Wassermans, the arrival and non-arrival of expected munitions and/or reinforcements, replacements or your brother.⁵

Robert O. Stephens says that Hemingway's "reference to 'New York literary reviews' was in fact more pointed when he first wrote the preface" to Vittorini's novel.⁶ But, after realizing that his sharp words might affect the reception of Vittorini's book in a negative way, "at the expense of his own critical antagonisms, he toned down the reference,"

according to Stephens.⁷ Another reference to direction also suggests the New York critics: the narrator of The Old Man says that "The breeze . . . had backed a little further into the north-east and [Santiago] knew that meant that it would not fall off" (p. 106). The fact that Santiago believes the breeze will not "fall off" at this point in the story is significant because he is already being attacked by the sharks and because "the old man knew that a very bad time was coming" (p. 106). As Santiago says: ". . . there was no way to keep its [the marlin's] scent out of the water" (p. 106). In other words, once the "scent" is detected, the sharks-critics will be in proximity to begin their destruction.

During the second day of being pulled about by the monstrous fish, Santiago becomes very weary of body and spirit. But, despite the normal fluctuation of emotions that accompany such exertion, the old man greatly fears only one eventuality: "If sharks come, God pity him [the marlin] and me" (p. 68). As if it were inevitable, not long after Santiago kills the marlin, the first of the sharks does attack. And the difference between happiness and disaster is only the white space between two sentences: "The old man looked at the fish constantly to make sure it was true. It was an hour before the first shark hit him" (pp. 99-100). Although in the two "shark factory" statements no distinction is drawn between various kinds of sharks, in the novel as a whole, significant differences are shown. That is, the large Mako

shark that first tears into Santiago's now defenseless fish is different from the scavenger sharks that smell blood from the open wounds and follow suit in determination to finish the job.

Santiago shows a noticeable respect for the Mako shark. Even though the Mako has attacked his marlin, Santiago says to himself that the Mako "is not a scavenger" (p. 105). Some sharks are "just a moving appetite" (p. 106), but the Mako is not such a base creature. Instead, "He is beautiful and noble and knows no fear of anything" (p. 106). Furthermore, Santiago identifies somewhat with the Mako by thinking, "He lives on the live fish as you do" (p. 105). And Santiago says that his only reason for killing the Mako is that he had to "'in self-defense'" (p. 106). Symbolic identification of the Mako is difficult. While there is little doubt that the scavengers are meant to be the critics--the ones whom Hemingway was at odds with, at least--the Mako has to be identified more tentatively. But the fact that Hemingway, by his own admission, is using the sharks in general as symbols of critics leads one to explore just how and why it is that the Mako differs from the scavengers.

Is the Mako simply a literary critic of higher quality than the general run, according to Hemingway's view, one who has gained the respect of even Hemingway? The picture is not clearly enough drawn for one to postulate whether or not the Mako is one particular critic. However, a few critics

received somewhat positive treatment from Hemingway--for instance, Charles Poore and John O'Hara, who, although primarily a writer of fiction, was considered by Hemingway to be a critic. Poore came in for some praise from Hemingway at the time The Hemingway Reader was being compiled. Hemingway had given Scribner's a list of possible editors for the book, and, upon hearing that Poore had been the editor selected, said that Poore "has always known what I was trying to do and I think it was a good choice."⁸ Coincidentally, Poore's choice as an excerpt from The Old Man and the Sea to be included in the reader was the scene in which Santiago gallantly fights the sharks. Poore said:

The Old Man and the Sea is not easy to excerpt, but I think this passage, the fight with the sharks for the great fish that means everything in the world to Santiago is fairly taken.⁹

And Hemingway, who liked O'Hara because of this writer's fidelity to the Hemingway cause, once said: "'I can always count on John O'Hara to call it [The Old Man] the greatest thing since the Sermon on the Mount.'"¹⁰ The statement about O'Hara was made directly following a verbal attack on Edmund Wilson, according to Gregory Hemingway.¹¹ Hemingway had subsequently commented on O'Hara so as to show the difference between the two critics.¹² As for Wilson, Hemingway believed that "'Old Bunny Wilson will call it another Hemingway fish story, I guess.'"¹³ Hemingway had more praise to offer O'Hara, even if it was probably given with the knowledge that praise sometimes draws more praise in return:

"Remember when John came out with that laudatory review of Across the River, saying that I was the best writer since Shakespeare, and Hirschfeld had a wonderful cartoon in the New York Times showing all the great writers since the Bard impaled on my pen? O'Hara is something. Sometimes the Irish are so loyal they lose all judgment.

"Ever since I told John how good Appointment in Samarra was, and he knew I meant it, he's been like a faithful retriever. Next time I see him I'll tell him that Appointment's as good as anything I've ever written--which, by the way, it may be.¹⁴

Or could the Mako be another writer of fiction? Perhaps he is one who was primarily an artist as opposed to someone such as O'Hara, who worked both in creative and critical genres. The key to this possible answer is in Santiago's thought that the Mako "lives on the live fish as you do" (p. 105), an interpretation that is, of course, based on the assumption that the marlin symbolizes the author's writing. Although the Mako's being symbolic of a writer would certainly draw him closer to the mind of the fisherman-artist, this possible interpretation does not eliminate the fact that this shark is nevertheless dangerous. This creature is lauded because he "is built to swim as fast as the fastest fish in the sea and everything was beautiful about him except" for one thing (p. 100). And that one thing is a possible giveaway as to who the Mako might be: "everything was beautiful about him except his jaws" (p. 100). It is no news that Hemingway had spats with various writers. And while these writers were often the recipients of Hemingway's

negative remarks, Hemingway himself was frequently maligned by other writers. And he was known to be paranoid about these attacks. Maybe Hemingway was sparring with a celebrated fellow writer. For example, Hemingway felt that Faulkner was too caustic in his criticism of the former's work.¹⁵ And Hemingway facetiously called the noted author of The Sound and the Fury and other major works of fiction "Dr. Faulkner."¹⁶ Regardless of who the Mako is (and the symbolic possibilities could no doubt extend to many persons), the author of The Old Man describes a creature that has a destructive mouth:

Inside the closed double lip of his jaws
all of his eight rows of teeth were
slanted inwards. They were not the
pyramid-shaped teeth of most sharks.
They were shaped like a man's fingers
when they are crisped like claws
(pp. 100-01).

There Hemingway has said it in fairly explicit language: the Mako's most dangerous component is likened to the fighting end of a man who is malicious and potentially dangerous, perhaps a man who is pernicious enough to claw into the works of a fellow literary man. The narrator emphasizes the point by calling the Mako the Dentuso, meaning "the toothy one" in Spanish.¹⁷ Of course, Faulkner was not the only author that Hemingway had battled with; he had warred in various ways with Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and others. However, one thing is abundantly clear from the text of The Old Man: the Mako is a step above the scavengers.

But Santiago, the ultimate fisherman-artist, muses to himself that he is even "more intelligent" than the Mako (p. 103). Then he reconsiders and thinks: "Perhaps not. . . . Perhaps I was only better armed" (p. 103). In other words, maybe Santiago, the fisherman-writer, is able to kill the Mako because he is better equipped with talent than the Mako-writer is.

But Santiago realizes that the Mako is only the beginning of troubles. He knows that the scavenger sharks will pick up the marlin's scent and that the destruction of his fish is imminent (p. 106). Santiago is right. The scavengers, who have been trailing the path of blood, finally locate the wounded marlin. And with these sharks' first appearance, Hemingway paints a very satirical sketch of the breed. These sharks "had the scent and were excited and in the stupidity of their great hunger they were losing and finding the scent in their excitement" (p. 107). The scavenger sharks-critics lack the intelligence and talent that the Mako had. The comparison between the two creatures suggests the statement that Hemingway made to an aspiring young writer in Paris in the 1920's:

"Look, if you can't write why don't you learn to write criticism. . . . Then you can always write. You won't ever have to worry about it not coming nor being mute and silent."¹⁸

The narrator of The Old Man continues by describing the malicious constitution of the scavenger sharks-critics:

They were hateful sharks, bad smelling, scavengers as well as killers, and when

they were hungry they would bite at an oar or the rudder of the ship. It was these sharks that would cut the turtles' legs and flippers off when the turtles were asleep on the surface, and they would hit a man in the water, if they were hungry, even if the man had no smell of fish blood or fish slime on him (pp. 107-08).

The survival-of-the-fittest philosophy of literary naturalism is evident in this passage, as the critics are shown to be animalistic in their tendencies to strike almost anything at any given time, even if there is no special value in killing or maiming their targets. A man did not have to have the "smell of blood or fish slime on him" in order to be attacked by a scavenger; that is, he did not even have to smell like a true fisherman in order for a scavenger-critic to take a potshot at him.

Continuing to lambast the critics, Hemingway adds several more pages of insulting descriptions of the scavenger sharks and their murderous activities. He says that one of them "watched the old man with his slitted yellow eyes and then came in fast with his half circle of jaws wide to hit the fish where he had already been bitten" (p. 108). When this particular scavenger is finally killed, the reader sees that the shark is a cutthroat to the end: "The shark let go of the fish and slid down, swallowing what he had taken as he died" (p. 108). The bandwagon approach, which is popular with many critics, is also attacked in this section of the novel. It is not uncommon for a critic to follow the lead

of other critics in condemning (or praising) a book simply because he does not have the fortitude or intelligence to forge ahead with opinions that are unique to himself. The critic may well rely on "the dehydrated cuds of fellow critics," as Hemingway had said in the introduction to Vittorini's novel.¹⁹ In other words, as is said of the scavengers, "They came in a pack" (p. 118). And not only did one of the scavengers attack the marlin in the exact spot that had been ripped open by the Mako but also the first sharks did enough damage tearing away meat "that the fish now made a trail for all sharks as wide as a highway through the sea" (p. 111). Again, a strong hint has been dropped: it is men who travel highways, not sharks. Hemingway persists in adding coals to the fire: "The next shark that came was a single shovel-nose" (p. 111). From this image, one receives the picture of a shark (scavenger fish, of course, eat waste materials among other things) scooping up dung deposited by the cleaner fish. But the description continues, and in addition to comparing the shovelnose to "a pig" (p. 111), the narrator also suggests the metaphorical cannibalism of the sharks-critics by saying that this shark "had a mouth so wide that [a person] could put [his] head in it" (p. 111). This viciousness galled Hemingway a great deal. And in his 1950 interview with Harvey Breit, Hemingway said that he wished critics would spend more time reading and understanding literature rather than attacking personalities.²⁰ Perhaps the thought of critics assaulting personalities was what

Hemingway had in mind when he had Santiago say to the sharks: "And make a dream you've killed a man" (p. 119). Toward the end of Santiago's attempt to defend his fish, more human-like characteristics are attributed to the sharks. Shortly before the marlin has been stripped clean, "sharks hit the carcass as someone might pick up crumbs from the table" (p. 119), again intimating the indiscretion, inhumanity, and imitateness than Hemingway felt to be typical of so many critics.

A final bit of satire can be noted in the sharks section of The Old Man. That is, Santiago addresses the scavenger sharks as galanos: "'Ay,' the old man said. 'Galanos. Come on galanos'" (p. 108). The Spanish word galano is variously translated as meaning "gallant, fine, gay, genteel, splendidly dressed; elegant, ingenious, lively, sprightly," according to The Revised Velázquez Dictionary of the Spanish and English Languages.²¹ Knowing what the word suggests, one can almost imagine Hemingway recalling his "How do you like it now, gentlemen?" escapade with Lillian Ross, then remembering the article that Joseph Warren Beach wrote ("How Do You Like It Now, Gentlemen?"), and now yelling passionately at the sharks-critics: "Galanos--you gallant, fine, ingenious ones--how do you like it now?"

NOTES

¹Green Hills of Africa (New York: Scribner's, 1963), pp. 23-24.

²Gregory H. Hemingway, Papa: A Personal Memoir (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p. 147.

³"Ernest Hemingway, Literary Critic," in Ernest Hemingway: A Collection of Criticism, ed. Arthur Waldhorn (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1973), p. 92.

⁴Fuchs, p. 92.

⁵Robert O. Stephens, Hemingway's Nonfiction: The Public Voice (Chapel Hill: The Univ. of North Carolina Press, 1968), pp. 118-19.

⁶Stephens, p. 119.

⁷Stephens, p. 119.

⁸William Seward, My Friend Ernest Hemingway: An Affectionate Reminiscence (Cranbury, N.J.: A. S. Barnes, 1969), p. 48.

⁹The Hemingway Reader (New York: Scribner's, 1953), p. 642.

¹⁰Gregory Hemingway, pp. 146-47.

¹¹Gregory Hemingway, p. 146.

¹²Gregory Hemingway, pp. 146-47.

¹³Gregory Hemingway, p. 146.

¹⁴Gregory Hemingway, p. 147.

¹⁵A. E. Hotchner, Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 75.

¹⁶Leicester Hemingway, My Brother, Ernest Hemingway (Greenwich, Conn.: Fawcett Premier, 1962), p. 251.

¹⁷Velázquez Dictionary of the Spanish and English Languages, comp. Mariano Velázquez de la Cadena, Edward Gray, and Juan L. Iribas (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 213.

¹⁸Ernest Hemingway, A Moveable Feast (New York: Bantam, 1969), pp. 94-95.

¹⁹Stephens, p. 118.

²⁰"Success It's Wonderful," New York Times Book Review, 3 Dec. 1950, p. 58.

²¹Velázquez Dictionary, p. 333.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSION

Charles Poore considers it a point of interest that the negative reception of Across the River did not distract Hemingway from diligently continuing his writing:

Across the River and into the Trees stirred a curious frenzy of attacks on Hemingway when it appeared in 1950. It will be interesting for future biographers to note that while the clamour raged he was serenely writing the calm, Homeric pages of The Old Man and the Sea.¹

Implicit in Poore's remark is that Hemingway had the resolution to endure despite his setback. Hemingway stated to Lillian Ross in New York in 1949 that he had won the writing championship in the 1920's and defended it in the 1930's and 1940's.² He added that he did not mind earning it again in the 1950's: "It is sort of fun to be fifty and feel you are going to defend the title again."³ But after Across the River appeared, even Hemingway himself had to admit that "I lost the title."⁴ He said that the novel

wasn't as bad as the critics said. But the readers didn't want a romantic novelist writing about getting old and dying and having a narcissistic affair with a young girl.⁵

Despite the reversal of success, Hemingway came up swinging. And he told Gregory Hemingway that he was again a contender

as the result of the Islands in the Stream trilogy that was in progress at the time and, particularly, the portion that was drawn from it for separate publication as The Old Man and the Sea:

"Gig, I think I've got another shot at the title. . . . I'll show you the second section of the trilogy as soon as I finish it, which shouldn't be long at the rate I'm going now. I'd like your reaction on that one. It's different from anything I've written before. No love interest, no sex, just a simple story about an old man catching a fish. It's kind of mystical, though. . . ."6

Such confidence being expressed by Hemingway during his autumnal years is a comment on Santiago's belief that a big fish would be harvested in September or October (pp. 18, 37, 41). And when The Old Man was published, it did indeed have mystical qualities, qualities that caught the attention not only of the general public but also of the literary critics. After only a first reading of the fish story, A. E. Hotchner came to a conclusion that he makes quite clear in his biographical work on Hemingway:

I began to think about The Old Man and the Sea, and I realized it was Ernest's counterattack against those who had assaulted him for Across the River. It was an absolutely perfect counterattack and I envisioned a row of snickering carpies bearing the likeness of Dwight MacDonald and Louis Kronenberger and E. B. White, who in the midst of cackling "Through! Washed Up! Kaput!" suddenly grab their groins and keel over. It is a rather elementary axiom that he who attacks must anticipate the counterattack, but the critics, poor boys, would never make General Staff.

As Ernest once said, "One battle doesn't
 make a campaign but the critics treat
 one book, good or bad, like a whole
 . . . war."⁷

It was just as Hotchner said: the novel was a "counterat-
 tack." Hemingway had typified the critics as a species
 among the most hated of all life; he verbally assaulted these
 sharks-critics; and, perhaps most humiliating of all to the
 critics, he was forcing them to read a prose masterpiece
 written by the "washed up" writer.

If The Old Man and the Sea were merely a one-leveled
 satire written in order that Hemingway might openly vent
 his frustrations towards the critics, then the novel would
 lack ambiguity and universality, therefore failing as a work
 of art. But the beauty of Santiago's story is that, long
 before anyone provided a more detailed explication of the
 autobiographical fisherman-artist theme in the tale, it was
 recognized as a first-rate piece of fiction. After all, of
 all the Hemingway "code heroes," who was the ultimate one?
 Who displayed the greatest courage among the protagonists
 in the Hemingway novels? Who overcame greater odds? Of
 course, Santiago. And his is a story of suspense. When
 the old man hooks the fish and announces its size, the reader
 also is hooked and carried through the joys and sufferings
 that pervade the entire book. Who can walk away when a
 master fisherman is going head to head with a 1500-pound
 marlin? Santiago's story is a contest not only of sport but
 also of man against nature in all its majesty. It is a

story of man against himself. It is a story of an old man against nearly impossible odds, making the improbable possible, yet, because of Hemingway's masterful handling of the tale, still believable. And the style of the novel is poetic simplicity, simply Hemingway at his best again after several years of lesser work.

One of the strengths of Hemingway's best fiction is that it is relatively free of authorial intrusion. Hemingway wished first for his stories to function as stories; he did not want to be guilty of including parts of nonfiction essays in his works, thereby polluting his fiction by chronicling his various opinions about life. If the writing was well enough done, it would reveal many things to the reader without the reader's having to tolerate inserted editorials. Nevertheless, a dedicated literary man does not compose fiction without leaving some of himself with his readers. As Evan Shipman told Malcolm Cowley: "I do not believe that I ever heard [Hemingway] express a serious opinion that I did not find later in his work."⁸ In 1958, when Hemingway was answering some questions from a group of high-school students in Idaho, he was asked: "In your novels are you writing about yourself?" He replied: "Does a writer know anyone better?"⁹ It is common knowledge that when Hemingway wrote about war or drinking or bullfighting he was writing from first-hand observation or participation. These subjects were handled in a straightforward fashion. But Hemingway does not have a novel in which the protagonist, being

a writer, reveals his every thought on the topics of writing and the world of literature. He reserved the sermons and the philosophizing for his nonfiction and for interviews. However, as any Hemingway scholar knows, when the famous iceberg is floating at its best, the stories themselves reveal a great deal of the Hemingway mind. In fact, Hemingway's nonfiction merely confirms, not newly exposes, his thoughts about life and art as found in his fiction.

And, after all is said and done, although mankind needs its written expositions, the poetic renditions, whether in poetry or fiction or some other art form, are the higher forms of human communication. Probably nothing mattered more to Hemingway than his writing. So he chose a short novel in which to tell the story of a fisherman who also happens to be an artist, a metaphorical extension of himself, the writer. Just as the old man had the fish that meant everything, Hemingway had his writing, which meant everything. Just as the old man had to isolate himself from humanity and to suffer in order to land the big one, Hemingway had to insulate himself and to work diligently in order to write his stories. Just as the old man's prize fish was attacked, Hemingway's writing had been attacked. Just as the old man fought the sharks, Hemingway savagely battled the critics. And just as Santiago was crafty and expert in landing the marlin, Hemingway was masterful and true to his ambitions in penning The Old Man and the Sea.

NOTES

¹The Hemingway Reader (New York: Scribner's, 1953), p. 616.

²Portrait of Hemingway (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), p. 46.

³Ross, p. 46.

⁴Gregory Hemingway, Papa: A Personal Memoir (New York: Pocket Books, 1977), p. 148.

⁵Gregory Hemingway, p. 148.

⁶Gregory Hemingway, p. 146.

⁷Papa Hemingway: A Personal Memoir (New York: Bantam, 1967), p. 79.

⁸Scott Donaldson, By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway (Dallas, Penn.: Penguin, 1978), p. xi.

⁹Hotchner, p. 219.

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