

Title: Biblical Allusion in *The Old Man and the Sea*
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Publication Details: *Studies in Short Fiction* 10.2 (Spring 1973): p143-147.
Source: *Short Story Criticism*. Ed. Anna Sheets-Nesbitt. Vol. 36. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000. From *Literature Resource Center*.
Document Type: Critical essay



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[(essay date 1973) In the following essay, Flora argues that *The Old Man and the Sea* is Hemingway's "parable of practical Christianity," as Santiago finds his greatest reward in being humble, enduring, launching into the deep, and having faith, hope, and love.]

From the beginning of his career to the end, Ernest Hemingway made important use of the bible in his fiction. Critics of *The Old Man and the Sea* have long been aware of biblical cadences and parallels.¹ However, no one has commented on two important biblical passages that Hemingway appears to have used with great deliberation in *The Old Man*. Attention to one of these is useful for resolving a controversy about the protagonist; attention to both helps to clarify Hemingway's theme.

One critical disagreement over the work surrounds the question of whether Santiago went "too far out" and thus sinned.² Several references to going far out sandwich the central story of the fishing episode. Early in the story, Santiago informs the boy, Manolin, that he is going "far out," where most of the fishermen do not like to go. Hemingway repeats the phrase with some variation, creating a certain biblical cadence thereby. After the devastation of his great fish by the sharks, Santiago brings the earlier determination to go "far out" back to mind as he accuses himself repeatedly: "I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish."³ His final words before he comes into harbor are put in the same terms: "And what beat you, he thought. 'Nothing,' he said aloud. 'I went out too far.'" (p. 120)

His final statement has a simplicity that negates his earlier judgement that he had sinned in killing the marlin. By the careful framing of his story in terms of going far out, Hemingway is, I think, doing something quite different from calling the old man to appreciate the community ashore, as some critics have thought. Rather, by repetition of "far out," Hemingway calls to mind a specific Christian challenge in terms of a New Testament account of Jesus. Santiago's name (Spanish for Saint James) reminds us that Hemingway named his protagonist for one of the twelve disciples, most of whom were fishermen. Saint Luke records the story of the calling of these men in terms that bear important similarities to Hemingway's tale. On a certain day Simon Peter and his fellow fishermen had also had a time of fishing with "no luck." Jesus had been preaching from Peter's boat to a crowd on the shores of Lake Gennesaret:

Now when he had left speaking, he said unto Simon, Launch out into the deep, and let down your nets for a draught.

And Simon answering said unto him, Master, we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing: nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net.

And when they had this done, they inclosed a great multitude of fishes; and their net brake.

And they beckoned unto their partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink.

When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord.

For he was astonished, and all that were with him, at the draught of the fishes which they had taken:

And so was James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not: From henceforth thou shalt catch men.

And when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed him. Luke 5:4-11

There is not, of course, a one-to-one parallel between this account and the events of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway was not that kind of writer. Nevertheless, it does not seem unlikely that having named his protagonist for one of the men involved, Hemingway looked again at this story, itself a memorable parable of the Christian calling--full of challenge and promise: "Launch out into the deep." To make the big catch it is necessary to reject the easy and to go "far out."

Appropriately, the twentieth-century Santiago is alone as he accepts the challenge of the Master. Not even Manolin can go with him. By himself he must do "the thing that I was born for" (p. 50). He is also on a larger body of water which has threats greater than those from Gennesaret, but this too is appropriate for the image of the modern Santiago. His need also seems more urgent. In Luke's account, the fishermen were at most tired and discouraged after a fruitless night's work. But Santiago has gone eighty-four days without success. He is old (again unlike James of Luke's Story), and his skiff reflects what life had done to him: "The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat" (p. 9). But to such men, Christianity has always promised victory with the challenge of launching out into the deep. Ironically, the victory in both Luke's account and Hemingway's makes the characters more humble. Simon Peter, apparently speaking for the other disciples as well, says, "I am a sinful man." Santiago takes a similarly humble position: "If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?" (p. 105). But in neither case is the sinning or not sinning the point.

By emphasizing Santiago's role as one who accepts the challenge of Jesus, we guard against making too much of the parallel at the end of the novella between Santiago and Jesus. It is true that we are pointedly reminded of Jesus' crucifixion at the end of the work, but this likeness should be seen in terms of discipleship. Santiago becomes more like the Christ because he has dared to launch out into the deep. He thereby experiences tremendous victory--but also great loss. *The Old Man and the Sea* is a striking illustration of what is probably one of Frederic Henry's best thoughts in *A Farewell to Arms*: "It is in defeat that we become Christian."⁴ Significantly, the young priest of that novel fails to grasp the truth of Frederic's observation. The Church does not give to Hemingway's characters the direction many of them crave. The story of Santiago is an ironic counterpoint to the story of Simon Peter and the other fishermen. It is not that Christianity is irrelevant to man's needs; it is just that Hemingway came increasingly to believe that man must do what he can do alone.

In addition to counterpointing the action of his story with the biblical account of the fishermen, Hemingway has skillfully produced a verbal texture that recalls one of the most famous of New Testament passages, St. Paul's treatise on love in I Corinthians, Chapter 13. The chapter concludes: "And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity." Hemingway has Santiago cherish the same triumvirate and in the same order. Almost immediately Hemingway presents Santiago and the boy together as an embodiment of faith. Speaking of his father, Manolin says, "'He hasn't much faith.' 'No,' the old man said, 'But we have. Haven't we?' 'Yes,' the boy said." Both the boy's and Santiago's dreams of lions in Africa symbolize this faith. As faith moves into the realm of action, hope becomes an important element. About the hope so necessary in pursuit Hemingway observes of Santiago as the old man prepares for his trip: "His hope and his confidence had never gone. But now they were freshening as when the breeze rises" (p. 13). Later the sharks sorely try that hope, but Santiago thinks of the great DiMaggio, who with his painful bone spur that has hampered his baseball playing serves to symbolize the hope active in conflict. So Santiago rallies: "He watched only the forward part of the fish and some of his hope returned." "It is silly not to hope, he thought. Besides I believe it is a sin." (pp. 104-105)

Santiago is a compelling character because with his faith and hope, love is closely interwoven: "most people are heartless about turtles because a turtle's heart will beat for hours after he has been cut up and butchered. But the old man thought, I have such a heart too and my feet and hands are like theirs" (p. 37). Already an important part of the old man, love emerges as the growing part of him, the part that is deepened in the climactic death of the marlin. Santiago's love for the fish is established early: "Fish," he said, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends" (p. 54). The fish possesses precisely the virtues of Santiago himself, and in the struggle Santiago achieves an at-one-ment with his "victim"; "Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come and kill me. I do not care who kills who" (p. 92). Time is arrested in love as the fish ("which is my brother") dies: "Then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and 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 the skiff" (p. 94). As he prepares to take the fish ashore, Santiago reflects: "I think I felt his heart." (p. 95)

In *The Old Man and the Sea* Hemingway presents a parable of practical Christianity. The theology of Christianity may no longer be valid, but--as Santiago's life illustrates--a practical Christian experience may yet be the best course open to man. To be humble, to endure, to launch out into the deep, to have faith, hope, and love--these achievements are still the most rewarding.⁵ *The Old Man and the Sea* illustrates the essence of Christian discipleship and does so in specifically biblical terms.

Notes

¹ See especially Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer and Artist*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), pp. 320-327. For a statement of the importance of the Bible to Hemingway, see Alexander R. Tamke, "Jacob Barnes Biblical Name: Central Irony in *The Sun Also Rises*," *The English Record* (1967), 2-7.

² See Clinton S. Burhans, "The Old Man and the Sea: Hemingway's Tragic Vision of Man," *American Literature*, 31 (1960), 446-455. Reprinted in *Ernest Hemingway: Critiques of Four Major Novels*, pp. 150-155 and in *Hemingway and his Critics*, ed. Carlos Baker (New

York: Hill and Wang, 1961), pp. 259-268. Delbert E. Wylder also emphasizes (wrongly) Santiago as sinner in *Hemingway's Heroes* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1969), pp. 199-221. For a useful summary of disagreement about *The Old Man and the Sea* as well as a pointed refutation to Behrens see Bickford Sylvester, "Hemingway's Extended Vision: *The Old Man and the Sea*, *PMLA*, 81 (1966), 130-138.

³ Ernest Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, Scribner Library ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1952), p. 110. References to the novelette are included in text hereafter. "Far out" references also occur on pp. 14, 28, 34, 40, 41, 50, 115, 116, 120.

⁴ Ernest Hemingway, *A Farewell to Arms* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929, Scribner Library ed., 1957), p. 178.

⁵ Hemingway emphasizes each of these virtues. By the several references to endurance he also reminds us that the Jesus who admonished some humble fisherman to "launch out into the deep" also stressed the necessity of endurance: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved" (Matthew 10:22). See also Matthew 24:13 and Mark 13:13.

Source Citation (MLA 7th Edition)

Flora, Joseph M. "Biblical Allusion in *The Old Man and the Sea*." *Studies in Short Fiction* 10.2 (Spring 1973): 143-147. Rpt. in *Short Story Criticism*. Ed. Anna Sheets-Nesbitt. Vol. 36. Detroit: Gale Group, 2000. *Literature Resource Center*. Web. 20 Jan. 2015.

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Gale Document Number: GALEIH1420024360

In conclusion biblical allusions were present in the novel and were affective in drawing out deeper meaning in the context. Marlin. Then what's a biblical allusion? bit.ly/sweetquizwooo. Struggles. an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference. Biblical Allusions in the Old Man and the Sea. Quiz Time! Take out your phones! We will show that Hemingway uses biblical allusions to effectively show that Santiago represents Jesus in his conquest over the marlin, struggles, and through the imagery used in the novella. Imagery. Only RUB 220.84/month. biblical allusions old man and the sea. STUDY. Flashcards. ~3 day journey at sea (quest)(almost superhuman). E) Luke 4:2, Mark 1:13 ~40 day period, 40 days in the wilderness having many trials where he is being tempted by Satan. ~They say Santiago is unlucky and they lose faith - after 40 days with no catch manolins parents make him leave the boat. F) John 19:31-37 ~Christ's 5 wounds on the cross (one nail in each hand, One on his crossed feet One in his forehead, 5th wound is from the spear of Longinus who pierced his side while he was on the cross). ~The scars on his hands "old as erosions in a fishless desert" ~other instances of pain. job 13 3. Christian features in The Old Man and the Sea The major allusions to Christ and the Christian tradition in the novel are inescapable and this chapter deals with them according to the theme of the work. Furthermore, biblical influence in The Old Man and the sea has been widely recognized by many noted critics. When The Old Man and the sea appeared in 1952, Philip Young wrote that it was a metaphor for which Hemingway indicated his deep respect and enlisted ours through the enhancing use of Christian symbols. John Halverson (1964) states that if the reader has been told that Santiago is in