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Ernest Hemingway's the Oldman and the Sea: A Tale of Man's Helplessness agaist Destiny

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Abstract- Earnest Hemingway, an American writer, produced considerable novels in the history of English literatutre. Hemingway's *The Oldman and the Sea* is a story of oldman's struggle and his helplessness against destiny. Like Greek tragedians, Hemingway accepts the harshness of destiny in man's life. It is very well said "Man proposes and God disposes" that clearly denotes the role of destiny in man's life. The story of *The Oldman and the Sea* is universal because it reveals how human beings struggle to get something in life but sometimes crushed under the wheels of destiny. The old man has indomitable spirit and sea experience yet he is unable to catch the fish for a few days. One day, he caught the big fish called the Marlin but it was too big for him to drag to the shore. The Old man tried to drag the Marlin to the shore but in a midway its blood attracted the Sharks and he brought only its skeleton on the shore. So Hemingway talks about the helplessness of man against destiny through the character of an old man. This paper is a sincere effort to display man's helplessness against destiny through the character of old man.

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Abstract- Earnest Hemingway, an American writer, produced considerable novels in the history of English literatutre. Hemingway's *The Oldman and the Sea* is a story of oldman's struggle and his helplessness against destiny. Like Greek tragedians, Hemingway accepts the harshness of destiny in man's life. It is very well said "Man proposes and God disposes" that clearly denotes the role of destiny in man's life. The story of *The Oldman and the Sea* is universal because it reveals how human beings struggle to get something in life but sometimes crushed under the wheels of destiny. The old man has indomitable spirit and sea experience yet he is unable to catch the fish for a few days. One day, he caught the big fish called the Marlin but it was too big for him to drag to the shore. The Old man tried to drag the Marlin to the shore but in a midway its blood attracted the Sharks and he brought only its skeleton on the shore. So Hemingway talks about the helplessness of man against destiny through the character of an old man. This paper is a sincere effort to display man's helplessness against destiny through the character of old man.

I. Introduction

Ernest Miller Hemingway is known as Ernest Hemingway in English literature, was an American journalist, novelist, short story writer and sportsman. Hemingway wrote seven novels during his life time and among them the popular novels are: *The Sun Also Rises*, *Farewell to Arms*, and *The Old man and the Sea*. *The Old man and the Sea* brought him a good name and fame in literature. Hemingway's works mainly deal with the themes of love, war, wilderness, and loss. *Farewell to Arms* deals with the theme of the futility of war. In *A Farewell to Arms,* Hemingway says, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong in broken places. But those that will not break it kills. It kills very good and the very gentle and the very brave impartially. If you are none of these you can be sure it will kill you too but there will be no special hurry." (en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ernest _ Hemingway) It seems that there is always conflict between good and evil in this world but some people remain strong in broken places. The greater power called destiny crushes everyone under its wheels impartially. In this connection, Omar Khayyam writes:

The moving fingers writes; and, having writ,

Moves on: nor all thy piety nor wit

Shall lure it back to cancel half a Line,

Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

(www.poemhunter.com/poem/the-rubaiyat-of-omar-khayyam)

Human beings are helpless against destiny. Hemingway's *The Old man and the Sea* deals with the theme of man's helplessness against destiny. Hemingway talks about how man's efforts go in vain in spite of struggling to get something in life.

Many writers have accepted the role of destiny in man's life in their works. Greek tragedians believed that man is only a puppet in the hands of destiny. Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex* is a great example of man's helplessness against destiny. It is believed that whatever happens to man is predestined and no one can escape from it. Shakespeare emphasizes uncertainty of man's life in his tragedy *Hamlet* and says,

"We know what we are, but know not what may be."

(www.nowweatshakespeare.com/quotes/famous-shakespeare-quotes/)

It seems that something uncontrollable happens to man that is called destiny. Moreover, Shakespeare defines life in his play *Macbeth* in the following manners:

> "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage, and then herds no more; it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." (www.nowweatshakespeare.com/ quotes/famous-shakespeare-quotes/)

Shakespeare considers life as a walking shadow and man is only a poor player who plays different role during his life time. Moreover, it is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury but signifying nothing. This clearly indicates the emptiness of man's life and the power of destiny.

Albert Camus's *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the finest example of absurd condition of man's life and compares man's life with the task of Sisyphus who is condemned to repeat the same meaningless task of pushing a boulder up a mountain, only to see it roll down again. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus says, "Likewise and during everyday of an illustrious life, time carries us. But a moment always comes when we have to carry it. We live on the future: "tomorrow," "later on," "when you have made your way," "you will understand when you are old enough." Such irrelevancies are wonderful, for; after all, it's a matter of dying. Yet a day

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comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt of the flesh is the absurd." (https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/855563-le-mythe-de-sisyphe) Camus believed that man dwells on future and thinks about tomorrow as well as tries to attain materialistic prosperity in his young age. It is ironical that man is unable to spend what he earns during his youth and he realizes that he is now nearer to death such realization makes him unhappy. We are living in the midst of absurdity so that we are unable to understand a true meaning of life.

The Old man and the Sea begins with a description of an old fisherman Santiago how he looks like with deep wrinkles on his face. Such thing shows the dusk time of his life. Hemingway tells the readers that the old man has a wide sea experience. However, the old man feels weakness in his old age; he has courage to catch the fish from the sea. He is aware of his physical situation. As the Old man says; "I may not be as strong as I think, the Old man said. I know many tricks and I have resolution." (Hemingway, p.22) Hemingway served as a soldier during World War I hence he displays the power of strong determination through the character of an old man. Santiago tells the story of his struggle to a boy and remembers his painful days.

> All my life the early sun has hurt my eyes, he thought. Yet they are still good. In the evening I can look straight into it without getting the blackness. It has more force in the evening too. But in the morning it is painful. (Hemingway, p.33).

It seems that Santiago has passed through hardship throughout of his life. The early sun has hurt his eyes yet he has courage to face it. It is more painful in the evening too. In spite of hardship, the old man is not ready to give up his sea career. Hemingway seems to tell the story of hardship of human beings through the character of old man. Old man's struggle is a struggle of mankind. Human beings are always in search of love, security, and prosperity throughout life but only a few can taste the fruit of happiness in life. There is a role of destiny in every one's life hence man tastes the fruits of happiness or sadness according to their deeds.

Hemingway talks about old man's efforts to catch the fish from the sea and how he has passed eighty four days without taking a fish. "An old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty four days without taking a fish." (Shams, p.95) A boy called Manolin accompanies an old man on his fishing expedition for forty days but nothing comes out of these fishing trips. The parents of a boy insist him to leave the company of an old man and not to indulge himself in a worthless task.

Santiago does not lose his courage to face such adverse circumstances of life. As he thinks: "Everyday is a new day" (Shams, p.96) At last, the old man has caught a big fish called the Marlin but it is too big for him to drag to the shore. He has no idea about its height and continues to drag it to the shore. Hemingway presents the conflict between man and nature: "A Marlin was eating the sardines that covered the point and the shank of the hook where the hand forged hook projected from the head of the small tuna." (Shams, p. 96).

As he holds the line delicately with his left hand, it runs through its finger without the fish feeling any tension. The Old man struggles with the huge fish for two days and two nights and expresses his love for the fish: "Fish, he said, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends." (Hemingway, p.60).

It seems that the Old man loves the Marlin but he is aware of the fact that he has to kill it as a fisher man before the day ends.

When the old man was trying to drag the Marlin on the shore, the sharks smell its blood and almost ate it. Although the Old man tried hard to keep the Sharks away from the Marlin, all his efforts proved vain. As he sighs:

> Half fish, he said. Fish that you were I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and mined many others. How many did you ever kill old fish? You do not have that spear on you head for nothing. (Hemingway, p.125)

It seems that the Old man laments on his fate to for not dragging such a big fish on the shore. He drags a carcass of the Marlin to the shore. When people look at carcass of the Marlin, they express their feeling of hushed amazement on that.

Thus, Hemingway presents the story of harshness of destiny through the character of old man. Man is always helpless against destiny. The life of human beings moves between two poles expectations and unexpectations, fortune and misfortune so no one can deny the role of destiny in life. Man always thinks of good things to be happened and tries to avoid bad things in life. The old man is a symbol of courage in the midst of difficulties. The Marlin reveals the fact how the weak is destroyed by the strong in this world. The Marlin's struggle is a struggle of man to save himself from the evil and heavy odds of the world. Man is a bundle of desires but he is unable to fulfill all his desires throughout life. It is rightly said that man proposes and God disposes.

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