

# Analysis of the Old Man and the Sea from the Perspective of Ecological Literature

Qian Wang

Heilongjiang University of Technology, Jixi, Heilongjiang, 158100, China

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**Abstract:** “The Old Man and the Sea” is the representative work of American writer Hemingway, who won the 1954 Nobel Prize in Literature. Hemingway has a delicate observation and exquisite description of nature in this work. At the same time, the work “The Old Man and the Sea” contains the author's deep reflection on nature. It can be said that “The Old Man and the Sea” is a work Literary works with a simple ecological view and nature complex. This article gives a brief introduction to ecological literary criticism, and analyses and discusses the work “The Old Man and the Sea” from the perspective of ecological literary criticism.

## 1. Introduction

“The Old Man and the Sea” is a representative work of American writer Hemingway. It describes an old Cuban fisherman, Santiago, who finally caught a marlin after not catching fish for 84 consecutive days, but because the fish was too big, the fisherman would He was killed but was attacked by a shark, and finally had to drag the fish head, tail and spine back to Hong Kong. This work seems to describe the tragic fate of an old fisherman, but it actually contains profound ecological meanings, revealing the relationship between mankind and nature. Human beings have respect for nature and want to conquer nature.

## 2. Overview of Ecological Literature

Eco-criticism is a kind of critical literature. Its research content is mainly the relationship between ecological environment and literature. Its development background is the increasingly tense and opposed relationship between man and nature. As early as the 1970s, in order to protect the ecological environment, some literary researchers began to use literature to guide people to understand the status and importance of nature, and to focus on the environment and ecology on which humans depend. The intuitive manifestation of ecological disaster in literary criticism is ecological literary criticism. With the continuous development of science and technology and the continuous progress of society, the population is increasing, the energy crisis continues to spread, and environmental problems are becoming more and more prominent, which seriously threaten the survival of mankind and force people to re-examine the relationship between man and nature. This also promotes ecological literature. The development of criticism. Eco-criticism was first proposed by American scholar William Ruckert in 1978. Once eco-criticism was proposed, it triggered ecological literary criticism, eco-poetics and other literary trends. At that time, there was no clear definition of eco-criticism. The main task of ecological literary criticism is to use literary forms to awaken people's awareness of protecting the living environment and ecology. The relationship between man and nature should be harmonious and unified, but mankind has excessively demanded and frantically destroyed nature, which has caused a serious crisis in the environment and ecology on which mankind depends, and mankind is eager to return to harmony between man and nature. A unified life.

## 3. The Ecological Consciousness Embodied in “the Old Man and the Sea”

The protagonist of “The Old Man and the Sea” is an old fisherman with a simple life but a strong

will and never give up: He always believes that “a person can be destroyed, but cannot be defeated”, on the sails of the ship he uses to go to sea. With many patches of flour bags, the house he lives in is a shack made of brown sheets and the furnishings in the house are quite simple. The shirt he wears is covered with various patches. The creation period of “The Old Man and the Sea” was a period of economic recovery in the United States after World War II. At that time, most people were pursuing a life of luxury and pleasure, but Santiago was willing to live a life of poverty and simplicity. This also expresses the author's advocacy of the simple lifestyle of mankind and the pursuit of a harmonious and unified life between man and nature. In that era, people have always been constrained by traditional ideas, and they have always believed that natural resources are inexhaustible, and lack of ecological and environmental awareness. This has also led to excessive consumption of resources and increasingly prominent environmental problems. The ecological consciousness and the lifestyle promoted in “The Sea” still have positive significance in modern times. Santiago treats the sea as a beautiful and kind woman, admires and praises the beauty of the sea, and can tolerate the cruelty of the sea, which fully reflects the author's ecological awareness of eagerness to live in harmony with nature and his love and respect for all things in nature. For a long time, human beings have adopted self-centered thinking to deal with the relationship between man and nature, believing that mankind is the master of nature, excessive plundering of natural resources, leading to the continuous spread of energy crises and increasingly prominent environmental problems, in “The Old Man and the Sea” The ecological consciousness of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature and the respect for all things in nature are a naked criticism of the long-standing human-centered thought, which still has guiding significance for modern society.

Santiago is an old man who loves and respects nature, but he is also an old man who conquers nature. His war with nature is mainly embodied in two aspects: conquering the marlin and being defeated by sharks. The old fisherman not only has rich fishing experience, but also has excellent fishing skills, and he can always return to the sea with a full load. However, the old man's fishing was not all smooth sailing. After 84 days of not catching fish, the old man was ridiculed by others. In order to prove his strength, regain his dignity, and improve his embarrassed life, the old man decided to go to the deep sea to fish. While fishing in the deep sea, the old man encountered a large marlin that was much stronger, calm, clever and quite scheming than him. The old man went through a two-day and two-night sea contest with the large marlin and passed the large marlin. After all kinds of torture, the old man finally subdued the big marlin and got the food he craved. Throughout the fishing process, the old man always believed that conquering the marlin is the most intuitive manifestation of his own strength. Conquering this marlin is equivalent to regaining his lost dignity in front of others, and he has always believed in “The belief that a person can be destroyed, but cannot be defeated” reflects that human beings can conquer nature as long as they have the fighting spirit of not admitting defeat. Therefore, the old man's victory over the marlin is a symbol of human conquest of nature. The old man was besieged by sharks on his way back from catching the big marlin. After a desperate fight with sharks, the old man was defeated by the sharks. The old man was not only exhausted, but eventually the big marlins he caught were eaten up by the sharks, leaving only the skeleton. This also symbolizes that humans are conquering nature. Time will eventually be conquered by nature. No matter how advanced human productivity and advanced technology are, they will encounter failures and setbacks in the process of conquering nature. This is a natural law that humans cannot surpass.

#### **4. Rethinking the Relationship between Humans and Nature**

Fighting and conquering can be said to be an important theme of “The Old Man and the Sea”. However, in “The Old Man and the Sea”, the author Hemingway also deeply ponders the relationship between man and nature. Ecological literary criticism should re-examine the relationship between mankind and nature, especially rethink the ruthless conquest of nature by mankind, and criticize this thought. In fact, it turns out that nature can only be temporarily conquered from a certain limited level, but nature has endless power. Ecocriticism believes that human beings are the sons of nature and one of the components of nature, and that humans should

integrate into the natural ecosystem instead of opposing nature or even conquering nature. In "The Old Man and the Sea", the marlin is clearly a symbol of nature, and San Diego fought desperately to survive. In the process of fighting, although it is in a competitive relationship with this big marlin, San Diego always compares himself with this big marlin in all aspects in his heart. This is actually a comparison between humans and nature. . In the eyes of Santiago, compared with the big marlin, his advantage is that he has weapons and more brains, while the big marlin has the advantage of being more noble and more capable. San Diego even thinks that the reason why he can defeat this big marlin is only because he has weapons. This can also be seen as the author Hemingway's denial of humans' conquest of the sea and nature, expressing the irony of human stupidity. If an unarmed human being is placed in nature, he will not be able to do anything, and he may not be able to win other non-human lives. The victory achieved by relying on weapons is nothing more than a staged victory. This staged victory has given birth to human greed and will only bring disaster to mankind. Man's blind arrogance and self-righteous conquest of nature will inevitably be avenged by nature. The image of the shark in the book symbolizes revenge, and San Diego is ultimately defeated by the shark. San Diego was full of contradictions and entanglements when he wrestled with the sharks. He kept reflecting on his actions and expressed a certain sense of guilt and guilt. Although the shark was killed by San Diego in the end, this suspicion and introspection itself represents a condemnation of humans' conquest of nature. The shark was killed by San Diego, but San Diego's trophy, the big marlin, was also eaten by the sharks. The only thing left was a fish skeleton. The confrontation between humans and nature would only hurt both sides. At the end of the novel, San Diego drags a worthless fish skeleton, hoping that the tide will take it away. The civilization created by mankind through the conquest of nature will eventually expose mankind's stupidity and ignorance, and even cause human self-destruction.

Because since the industrial society, human civilization has developed by leaps and bounds. With the rapid increase in productivity, society has gradually formed values centered on human self-interest, which is to despise the power of nature and trample on the maximization of human interests. Naturally, wantonly damage the rights of other creatures. Although this behavior will bring temporary benefits to humans, it will also bring huge potential threats. However, "The Old Man and the Sea" also emphasized that when the spiritual victory of conquering nature is achieved, the value of human beings must also be realized, which is difficult to be consistent with the spiritual ecology. Ecological values emphasize that humans should love nature, integrate with nature, and abandon excessive material pursuits. However, "The Old Man and the Sea" still has human-centered values. Santiago feels guilty for his behavior of killing marlins and sharks, but at the same time it is full of pride and confidence. The author tried to defend San Diego, believing that San Diego's profession is a fisherman. To realize his self-worth, he must catch marlins and kill the sharks that compete with him for the trophy. Only in this way can San Diego gain spiritual victory. But this kind of human spiritual victory will inevitably destroy the environment and even develop to the point where it is difficult to control. Once the destruction of nature by mankind exceeds the endurance of the environment, a series of consequences such as environmental pollution, resource depletion, greenhouse effect, reduction of biodiversity, ozone hole, etc. will occur, which will eventually destroy the material civilization that mankind has worked so hard to build. , Like a shark eating up a marlin that San Diego desperately caught.

As Engels said, every time human beings conquer nature, they will be avenged by nature. Santiago finally lost to the sharks after two days and two nights fighting against the marlins and defeating the marlins. Santiago attributed this failure to the fact that he was too far out to sea, which also demonstrated how humble and unworthy of human beings compared to the powerful nature, all creatures in nature are equal. Through the description of the relationship between man and nature in "The Old Man and the Sea", from the perspective of ecological literary criticism, we can easily find that the courage and determination of the old fisherman Santiago to go deep-sea fishing is actually the pride of mankind when he conquered nature. A symbol of lofty ambition; the old fisherman was exhausted and scarred in the process of fighting with big marlins and sharks. It is also a symbol of the spreading energy crisis and the increasingly prominent environmental problems caused by the

excessive demand for nature when mankind conquered nature; the old fisherman the victory over the marlin and the loss to the shark are both symbols of human success and failure in the process of conquering nature. After experiencing the failure, the old fisherman deeply realized that human beings should live in harmony with nature, and finally decided to return to his homeland. This ecological view of the old fisherman still has important value and significance in modern society.

## **5. Conclusion**

In the process of life and creation, Hemingway has always carried out delicate observation and deep reflection on nature, and poured this observation and reflection into the great work of "The Old Man and the Sea", through the experience and thinking of the protagonist San Diego , Expresses the author's deep reflection on the relationship between human beings and nature, showing a simple ecological view and nature complex. The analysis of the ecological view in "The Old Man and the Sea" from the perspective of ecological literary criticism is also an important inspiration for how humans should get along with nature today.

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