Old Man And The Sea: Santiago’s Battle

Ernst Hemingway’s, The Old Man and the Sea is a short story about an old man, Santiago, who has an unlucky streak of going out to sea and coming back empty-handed. His apprentice, Manolin, was forced by his family to leave Santiago. With people avoiding him and his follower being forced to leave him, Santiago is shown to the ideal man. The old man is the ideal man because he is independent, willing to take chances, and his noteworthy personality trait is his unbeaten spirit. He is a hero who puts forth honor, endurance and having confidence in himself.

In this short story, Santiago will rather put his honor and pride first, than admit that he is hungry, going through pain or any abuse. At the end of each day, the old man will come back saying that he will have fish to eat at home, even when he doesn’t have any. This shows how he prefers to be hungry than be looked down upon from others for not catching anything. Having Santiago risk “going out too far”, he ignores the struggle that he will have while dueling the merlin. His attitude towards the fish shows the true extent of his honor, noticing the true strength of the fish, and even calling it his brother. At the end of the battle, Santiago loves this fish until its death. The fish tearing up Santiago’s body and Santiago letting go of the fish and the sharks feeding on it shows how the skeleton of the fish and Santiago’s spirit are similar, they are both unconquered.

With Santiago accidentally letting go of the merlin, he does not blame the hand that lets it go neither did he whine about his bad luck or when the merlin challenged his strength. Instead, he tries to “protect” the merlin from the sharks by hitting them with an oar, his knife, or him wishing to bring a stone to keep fighting. In the end, Santiago accepts his defeat by thinking, “It is easy when you are beaten” (45) and then saying, “I never knew how easy it was”(45). This shows how Santiago wasn’t actually defeated, he has the courage to go back to the village, face Manolin and the village. He accepts the loss of a great catch, with accepting the loss of something grand, it shows how he keeps pushing forward.

Even though Santiago has not eaten and was in pain for 84 days, he has faith in himself that he will catch something. A reason why his faith is strong in himself is that he tries to be like Joe DiMaggio who overcame pain and believes the baseball player would be impressed by his determination. He also has faith because, at the end of his life, he wants to be like a sea turtle, whose heart will beat until death. At the end of the short story, his body may be weak and broken down but that doesn’t mean his spirit will follow. It is enduring and eternal. Santiago’s faith is not within God but in himself and when anyone else would give up on him, Manolin would be there by his side, like the very last line says, “He was still sleeping on his face and the boy was sitting by him watching him. The old man was dreaming about the lions” (48). The last line tells how he will keep going to find his best catch and how the youth of his spirit is represented in the lions.

Santiago’s honor, endurance, and the confidence he has in himself make him a symbol to show what people have inside of them. The battles that Santiago faced are different than people in the real world, yet there is a common theme. Maintaining honor in battles, the endurance to keep fighting and pushing, have the confidence to keep going and to not be put down from others who do not believe. Santiago shows how defeat is not in himself or the loss of the battle

rather returning and accepting the loss.