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**Beyond Anthropocentrism: Blue Humanities, Interspecies Ethics, and Oceanic Consciousness in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea***

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**Abstract**

In recent decades, environmental humanities scholarship has increasingly focused on oceans, marine ecologies, and aquatic imaginaries in response to growing concerns regarding climate change, ecological degradation, species extinction, and the limitations of anthropocentric thought. Within this context, Blue Humanities has emerged as an important interdisciplinary field that rethinks human relationships with the oceanic world through ecological interconnectedness, fluidity, and environmental vulnerability (**Mentz, 2020**). Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (**1952**), traditionally interpreted as a narrative of endurance, heroism, and masculine resilience, offers significant possibilities for ecological reinterpretation. However, most existing studies continue to privilege human-centred readings and rarely engage systematically with Blue Humanities, posthumanism, interspecies ethics, or material ecocriticism. This paper argues that Hemingway's novella destabilizes anthropocentric assumptions by presenting the sea as a dynamic ecological force that reshapes human consciousness, ethics, and bodily existence. Santiago's relationship with the marlin develops a complex interspecies ethics grounded in admiration, violence, vulnerability, and ecological respect. Employing close textual analysis alongside Blue Humanities (**Mentz, 2020; Blum, 2010**), ecocriticism (**Buell, 1995; Garrard, 2012**), posthumanism (**Haraway, 2008**), and material ecocriticism (**Alaimo, 2010**), the study demonstrates how Hemingway foregrounds oceanic consciousness and ecological humility. The paper contributes to contemporary environmental humanities discourse by offering a comprehensive ecological reinterpretation of the novella.

**Keywords:** Blue Humanities, Oceanic Consciousness, Interspecies Ethics, Ecocriticism, Posthumanism, Hemingway

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## 1. Introduction

Since its publication in 1952, Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* has remained one of the most influential texts in twentieth-century American literature. The novella has traditionally been interpreted as a meditation on endurance, dignity, resilience, and heroic perseverance. Santiago, the ageing Cuban fisherman who ventures far into the Gulf Stream in pursuit of a giant marlin, has frequently been celebrated as Hemingway's quintessential "code hero," a figure who sustains grace and courage even in the face of inevitable suffering and defeat (Young, 1952). Such interpretations, however, have also shaped the limits of Hemingway criticism. By privileging existential struggle and masculine endurance, many traditional readings reduce the sea to little more than a symbolic backdrop against which human heroism unfolds. Nature becomes scenery for human meaning rather than a living force capable of disrupting human certainty itself.

However, rereading the novella in the contemporary moment—an era marked by climate crisis, marine degradation, species extinction, and ecological precarity—makes such anthropocentric interpretations increasingly insufficient. The rise of environmental humanities, ecocriticism, and Blue Humanities has fundamentally altered the way literary scholars approach oceans, environments, and nonhuman life. Blue Humanities, in particular, challenges terrestrial ways of thinking by insisting that oceans are not empty spaces or passive metaphors but dynamic ecological systems that reshape human consciousness, material existence, and ethical understanding (Mentz, 2020). Water destabilizes boundaries, ownership, permanence, and mastery; consequently, oceanic space often exposes the fragility of the human subject itself.

Within this framework, *The Old Man and the Sea* appear strikingly contemporary. Santiago does not simply "battle" nature in any straightforward sense. Instead, he exists within a dense network of ecological relationships involving the marlin, sharks, birds, currents, weather systems, and the sea itself. Hemingway repeatedly complicates the distinction between human and nonhuman existence. Santiago's declaration that "the fish is my brother" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 65) radically unsettles anthropocentric hierarchies because the marlin is no longer reduced to prey or a commodity; it instead emerges as an ethical presence deserving recognition and admiration. However, Hemingway immediately complicates this intimacy through contradiction. Santiago simultaneously confesses admiration and violence when he admits, "Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 60). The line is deeply unsettling because it refuses any simplistic environmental morality. Santiago's relationship with the marlin cannot be reduced either to domination or harmony. It exists uneasily between affection and violence, dependence and conquest, recognition and destruction.

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It is precisely this contradiction that gives the novella its ecological complexity. Hemingway does not present nature as an innocent realm existing outside conflict, nor does he fully celebrate human mastery over the natural world. Instead, the novella repeatedly exposes the instability of anthropocentric confidence. The farther Santiago moves into oceanic space, the more uncertain his authority becomes. His body weakens, the sea remains indifferent, and the marlin continually exceeds his attempts at control. What initially appears as a narrative of heroic endurance gradually transforms into a confrontation with ecological vulnerability and human limitation.

This paper, therefore, argues that *The Old Man and the Sea* fundamentally destabilize anthropocentric assumptions by representing the sea as an active ecological force and by constructing Santiago's relationship with the marlin as a profoundly complex form of interspecies entanglement. Drawing upon Blue Humanities, ecocriticism, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, and deep ecology, the study examines how Hemingway challenges fantasies of human exceptionalism and instead foregrounds ecological humility, vulnerability, and interconnectedness. Rather than celebrating human triumph over nature, the novella reveals how deeply human existence remains entangled within larger oceanic systems that continually exceed human control, ownership, and understanding.

## **2. Literature Review**

Scholarship on *The Old Man and the Sea* has undergone a significant transformation over the decades, reflecting larger shifts within literary criticism itself. Earlier interpretations were overwhelmingly shaped by existential and humanist concerns, often positioning Santiago as the embodiment of heroic endurance and masculine resilience. Critics such as **Baker (1963)** focused on Hemingway's stylistic economy and moral seriousness, interpreting the novella primarily as a celebration of perseverance in the face of inevitable defeat. While these readings remain influential, they also reveal the limitations of traditional Hemingway criticism. In these interpretations, nature largely functions as a backdrop against which human strength is tested and affirmed. The sea becomes symbolic rather than ecological, and nonhuman life remains secondary to the drama of human experience.

Within Hemingway studies, **Susan F. Beegel's** work marked an important shift toward environmental interpretation. Beegel challenged the assumption that Hemingway's representations of animals and marine life merely reinforce domination or conquest. Instead, she argued that Hemingway's descriptions of the sea reveal intimacy, admiration, and ethical uncertainty. Santiago's relationship with the marlin, therefore, cannot be reduced to simple triumph because the fish repeatedly emerges as a being worthy of recognition rather than a passive object of capture.

Recent scholarship has further complicated these ecological readings. **Søfting (2024)** argues that the novella exposes the contradictions embedded in human relationships with nonhuman life by presenting Santiago as both affectionate toward and destructive of marine creatures. Such readings are important because they resist the idealisation of Hemingway as a purely ecological writer. Instead, they foreground the ethical instability of coexistence itself. Similarly, **Gajalakshmi and Meenakshi (2024)** reinterpret the novella through a deep ecology lens and argue that Santiago's journey gradually undermines anthropocentric confidence by emphasising ecological interconnectedness rather than human conquest.

Despite these critical developments, important gaps remain within existing scholarship. Much ecocritical work on Hemingway still approaches nature in broad or symbolic terms without fully engaging with the specific implications of marine environments and oceanic epistemologies. Furthermore, relatively few studies sustain a dialogue among Blue Humanities, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, and interspecies ethics. This paper addresses that gap by synthesising these frameworks to argue that *The Old Man and the Sea* fundamentally unsettles anthropocentric assumptions through its representation of oceanic consciousness, ecological vulnerability, and ethically unstable forms of interspecies entanglement.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This study employs an interdisciplinary theoretical framework that brings together Blue Humanities, ecocriticism, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, and deep ecology to examine how *The Old Man and the Sea* unsettles anthropocentric assumptions about nature, agency, and human superiority. Rather than functioning as isolated theoretical models, these frameworks collectively illuminate the novella's persistent questioning of mastery, control, and the supposed separation between human and nonhuman life. What makes Hemingway's text particularly compelling is that it repeatedly resists stable interpretation. The novella moves uneasily between admiration and violence, intimacy and domination, ecological humility and masculine assertion. Consequently, no single framework is sufficient on its own. The complexity of Santiago's encounter with the sea and the marlin demands a mode of reading capable of acknowledging contradiction rather than resolving it.

Blue Humanities serves as the central framework of this analysis because Hemingway's novella is fundamentally structured around oceanic space and marine existence. **Steve Mentz (2020)** argues that oceans destabilize terrestrial assumptions regarding permanence, order, and human control. Unlike land, which human beings attempt to divide, possess, and organize, the sea remains fluid, unstable, and resistant to mastery. This instability becomes central to Santiago's journey. The farther he moves into the Gulf Stream, the more uncertain his authority becomes. The ocean continually exceeds his

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attempts at prediction and control, forcing him into an uneasy recognition of ecological vulnerability. Similarly, **Blum (2010)** emphasizes that oceanic studies require alternative epistemologies capable of understanding marine environments beyond anthropocentric logic. The sea in Hemingway's novella cannot be reduced to metaphor or setting because it actively reshapes Santiago's consciousness, body, and ethical perception.

Ecocriticism further complicates traditional human-centred readings of the novella. **Buell (1995)** argues that environmental texts must recognize the agency of nonhuman worlds and situate humans within broader ecological systems rather than at their centre. **Garrard (2012)** extends this argument by emphasizing ecological interconnectedness and environmental ethics. Such perspectives become particularly important in understanding Santiago's relationship with the marlin, which repeatedly destabilizes the distinction between subject and object, hunter and hunted. Santiago's admiration for the marlin suggests a recognition of nonhuman dignity that complicates anthropocentric hierarchies, even as the narrative remains entangled in violence and survival.

Posthumanism deepens this tension further by challenging the idea of human exceptionalism itself. **Haraway's (2008)** concept of "companion species" rejects rigid divisions between humans and animals, arguing instead that species exist within networks of mutual dependence and entanglement. Santiago and the marlin become bound together physically, emotionally, and ethically through suffering, endurance, and vulnerability. Their relationship cannot be reduced either to conquest or harmony because it remains structured through contradiction.

Material ecocriticism, particularly **Alaimo's (2010)** concept of trans-corporeality, foregrounds the interconnectedness between bodies and environments. Santiago's physical exhaustion, bleeding hands, cramped muscles, and bodily deterioration reveal that human embodiment is never autonomous from ecological forces. The sea enters the body materially, dissolving the illusion that humans stand outside the environments they inhabit. Finally, **Naess's (1973)** deep ecology rejects anthropocentric superiority and affirms the intrinsic value of all living beings. Hemingway's novella repeatedly gestures toward this ecological ethic, even as it exposes how difficult it is for humans to abandon desires for mastery and control.

Together, these frameworks allow *The Old Man and the Sea* to be read not as a straightforward narrative of heroic endurance, but as a deeply conflicted meditation on ecological vulnerability, interspecies entanglement, and the unstable position of the human within larger oceanic systems.

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#### **4. Oceanic Consciousness and the Sea as Ecological Presence**

One of the most intellectually compelling aspects of *The Old Man and the Sea* lies in the way Hemingway destabilizes the conventional human-centred understanding of nature by representing the sea not as a passive setting but as an active ecological force that continuously reshapes human consciousness, bodily existence, and ethical perception. The sea in the novella cannot be reduced to scenery, symbolism, or backdrop; rather, it emerges as a living and materially powerful presence that resists human attempts at mastery. Hemingway's representation of the ocean anticipates what contemporary Blue Humanities scholars identify as the necessity of "thinking with the sea" rather than merely thinking about it (Mentz, 2020). The sea repeatedly exceeds Santiago's assumptions of control, forcing him into a confrontation not simply with nature, but with the limits of anthropocentric certainty itself.

This complexity becomes visible in Hemingway's famous description:

"He always thought of the sea as *la mar*, which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 32).

At first glance, the line appears almost romantic in its tenderness. However, Hemingway subtly complicates this intimacy. Santiago's use of *la mar* does not sentimentalise the sea as a nurturing maternal figure; instead, it reflects an uneasy relationship grounded in affection, dependency, uncertainty, and fear. The younger fishermen, who refer to the sea as *el mar*, approach it instrumentally—as territory, resource, and economic opportunity. Santiago, however, recognizes the sea's agency and unpredictability. He understands that the ocean is never entirely knowable, and this recognition places him outside the logic of human domination. In this sense, Santiago's ecological consciousness is not born from harmony with nature but from his awareness of its irreducible alterity.

Blue Humanities scholarship insists that oceans resist terrestrial fantasies of permanence and order because water destabilizes boundaries, ownership, and human certainty (Blum, 2010; Mentz, 2020). Hemingway's sea functions precisely in this way. The farther Santiago moves into oceanic space, the less secure his identity becomes. Initially, he believes his experience, discipline, and "tricks" will enable him to endure the sea. However, the narrative slowly dismantles this confidence through exhaustion, pain, hunger, and bodily deterioration. Santiago's body begins to register the force of the ocean materially:

"My left hand was taking it easy because it had cramped" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 64).

The moment is deceptively simple, yet critically important. Santiago's body refuses mastery. His cramped hand becomes a reminder that the human body itself is vulnerable matter shaped by environmental conditions rather than an autonomous instrument of will.

**Stacy Alaimo's (2010)** concept of trans-corporeality becomes particularly useful here because it challenges the illusion that humans exist separately from the environments they inhabit. Santiago's bleeding hands, dehydration, exhaustion, and bodily pain reveal the extent to which the sea enters and transforms the body itself. The ocean is not external to Santiago; it acts upon him materially, collapsing the boundary between environment and embodiment.

At the same time, Hemingway refuses to romanticise ecological interconnectedness. The sea remains indifferent to Santiago's suffering. It does not reward moral virtue, nor does it guarantee transcendence. In fact, the novella repeatedly resists the comforting fantasy that nature exists in harmonious balance with human aspiration. Santiago's realization—"I went out too far" (**Hemingway, 1952, p. 133**)

—marks one of the novella's most devastating ecological moments because it signals the collapse of anthropocentric confidence. Importantly, the statement is not merely practical or geographical; it is epistemological. Santiago recognizes that he has exceeded the limits of human control and entered a space where mastery becomes impossible. The line exposes the fragility of the human subject within larger ecological systems.

However, Hemingway complicates even this moment of humility. Santiago's acknowledgement of ecological limits does not entirely free him from anthropocentric desire. He still wishes to conquer the marlin, still imagines himself capable of endurance beyond ordinary human limitation. This contradiction is precisely what makes the novella ecologically compelling. Hemingway does not present Santiago as an ideal ecological subject who transcends human violence and ambition. Instead, Santiago remains caught between reverence for the sea and the persistent human desire to overcome it. The novella, therefore, resists simplistic environmental morality. It reveals ecological consciousness as unstable, contradictory, and painfully incomplete.

The ocean in Hemingway's novella thus becomes more than a setting; it becomes a force that dismantles human exceptionalism. Santiago enters the sea believing that experience can secure mastery, but the ocean repeatedly exposes the illusion. What emerges instead is a fragile form of ecological humility grounded not in triumph, but in vulnerability, uncertainty, and the painful recognition that human existence remains inseparable from the larger material systems of the natural world.

### **5. Interspecies Ethics and the Marlin**

The ethical complexity of *The Old Man and the Sea* emerges most powerfully through Santiago's relationship with the marlin, one that persistently unsettles the rigid binaries by which Western humanism has traditionally separated the human from the animal, the subject from the object, and the hunter from the hunted. Hemingway refuses to allow the

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marlin to remain merely a fish, merely prey, or merely a symbolic extension of Santiago's heroic struggle. Instead, the marlin gradually acquires ethical presence, agency, and even a kind of dignity that destabilizes the logic of human superiority upon which anthropocentric thinking depends. However, the novella becomes intellectually compelling precisely because Hemingway never resolves the contradictions embedded within this relationship. Santiago admires the marlin, identifies with it, suffers alongside it, and nevertheless remains committed to killing it. The ethical tension of the novella lies not in ecological harmony but in the impossibility of separating admiration from violence within systems of survival.

Santiago's recognition of the marlin's beauty and dignity does not free him from the ecological economy of killing upon which survival depends. The novella, therefore, resists sentimental environmentalism. Hemingway does not imagine a purified ecological ethics beyond violence; rather, he exposes how deeply violence is embedded within systems of life itself. Santiago's tragedy lies partly in his awareness of this contradiction. He does not kill the marlin casually or triumphantly. Instead, he kills while simultaneously mourning the necessity of the act itself. This ethical ambiguity becomes even more complex because the marlin repeatedly exceeds Santiago's attempts to assert ownership or to contain it symbolically. The fish refuses passivity. It possesses agency, endurance, and almost unimaginable strength. Santiago repeatedly recognizes this:

"Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother" (**Hemingway, 1952, p. 102**).

The language here is striking because Hemingway elevates the marlin beyond the status of an animal object, transforming it into an ethical and existential equal. The fish becomes "brother," a term that radically destabilizes human exceptionalism. Santiago's admiration is not anthropomorphic sentimentality; rather, it reflects a growing recognition that human identity cannot remain isolated from the nonhuman world. The marlin's dignity forces Santiago into a confrontation with another form of existence that exceeds human systems of value and mastery.

At the same time, Hemingway carefully avoids presenting the marlin as an idealized symbol of innocent nature. The fish is itself part of a violent ecological system. The ocean in the novella operates according to cycles of predation, consumption, suffering, and death. Santiago eventually recognizes this brutal ecological reality when he reflects:

"Everything kills everything else in some way" (**Hemingway, 1952, p. 117**).

This statement is perhaps one of the novella's most ecologically important insights because it rejects simplistic moral distinctions between innocence and violence. Hemingway's ecological vision is neither romantic nor sentimental. Life within marine systems depends upon continual processes of death and consumption. Santiago kills the

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marlin, the sharks consume the marlin, and the sea itself remains indifferent to all forms of suffering. Ecological interconnectedness in the novella, therefore, does not produce harmony; instead, it produces ethical uncertainty.

This is precisely where Hemingway's treatment of interspecies ethics becomes deeply modern. Contemporary environmental thought often struggles with the contradiction between ecological interconnectedness and the violence inherent within natural systems. Hemingway anticipates this problem decades before the emergence of contemporary posthumanism and animal studies. Santiago's relationship with the marlin never settles into moral clarity because Hemingway recognizes that coexistence itself is structured through contradiction. The novella does not offer an easy ecological morality in which humans "respect nature" and achieve harmony. Instead, it exposes how difficult ethical existence becomes once humans genuinely recognize the agency, dignity, and vulnerability of nonhuman life.

Importantly, Santiago himself transforms this encounter. The marlin is not merely captured; it alters Santiago's consciousness. The old fisherman enters the sea believing in endurance, skill, and mastery, but his prolonged struggle with the fish gradually dismantles these assumptions. By the end of the novella, Santiago no longer appears as a conquering hero. Instead, he emerges as a vulnerable ecological subject painfully aware of the fragility of human power within larger oceanic systems. The marlin thus functions not as a trophy but as a force that destabilizes anthropocentric confidence itself.

Ultimately, Hemingway's representation of the marlin reveals that interspecies ethics cannot be reduced to either domination or harmony. The relationship between Santiago and the fish remains unresolved, contradictory, and ethically unstable—and it is precisely this instability that gives the novella its enduring ecological power.

## **6. Ecological Humility and Human Limits**

One of the most persistent tendencies in traditional criticism of *The Old Man and the Sea* has been the desire to read Santiago as ultimately triumphant—a heroic figure who achieves spiritual victory despite material defeat. Such interpretations often rely upon humanist assumptions that privilege endurance, willpower, and masculine resilience as evidence of human greatness. However, the novella becomes far more unsettling, and arguably far more ecologically significant, when Santiago's journey is read not as a triumph of mastery but as a painful confrontation with the limits of human control. Hemingway repeatedly dismantles the fantasy that experience, discipline, or individual strength can secure dominance over the natural world. The farther Santiago moves into the oceanic environment, the more the narrative exposes the fragility of anthropocentric confidence itself.

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The marlin's destruction by the sharks becomes especially significant in this context. Traditional heroic readings often interpret the marlin's skeleton as evidence of Santiago's spiritual victory. However, ecologically, the skeleton suggests something far more unsettling: the impossibility of possession within oceanic systems. Santiago cannot preserve what he captures because the sea continually exceeds human intention. The sharks dismantle the illusion that the marlin ever truly belonged to him. Ownership collapses under the pressure of ecological reality.

Santiago himself gradually recognizes this instability:

"They beat me... They truly beat me" (**Hemingway, 1952, p. 136**).

The statement is deeply important because it complicates the novella's famous insistence that "a man can be destroyed but not defeated." Santiago's admission reveals that ecological systems cannot be reduced to narratives of heroic endurance. The ocean does not reward courage, morality, or effort. Instead, it remains indifferent to human aspiration. Hemingway thereby destabilizes one of the central assumptions of humanism itself—the belief that individual will can overcome material limitation. At the same time, Hemingway carefully avoids transforming ecological humility into passive resignation. Santiago does not simply surrender to nature, nor does the novella romanticize human weakness. Instead, Hemingway presents humility as an uneasy and painful recognition of coexistence within systems far larger than the self. Santiago's suffering forces him to confront the uncomfortable reality that human existence is always dependent upon forces it cannot fully control.

This dependence becomes materially visible throughout the novella. Santiago's body repeatedly betrays him:

"I am not religious," he said. "But I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish" (**Hemingway, 1952, p. 71**).

The line is revealing because Santiago's confidence eventually gives way to desperation. His physical endurance alone becomes insufficient. The body that once symbolized masculine self-reliance gradually exposes its own fragility. The ocean enters the body through exhaustion, pain, dehydration, and suffering, reminding readers that human identity is never autonomous from environmental conditions. Santiago does not stand outside nature observing it from a position of superiority; he is materially embedded within it.

The novella's ecological power, therefore, lies precisely in this tension. Hemingway neither celebrates human domination nor imagines a pure harmony between humans and nature. Instead, he exposes the instability of both positions. Santiago's journey becomes an extended confrontation with the limits of human power, the fragility of bodily existence, and the impossibility of fully separating human life from the larger ecological systems that

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sustain and exceed it. In this sense, *The Old Man and the Sea* ultimately foreground not triumph, but ecological humility—a humility grounded in the painful recognition that the natural world can never be entirely mastered, possessed, or controlled.

### **7. Counterarguments and Ethical Complexity**

Any attempt to read *The Old Man and the Sea* as an ecological or posthuman text must also confront the uncomfortable contradictions that the novella refuses to resolve. To celebrate Hemingway too quickly as an environmentally conscious writer would risk simplifying a narrative that is, in many ways, deeply entangled in the very anthropocentric structures it appears to critique. The text continually moves between ecological humility and human exceptionalism, between interspecies recognition and acts of domination. It is precisely this instability that makes the novella intellectually difficult and ethically compelling.

The most obvious contradiction, of course, lies in the fact that Santiago ultimately kills the marlin. His admiration for the fish does not interrupt the violence of the act itself. Even while recognizing the marlin's dignity, beauty, and endurance, Santiago remains committed to turning the fish into a possession, a catch, and ultimately a means of survival. This creates a serious ethical tension within the novella. Critics may therefore argue that Hemingway never fully escapes anthropocentric thinking because the narrative still privileges human need over nonhuman existence. The marlin may be respected, but it is nevertheless sacrificed within a human-centred economy of survival and meaning.

At the same time, the novella remains deeply invested in masculinity, endurance, and heroic struggle. Santiago's confrontation with the marlin can still be interpreted as a performance of masculine identity in which suffering, perseverance, and conquest become measures of human worth. Hemingway's broader literary reputation complicates matters further. His association with hunting culture, bullfighting, and animal killing makes ecological readings seem, at times, almost contradictory. The danger, then, is that the novella may romanticise violence under the language of admiration and respect.

However, these contradictions are precisely what prevent the text from collapsing into simplistic environmental morality. Hemingway does not imagine ecological coexistence as pure, peaceful, or ethically resolved. Instead, he exposes the painful tensions embedded within all relationships between humans and the nonhuman world. The novella's ecological significance lies not in offering solutions, but in revealing how difficult ethical existence becomes once humans genuinely recognize the agency and vulnerability of nonhuman life.

### **8. Conclusion**

This paper has attempted to move beyond conventional human-centred readings of *The Old Man and the Sea* by examining the novella through the intersecting frameworks of

Blue Humanities, ecocriticism, posthumanism, material ecocriticism, and deep ecology. Rather than approaching the text merely as a narrative of endurance or masculine heroism, the study has argued that Hemingway constructs the sea as a dynamic ecological presence that continually destabilizes human certainty, mastery, and exceptionalism. Santiago's encounter with the marlin gradually transforms from a struggle for conquest into a confrontation with vulnerability, interdependence, and ecological limitation. The novella, therefore, becomes less a celebration of human triumph and more an exploration of what it means to exist within systems that constantly exceed human control.

At the same time, this paper has deliberately resisted the temptation to position Hemingway as a purely ecological or posthuman writer. Significant tensions remain embedded within the text. The novella continues to engage with discourses of masculinity, violence, survival, and conquest even as it simultaneously questions them. Santiago's admiration for the marlin never fully escapes the logic of killing, just as his ecological humility never entirely abandons the desire for mastery. However, it is precisely these contradictions that make the novella intellectually significant. Hemingway does not offer an idealized vision of harmony between humans and nature; instead, he reveals the ethical instability and emotional difficulty of inhabiting interconnected ecological worlds.

In the contemporary moment, marked by the climate crisis, marine exploitation, and environmental precarity, *The Old Man and the Sea* has acquired renewed relevance. The novella reminds readers that human existence is neither autonomous nor superior, but deeply entangled within fragile ecological networks that demand humility, ethical reflection, and a rethinking of humanity's relationship with the more-than-human world.

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