

“The Old Man and the Sea”

Critique/Analysis Short Animation

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“The Old Man and the Sea” is an animated short film produced in 1999 by director and animator Aleksandr Petrov. The film is based on the novel by Ernest Hemingway with the same title and centers around an old fisherman living in Cuba named Santiago. Santiago awakens from a dream of his youth by a young man (Manolin) trying to feed and take care of him in an old shack next to the sea. Manolin mentions his anger towards his parents for not allowing him to go fishing what the unlucky Santiago who has not caught a fish in 84 days. With sendoff of Manolin, Santiago finds himself back on the sea in his small boat attempting once again to catch a fish. With a little luck he finally catches a small fish to use for bait from which he eventually gets a hold of a large-sized marlin. For days Santiago holds onto the fishing line with his prize fish caught on the lure while having memoirs of his strength and success when he was a young man, defeating a strong black man in a arm wrestling contest over an entire day. Santiago also finds himself fantasizing to be a brother of the Marlin, admiring their nobility and strength under the sea and swimming with the fish underwater. With every ounce of strength left Santiago manages to Harpoon the great fish and tie it to the side of his boat to take back to shore. Such as with life, luck, and age Santiago finds sudden defeat during victory as a school of sharks comes along and eats away at his prize fish. Losing his weapons, he fashions a knife on the end of one of his paddles to ward off the sharks. Santiago finally finds himself to shore with only the skeleton of his prize Marlin attached to the side of his boat. The local townsman and fisherman seem to find newfound respect for Santiago as they visibly see the struggle he endured. The young boy Manolin finds Santiago sleeping again in his bed. The bitter-sweet victory of killing the marlin has convinced Manolin’s parents to once again allow their son to go fishing with the old man again.

The stories themes (as with Hemingway's novel) have been debated for years. Most of Hemingway's book cover ideas of men proving their worth by facing and overcoming the challenges of nature as well as our connection to nature itself. The novel shows a stripped-down tattered life of a man that once was full of adventure and youthful vigor now desiring youthful adventure, notoriety, and worth to those around him. To me the novel is slightly existential with few references to God and many times a connection to nature. Santiago seems to be in desperate desire for need and attention as well as a desire to live a life of excitement. A man admiring nobility and a need to be known not as an unlucky worn out old man but to be victorious as he was in his youth, to be loved. The young boy Manolin ends the film remarking how much he can learn from Santiago, leaving the old man with a smile. Santiago seems to be unaware that despite his desire for excitement and purpose, he ultimately want to be loved and admired, even if it is through the eyes of a young man in the vigor of what he once remembered.

The plot structure is broken down into three acts. The setup is Santiago going out to sea with the catalyst event being the encounter with the marlin. Two turning points occur in the second act including the killing and capturing of the marlin as well as the shark attack that destroys Santiago's prize reward. The climax is the unsuccessful battle to ward off the sharks from completely removing any trace of Santiago's accomplishment. The final confrontation is the defeat of the sharks with a conclusion upon his return home. Although Santiago has lost the battle, he has won the war with the hearts of those around him, proving he is not to be forgotten and proving to those around him that he himself has not given up in his old age and in so not to be forgotten.

The actual animation was done with "paint-on-glass" using slow drying oil paints. These paints were moved and morphed into shapes and expressions with small brushes as well as

human fingertips. Multiple composited glass layers were used to create the three-dimensional feel from background to foreground. An IMAX camera was used to photograph the large canvas's while being attached to a motion control camera system for dynamic movement across the scenes. The style of the animation is considered to be "romantic realism" which is a photorealistic technique removing cartoon like animation (squash and stretch, exaggeration) while still maintaining to convey a surreal dream like motion in certain sequences. The entire process took about two years to complete and the film eventually won the academy award for animated short in 2000.

There are many examples in the film demonstrating a few of the principles of animation. In the beginning of the film Santiago sees visions in his dream of animals off the coast of Africa including a family of deer hopping along through the forest. The natural arcs of their movements can be seen in each jump and landing. Anticipation is also noted in the animation of a small bird that lands on Santiago's fishing line. The animation comes to an ease in as well as a brushing back of the wings to come to anticipate the landing. Finally, there is a 360-degree turnaround in a flashback dream of Santiago arm wrestling with the strong black man, demonstrating solid drawing. A fully three-dimensional vision of the match is created by smearing oil paint on a two-dimensional canvas.

My opinion of the film is a love-hate relationship. I would give it five stars for its meticulously creative artistry and sweeping score. The story itself is quite revealing and can be quite depressing when you watch it from a secular perspective. When one gets older, they feel more and more forgotten by the world, ultimately falling off the earth in complete forgetfulness. We can relate in that over time our endeavors and experiences are slightly muted with time and age building up, our adventures not so adventurous but routine. The film accurately captures that

relatable malacology of the good old days of adventure and successful endeavors of one's youth. My personal bias comes towards its philosophical viewpoint which is anchored in a moral stance of right and wrong. The film reflects Hemingway's life of his body being war torn from injuries in war and plane accidents leading to a life of solitude, divorce, and ultimately suicide despite having a full life of adventure living all over the world. I personally believe in a loving God (Jesus Christ) who does not expect us to perform to appease the world's love and because of this I find the message of the film not one of humility but of existential emptiness and depressing melancholy. The desire to keep one's life alive with adventure and notoriety is futile and doesn't last anyway. One silver-lining is the young boy who loves the old man even in his victories and his defeats. A self-less love not based on performance is a love worth fighting for (and it does not require a battle or proving one is still useful and successful despite his age).