

Critical Interpretations of Hemingway

Mario Vargas Llosa, Author: I think his masterpiece was *The Old Man and the Sea*....It's brief, very concentrated, and a kind of marvelous metaphor about the struggle between man and nature. And at the same time, it is a synthesis of his philosophy: the idea that through struggle, one can justify their life, their fate and their human condition....

I think that there are different interpretations. If a young person reads *The Old Man and the Sea*, it's about adventure—the struggle, the heroism of the old man, drawing strength from only his conviction. But I think that, for someone older, it's more about old age, the way it resuscitates—how it fights its last battle, knowing that it's going to lose. From the beginning, the old fisherman knows he cannot win the battle against the sharks, but he still wages a battle because, in a way, even if he loses the battle, it gives him a better understanding of himself. And it gives him an illusion, which allows him to live.

Edna O'Brien, Author: It doesn't work for me, because it's so ordinary. It's adolescence. It's schoolboy writing. I'm sorry. It's the writer. He's the bloody fish. He's struggling to do it [to write.]

Abraham Verghese, Author: With *The Old Man and The Sea*, you see the agony of this old man, you see his bravery, you see his desire to redeem himself and you see him sort of arrive with the prize, but the prize is in tatters. And isn't life like that? I mean ultimately, life is so ironic, you know. You get the biggest damn fish out there, you redeem your reputation, but by the time you get it to shore, it's gone and so are you.

Stephen Cushman, Literary Scholar: The refrain, as he's trying to come in and the sharks keep hitting the fish and keep taking it away, as he said, "The thing I did wrong is, I went out too far." I went beyond what I can control. I went beyond what I can compensate for. And I hear that as just beautiful and awful, and full of pathos, and that is Hemingway.