



HOMOEROTIC UNDERTONES IN HEMINGWAY’S THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA: A STUDY OF SANTIAGO’S DESIRE FOR THE BOY

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Abstract

This study observes the psychological profundity and complexity of Santiago's association with Manolin, a young character in Ernest Hemingway’s famous novel The Old Man and the Sea, concentrating on the homoerotic undercurrents that can be construed from their relations. Santiago, a wife-less and elderly chap, is extremely secluded, and his friendship to the boy mirrors not only a longing for company but also an expression of suppressed bodily, emotional and physical desires. The study proposes that Santiago's wish for Manolin exceeds the role of a mentor-mentee affiliation. Rather it reveals a primary wish for physical relations. As a result of his solitude and the absence of female relations, Santiago’s love for the boy can be seen as an exhibition of his hidden and suppressed sexual needs. By revealing this aspect, the research suggests that the association between Santiago and Manolin presents perception into the intricacies of human needs, the search for contentment, and the emotional workings of aloneness in old age, without violating the boundaries of the text's explicit themes.

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## INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is generally viewed as one of his most distinguished novels, with its themes of endurance, loneliness and human struggle in view of critical analysis. The work records the life of Santiago, an introverted and deserted fisherman, as he encounters a massive marlin in the open sea. While the text is often construed through lenses of manliness, persistence, and empirical solitude, this study pursues to unearth a dissimilar aspect of the chronicle: the homoerotic undertones rooted in the relationship between Santiago and Manolin, the young boy who is working as his fishing trainee.

Santiago is an old, isolated and wife-less man. His physical and emotional loneliness may cause the rechanneling of his natural needs toward Manolin, a poor, innocent and boyish character in his life. The boy seems more than just an apprentice; he signifies a source of companionship and emotional fulfillment for Santiago. In the absence of sexual and romantic source of relationship with a female, Santiago's attachment to the boy takes on a more intricate, psychological inclination. This study seeks to examine how the relationship between Santiago and Manolin echoes repressed, deeper emotional and sexual wishes. It also reveals an elusive and often unnoticed facet of the novel.

By examining the psychological suggestions of their bond, this work reveals how Santiago's craving for the boy can be seen as a response to the solitude and isolation that often escort old age. Additionally, it will reveal how Hemingway delicately includes homoerotic themes, contributing to a more affluent understanding of old man's character and his hunt for fulfillment, both on an emotional and physical level. Eventually, this paper will suggest that the relationship between Santiago and Manolin mirrors the subtle intricacy of human wishes, the desire for connection, and the intricacies of human sexuality in an elderly and secluded individual.

**KEY WORDS:** The old man, Loneliness, Homoeroticism, Isolation, Sex, boy, Human desires, Santiago, Manolin

## OBJECTIVES

- To analyze the relationship between Manolin and Santiago
- To explore the homoerotic undercurrents
- To examine the representation of loneliness

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What role does loneliness play in Santiago's emotional state for Manolin?
2. How does Hemingway use the association between Santiago and Manolin to reflect isolation and masculinity?
3. Does Santiago's single status in *The Old Man and the Sea* lead to frustrated and unsatisfied emotional and sexual wishes, and how are these needs imitated in his association with Manolin?

## METHODOLOGY

A psychoanalytical method will be applied to examine Santiago's suppressed sexual and emotional needs, chiefly through Freudian perceptions of attachment and repression theory. This study will use literary analysis to carefully inspect the text of *The Old Man and the Sea*. It will focus on the communications between Santiago and Manolin to reflect hidden homoerotic themes. Additionally, the historical background of the 1950s will be considered to better comprehend societal attitudes towards maleness and wish during that period. Finally, comparative analysis with other Hemingway novels will offer background for understanding repeated and frequent themes of isolation, masculinity and emotional desire.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research will draw upon psychoanalytical model, chiefly Freudian analysis, to investigate Santiago's emotional isolation, suppressed wants and his attachment to Manolin. Freud's thoughts

of unconscious desires and suppression will help comprehend how Santiago's sexual and emotional requirements are transmitted toward Manolin due to his separation from the society. Moreover, attachment theory will be used to examine the emotional features of Santiago's need for connection, revealing how his solitude and aging figure his emotive association with Manolin. gender and masculinity theories will also be used to focus on the representation of masculinity in the novel. The nonappearance of female characters and the depiction of male familiarity will be inspected through this perspective to better comprehend how Hemingway depicts physical, sentimental and emotional relations between men.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The current research analyses the related available research on the topic of homoeroticism and Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. It will reveal the attached underline layers of the research to these elements.

Kim (2023), in his article, *Two Protagonists of 'The Old Man and the Sea,' Santiago and Manolin, Used as Metaphors for a Healthy Retirement Life of Husbands and Wives in Korean Society*, states that Santiago and Manolin's association represents common support and respect and in ageing couples. Nevertheless, this research adopts a psychoanalytical method, focusing on Freudian philosophy to explore how Santiago's emotional attachment with Manolin may replicate suppressed homoerotic wishes due to his loneliness.

Moreover, gender theory will be useful to examine how Hemingway represents masculinity and how their association encounters outdated representations of male understanding. The paper will also include the historical background of the 1950s, investigating social traditions and customs and their effect on Hemingway's depiction of male relations. Lastly, the symbolic investigation of their relation will disclose primary sexual and emotional suggestions.

The writers, Md. Ripon Ali and Md. Nazmul Haque (n.d.), in their research work, *Exploration of the Influence of Poor Socio-Economic Conditions on Santiago and Manolin in an Economically Deprived Cuban Society in The Old Man and the Sea*, inspect how the socio-economic situations of the Cuban civilization in *The Old Man and the Sea* deeply affect the lives of Manolin and Santiago. They claim that the poverty-stricken situation forces Santiago to undergo enormous adversities at sea, fighting both emotional and physical challenges in his persistent hunt of a fish. Akram and Oteir (2025) also find emotional challenges so important to tackle. Literature also affirms its importance (Li & Akram, 2023, 2024). The writers suggest that Santiago's determination and strength are direct reactions to his financial struggles. Likewise, they disclose how Manolin's life is formed by his socio-economic condition, where his parents' incapacity to afford education forces him to work on fishing boats, limiting his educational prospects. Literature also upholds the importance of educational outcomes (Akram & Abdelrady, 2023, 2025; Akram et al., 2022, 2021, 2020) and expectations (Ramzan et al., 2025, 2023, 2021, 2020; Ramzan & Khan, 2024). The research highlights that the poverty in Cuban society helps as both a catalyst for Santiago's resilience and a fence to Manolin's individual development.

Rognvoll (2024), in the research paper *Inner Conflict: An Examination of the Duality of Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea through His Vocal Expressions and Thoughts*, reveals the emotional confusion experienced by Hemingway's code hero, Santiago, due to his observance to the enduring code. The research claims that while the code helps as a defensive armor against past sufferings, it also creates inner struggle by imposing self-expectations that Santiago cannot fully resolve. Given that *The Old Man and the Sea* mainly emphasizes on Santiago's reflective voyage with slight dealings with other characters, Rognvoll inspects the interior discourse and unwritten expressions of Santiago to disclose how his dependance on the code becomes a mental drain. Eventually, the research proposes that the code, while providing energy, power and resilience, must be uncontrolled by Santiago in order for him to heal and grow after his fatiguing voyage at sea.

Fantina (2003), in her research *Hemingway's Masochism, Sodomy, and the Dominant Woman*, examines the complex relations between Hemingway's male heroes and female characters, revealing a submissive and masochistic sexuality in these heroes. Fantina proposes that Hemingway's novels reflect characteristics of male masochism, where male characters sometimes inertly involve in heterosexual sodomy, exposing a fundamental obedience. This perception can be synchronized to the study of Santiago's association with Manolin in *The Old Man and the Sea*. While Fantina's emphasis is on the undercurrents between men and women, her investigation of masochism as an insubordinate form of masculinity presents valued awareness into how Santiago's psychological and emotional dependency on Manolin could also be understood as a form of passive submission. In this situation, Santiago's association with Manolin may mirror an alternate, non-traditional form of male attachment that challenges prescriptive maleness and proposes profounder emotional and potentially homoerotic desires. Therefore, the masochistic inclinations in Hemingway's characters particularly in protagonists, as discoursed by Fantina, offer an outline for understanding the emotive density and possible homoerotic suggestions in Santiago and Manolin's affiliation.

Domotor (2013), in *Absent Fathers, Homosexual Sons, and Melancholic Repression in Three of Hemingway's Short Stories*, observes how the nonappearance of fathers effects sexual and emotional growth, leading to suppressed wishes and identity confusion. Domotor claims that this *father hunger* is seen in Hemingway's characters, particularly Nick Adams, who search for assertion from other men. This idea can be applied to *The Old Man and the Sea*, where Santiago's separation and desire for Manolin may reproduce a similar emotional need. Just like the characters in Domotor's study, Santiago's deep emotive association with Manolin could symbolize a suppressed longing for affection and closeness, suggesting at homoerotic suggestions.

Muscarella (2000), in *The Evolution of Homoerotic Behavior in Humans*, offers a theoretic model for understanding homoerotic conduct, concentrating on the behavior itself rather than sexual angle. In his article, Muscarella proposes that homoerotic conduct may have advanced in humans because it helped short-term social ties and collaboration among same-sex persons, which indirectly enhanced existence and reproductive triumph. This viewpoint, grounded on signal from other cultures, classes, and evolutionary theory, proposes a new way of thinking about same-sex conduct and its role in human growth.

Bergeret (2002), in *"Homosexuality or Homoeroticism?: Narcissistic Eroticism"*, debates the difference between homosexuality and homoeroticism. He asserts that the latter is more applicable when inspecting certain forms of same-sex attraction. Bergeret reviews the communal use of the term *homosexual* and proposes that psychoanalysis should emphasis on the *narcissistic register* of homoeroticism, a term that better defines the interactive behavior between people. The research paper also touches on Freudian ideas, such as psychic bisexuality, and calls for a more subtle method to understanding homoeroticism. This viewpoint can be applied to *The Old Man and the Sea*, as Santiago's emotional ties with Manolin may mirror a procedure of homoeroticism, where the bond is formed by deeper emotional and egotistical needs, rather than a severely sexual positioning.

## RESEARCH GAP

While much has been written on *The Old Man and the Sea*, there is a gap in reflecting the homoerotic undercurrents in the bond between Manolin and Santiago. Current research often emphases on themes of isolation, masculinity and valor, overlooking the emotional complexity of their relationship. Few works use psychoanalytic or Freudian philosophies to examine hidden homoerotic wants. Moreover, while researchers have revealed male masochism and father-son undercurrents in Hemingway's novels, these studies have not been stretched to the emotive understanding and closeness between the old man and the boy of the novel. This research aims to fill that gap by investigating their bond through a homoerotic angle.



## DISCUSSION

In Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, the relationship between the boy, Manolin and the old man, Santiago, is often regarded through the perspective of tutorship and friendliness. Though, underneath the layer of this association lies an elusive homoerotic tension that echoes Santiago's profounder desire for homosexual connection. This research work explores the homoerotic hints in their association, concentrating on how Santiago's state of mind toward Manolin suggest a wish that ranges across familial fondness, presenting a new viewpoint on the emotional complication of the novel.

In the introductory passage of Hemingway's fictional work, the conversation between Manolin and Santiago reveals the deep love and mutual dependency that characterizes their bond. The boy's desire to accompany Santiago on his fishing excursions, in spite of Santiago's current struggles, discloses a sense of dedication and faithfulness. Nevertheless, the way Hemingway presents their relationship through lines like, "The old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him," (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, p. 1) shows a deeper emotional relation that goes beyond normal mentorship. The phraseology arouses a sensitivity, signifying that Santiago may not only take Manolin as an apprentice but as someone who fills a void in his life, physically and perhaps even emotionally. Manolin's sentiments for Santiago and his inclination to return to his side indicates an implicit desire that reinforces their collaboration, faintly suggesting the homoerotic hints in their association.

In his novel Hemingway writes, "They (Santiago and Manolin) sat on the Terrace and many of the fishermen made fun of the old man and he was not angry" (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, p. 2), the taunting behavior of the other fishermen proposes distress or suspicion about Santiago and Manolin's intimacy. Their derision suggests that the relation between the two might be seen as unusual, possibly implying at homoerotic suggestions. Santiago's absence of annoyance reflects his emotional state of remoteness, finding comfort in the Manolin's company despite the judgment of others.

In the words of Santiago, "If you were my boy, I'd take you out and gamble," (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, p. 3), there's a silent and fundamental tenderness and a delicate wish in his words. Santiago's demand to take the boy out and gamble mirrors a deep sensitive wish, one that goes outside mere familial love. Old Santiago's look, defined as "sun-burned, confident loving eyes," proposes a closer connection. While he recognizes young boy's place with his parents, the declaration clues at a desire for an intimate, perhaps more personal relation, underlining the homoerotic undercurrents in their bond.

In this section of the novel, where Manolin covers Santiago's body in a blanket with tenderness, "The boy took the old army blanket off the bed and spread it over the back of the chair and over the old man's shoulders" (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*, p. 5), there is a sign of care that mirrors the deep emotional bond between them. The boy's action of tapping the old man in as he sleeps—proves a tenderness that goes beyond simple affection. It suggests a sense of encouragement, signifying a familiarity that might be misjudged by strangers, suggesting at homoerotic hints. The old man's helplessness in sleep contrasts with Manolin's defensive motion, emphasizing the emotional bond between the two.

When Santiago says, "I wish I had the boy. To help me and to see this" (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*). His wish for Manolin is not only one of friendship but also of emotive and corporeal sustenance. Santiago's request replicates a profounder wish for Manolin's presence, which goes beyond mere support in his fight with the big fish. Old man's desire to share the experience with Manolin suggests a more friendly bond, strengthening the homoerotic suggestions in their connection. The sea which is in fact a place of seclusion, increases old man's emotional dependency on the boy, as he desires for someone to observe and share his hardships and achievements.

When Santiago says, “I wish the boy was here” (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*), His words disclose a pure emotional desire for young boy’s existence during his scuffle with the fish. His desire indicates not just a wish for corporeal help, but also an emotional bond, as the boy denotes Santiago’s last relation to friendship and relief. As the old man feels the strength of the fish, his wish to have the boy by his side highlights the profound isolation he faces, intensifying the homoerotic undertones in their relationship. His yearning to share the moment with the boy suggests a desire for closeness, both in struggle and conquest.

In the passage where the boy says, “Let no one disturb him, after the fishermen ask about Santiago, how is he?” (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*) Manolin’s defensive reply explains the deep love he has for his mentor. Manolin’s crying without concern for others’ care highlights his emotional helplessness and the strength of their relations. Manolin’s words suggest a sense of care and possession, highlighting the closeness and emotional dependence between them. This moment, where Manolin defends the old man’s condition, further suggests the homoerotic undertones in their bond, as Manolin’s anguish exposes a desire for Santiago that exceeds familial bonds and relationship.

In this tender moment, when the old man wakes and says, “They beat me, Manolin,” and the boy responds, “He didn’t beat you. Not the fish”, (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*), the emotional profundity of their closeness is obvious. Manolin’s sentiments are a soothing comfort, as he tries to comfort Santiago not just emotionally but physically. Old man’s acceptance of defeat mirrors his helplessness, while Manolin’s instant response expresses his self-justifying, friendly role in Santiago’s life. This communication demonstrates the homoerotic hints of their bond, as Manolin not only cares for the old man’s physical happiness and comfort but also attends to his emotional breakability, signifying a stronger, more private bond than simply that of an apprentice and mentor.

In this instant, when Santiago says, “I missed you” (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*), his words disclose the profundity of his emotional attachment with the boy. Santiago’s reflection on the ocean’s massiveness and his boat’s tininess reveals his loneliness, which is lessened by Manolin’s company. Old man’s presence highlights not only his physical isolation but also an emotional desire for company. His desire for Manolin proposes a closeness beyond mere bond, suggesting the homoerotic suggestions that pervade their relationship. His sharing of thoughts with young boy rather than the sea exemplifies Santiago’s wish for human connection and emotional support.

In a dialogue between Santiago and Manolin, when the younger one says, “Now we fish together again” and the old man replies, “No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore” (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*), there is a sad and touching echo of Santiago’s sense of disappointment and failure and Manolin’s steadfast dedication. Manolin’s persistence that, “I’ll bring the luck with me,” and his statement, “We will fish together now for I still have much to learn,” shows not only his love for Santiago but also his longing to remain by the old man’s side, despite his own triumph.

In the concluding section, where Manolin watches over the asleep old man, “The old man was sleeping on his face and the boy was sitting by him watching him” (Hemingway, *The Old Man and the Sea*) the friendly relation between Santiago and Manolin is touchingly taken. Manolin’s act of watching over Santiago as he sleeps highlights his pure emotional sentiments and feelings, while the old man’s dream of the lions echoes his memories of youth and lasting hopes. That event demonstrates not only Manolin’s caring role but also their undeclared loving bond, signifying a relation that surpasses mentorship and friendship. The final image of Manolin sitting nearby Santiago and noiselessly witnessing him suggests a sense of obsession and love, further highlighting the homoerotic undertones that pervade their relationship.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the association between the old man and the young boy in *The Old Man and the Sea* exceeds the limitations of traditional mentorship, reflecting pure homoerotic and emotional undercurrents. Throughout the description, Hemingway delicately describes their relationship as one fixed in love, desire, and dependence, with old man's wants for friendship and closeness resounding through his connections with young Manolin. The moments of care, tenderness and mutual affection reveal a connection that goes beyond mere friendship, underlining the emotional involvedness of human influences. By examining the homoerotic implication in their bond, we sense a deeper understanding of the weaknesses and wishes that form the characters, eventually enriching the interpretation of Hemingway's master piece.

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