

La Mar: Significance of the Retrieval of the Unconscious Feminine Self

Humaira Aslam* & Nasir Jamal Khattak**

Abstract

The masochistic trends in the Cuban society do not allow Santiago to look within, towards the softer side of his nature for such a person would be considered too effeminate. Santiago is an old Cuban angler who is obsessed with his past glory as a champion. He was considered the best angler and one who could handle big fish with skill like a master. Now that he cannot catch big fish anymore he is considered salao - extremely unfortunate - by his community. However, there is an adamant refusal in him to accept this situation; therefore, he goes all alone and against all odds to the sea to catch big fish, but ultimately fails.

Keywords: Angler, Anima, Feminine Influence, Salao, Unconscious Feminine Self

Introduction

This paper is a study of the anima, which is the unconscious feminine side of man in Jungian psychology. The anima according to Jung is manifested in a combination of archetypal images that may come from the culture and man's experience with women, mostly his mother. The anima according to Jung mediates between a man and his inner self. A failure to do so will lead to an imbalance in the personality, which is the cause of most of our failures. Santiago has grown old and weak, but will not let go of his claim that he is still the champion. He pays no heed to the feminine side of his nature (anima), which advocates taking things easy at this stage of life. He suppresses it psychologically and physically ignores this fact. Santiago believes that by determination and will power he will attain his objective of catching a big fish. With that in mind he sets out for the sea, ignoring his physical condition. The imbalance in his personality has its own repercussions, for physically, even though he catches a marlin (big fish) he remains unable to control it. Psychologically he learns that if he pushes himself to the farthest limit in old age; he is consequently bound to fail.

Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* is obsessed with his public image and refuses to pay attention to his personal life. He is a widower who never developed any interest in another woman. So much so that he does not talk about one either. Physically out of his life, Santiago nudges her out of his mind too, which is a common trait of the extraverted type. That, however, does not mean he does not miss the presence of woman

* Assistant Professor, Jinnah College for Women.

** Chairman Department of English, University of Peshawar.

in his life. The fact that he feels lonely points to the unconscious admittance of missing woman. His trophies and achievements cannot fill up the void the lack of woman has left in his life. As an extraverted person who is persona-possessed, he continues to look outward, and earns himself the name of a champion angler, to wash away the stigma of being a “salao” (Hemingway, 2007: 1) He consciously develops his machismo to the neglect of woman or the feminine his life. He represses what Jung would call the anima.

Like a workaholic running after his business, Santiago has overlooked his family per se. His career as a champion angler has sucked him out of his home and has physically put him out there in the sea. That is one of the main reasons for his unconscious feminine self. Perhaps this is why the narrator focuses on his strength and body too. “[The old man’s shoulders] were strange shoulders, still powerful although very old, and the neck was still strong too and the creases did not show so much when the old man was asleep and his head fallen forward”.(9). On the one hand, the words, “powerful” and “strong,” reflect the masculine physique of the old man, which is how Santiago wants people to know him; and, on the other, they point to how physically he is well and well-built. However, the possession of the persona and the rejection of his anima bedevil him from within. Santiago lives and works in a patriarchal society which glorifies machismo, woman occupies secondary position in the scheme of his world. This is why he so very conveniently buries his wife’s photograph under his clothes in a shelf. We learn that:

Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt (7).

On the one hand, the action of hiding his wife’s photograph symbolizes pushing her into the recesses of his mind—the photograph is locked up in the closet. It also shows how Santiago represses his anima, which is one of his main problems. The photograph reminds him of her, and he considers that a weakness; his act of keeping his wife's photograph under his clothes shows that Santiago consciously sacrifices everything, no matter how precious and personal, to his persona. His wife or his family is secondary to the role that his society assigns to him as a man. He wants to adhere closely to how his society perceives man (Valenti, 2002: 114-115).

The society of which he is a denizen does not consider it honorable for man to think too often of a woman. Valenti says that in the Cuban society men engage in activities such as work, sports or combat, and women are not welcome to this world. Santiago does not want to be counted among those men who give woman a lot of importance; she ought to stay where she belongs—in the background. As a true son of his soil and society, he does not think very highly of woman (Valenti, 2002: 90-91). Santiago, in accordance with the mores of his society, shelves woman into a space where she does not interfere much with what man does. Woman distracts man off the goal he sets for himself. Like the proverbial temptress, she lures him away; he can achieve his goal if he withstands the temptation that woman offers. This is why he does not develop interest in another woman, for in his view, will make him look like a man who attaches a lot of

importance to woman in his life—something that his society does not consider very respectable for man.

The conscious and blind pursuit of what his society considers desirable detaches Santiago from his unconscious. Doubled with the macho mores of his society is his desire to be the champion angler again. Thus, Santiago twice distances himself from his anima, which is symbolized by putting his dead wife's picture under his clothes. This process of repression takes him away from his unconscious and thus the gap between his conscious and the unconscious widens which leads to an imbalanced personality. Instead of seeing or treating one as an extension of the other, one ends up “otherising” it. By turning his back on his anima, symbolized by putting his wife's photograph under his clean shirt, Santiago furthers the gulf between his conscious and unconscious. He buries his anima so that he can come up to the macho role his society assigns to man. His dead wife's photograph symbolizes the anima, and his clean shirt the persona. Furthermore, Santiago's attitude towards his wife, especially with reference to her picture, shows how he “otherizes” what actually is an inseparable part of his being. It may be appropriate to say that in Santiago we see the typical role of men of any patriarchal society. Instead of seeing woman as an extension of man's psyche, such societies see her as the other. These societies commit excesses against woman in the name of social mores, traditions, and religion. Instead of drawing creative energy from the contra-sexual image or the anima, we relegate woman to a lesser being and lesser role in the day-to-day life. Such societies deprive themselves of a wonderful human resource and of the creative and nurturing qualities of the anima (Whitmont, 1991: 191). No doubt, the anima is “predominantly contra-sexual,” but “there is nothing so totally 'other' as the opposite sex,” (Whitmont, 1991:185). As such, Santiago overdevelops his persona to the neglect of his feminine self.

Woman or anima is an extension of man's being and the animus of woman's, like two sides of a coin. Turning back on the feminine side creates a void that has to be filled. The instinctive urges, attention, energy, and emotions that are to be focused on woman have to have their object of affection or focus—Santiago has to find an alternative for the lack of the anima in his life.

Furthermore, Santiago's attitude towards his wife, especially with reference to her picture, shows how he “otherizes” what actually is an inseparable part of his being. It may be appropriate to say that in Santiago we see the typical role of men of any patriarchal society. Instead of seeing woman as an extension of man's psyche, such societies see her as the other. These societies commit excesses against woman in the name of social mores, traditions, and religion. Instead of drawing creative energy from the contra-sexual image or the anima, we relegate woman to a lesser being and lesser role in the day-to-day life. As such, Santiago overdevelops his persona to the neglect of his feminine side.

Santiago has to find an alternative for the lack of the anima in his life. As such, it is interesting to note that Santiago refers to the sea in a manner as if it is feminine; he

calls it “la mar” (19). The anima, “has assumed its primordial symbolic shape as *la mar*, the eternal, feminine sea” (Rovit & Brenner, 1986: 50). Furthermore, fighting the waves of the sea is like taming a wild woman, which obviously makes him the man who controls her. Moreover, like the anima, the sea has both its positive and negative impact on his life.

The sea stands for his unconscious in being deep, vast, unfathomable etc. in contrast to the conscious, which is limited, defined, and finite. He projects his sentiments on to the sea in a manner as if the sea is the anima; hence anima-like. He thinks of the sea as feminine. We learn that:

[T]he old man always thought of [the sea] as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman... (19).

In his opinion, *la mar* (a term used for the sea, referring to it as the feminine) is responsible for his being “*salao*.” Like a fixated lover submits to a coquettish beloved and her excesses, Santiago goes to the sea repeatedly and gets masochistic pleasure out of it. She rewards his visits at times in the form of a catch and at others refuses to give any bliss. Richard Fantina points to this issue in the following words. He says:

[Santiago's] vision of life as malevolent and hostile demands a degree of surrender to its violent torrents. This surrender must take place both on the physical and psychic planes as the wounded body meshes with the wounded soul. In the masochistic worldview, woman as the natural force inflicts these wounds and this suffering (Fantina, 2005: 63).

Santiago's feeling of loneliness proves that the feminine influence is lacking but he is not conscious of it. The more he avoids the tokens that remind him of his loneliness or his wife, the more he turns his back on the anima. This on the one hand it proves him more macho and acceptable from the point of view of his society, and, on the other, turns him to the sea to catch the fish to prove that he is a champion angler. That is to say, he runs after what his society considers socially acceptable and represses his anima. Moreover, while he does that, he becomes distant and hostile towards all that he believes prevents him from achieving his goal. Consequently, “His mystique of a loner reveals in him a dark hostility to relationship itself as much as to women” (Pullin, 1983:11). Pullin points to the same issue of turning his back on the anima.

Santiago's insistence on remaining physically alone is a sign of his repressing his anima, which enhances its unconscious need all the more. The fear of losing his masculinity, makes the repressed wish conscious, and comes to the forefront in his masochistic attitude, nevertheless this cannot do away with the need of a female influence in his life, or else he would never have been “too lonely” (7). Santiago forgoes the need because his society, with a dominant trait of machismo looks down upon it. Right until his old age he has never paid attention to the lack of feminine influence in his life. The detached life that he is living is itself an example of the extremity in which he is indulging, a life devoid of the feminine influence. Thus, this attitude had to have its

repercussions somewhere, therefore, it is evident that “eros lives” in Santiago as his love for the sea-La Mar, as he is “too old for sexual love” (Lewis Jr. 1999: 41). Hence, unconsciously this need is fulfilled by an affiliation with the sea in referring to her as feminine, therefore “la mar”. Thus if Santiago has to flourish and have a good reputation in his society, he has to have a balance in his conscious life. However, Santiago tries to achieve that superficially by going out to sea to catch big fish, which is necessary for his reputation as a champion angler, irrespective of the fact that the demands of old age are different from what he deems it to be.

According to Mary Ann Mattoon, the anima “mediate[s] between a man's ego and the inner world” (Mattoon, 1981: 95). Thus, if Santiago has to flourish and have a good reputation in his society, he has to have a balance in his conscious life. In order to achieve that Santiago goes out to sea to catch big fish, which is necessary for his reputation as a champion angler. In other words, we can say that Santiago fails to realize is that the big fish that he is after, symbolizes his anima. Therefore, as such, the sea is his unconscious, however, he goes out there with the false perception of fulfilling the demand of his society, that which he believes can strengthen his relationship to the society, therefore, the lack in his inner-self remains as it is, even after frequently going to the sea—his unconscious. Moreover, this is the same sea, which has wounded him and caused him suffering, in not allowing him a good catch, yet Santiago reverts to the sea and has expectations from it. This makes it evident that the unconscious will always intervene whenever there is a lop sidedness in the personality. His reputation in society may be at the forefront in his conscious mind, but the restlessness and the daring to risk all and move alone out into the sea is more an unconscious desire of integrating the self, as years of remaining a champion in the past has not brought a sense of contentment with it. Thus, he says to Manolin before he sets out on his lone journey that he will go far out. He never resents the sea's wicked attitude in not allowing him catch fish. Hence, the sea has good and bad qualities, like the unconscious, which possesses both good and bad traits. Santiago is consciously going back to that which he loves—the sea—hence psychologically, an inner need for the feminine that is absent from his life:

[T]he old man always thought of her as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild or wicked things it was because she could not help them. The moon affects her as it does a woman... (19).

When Santiago refers to the sea as “la mar”, he continues to gender her in a pagan vein. He calls on the ancient personification of the moon as a feminine principle in nature, the lunar changes that occur monthly, affect both the tides of the sea and a woman's cycle of ovulation and fecundity. (Beegle, 1999: 156-157). As such, Richard Fantina says regarding Hemingway, that his submissive sexuality sometimes subtly and sometimes dramatically reveals ritualized fantasies, which are “symptomatic of masochism” (Fantina, 2005:7), is evident in Santiago from the above-mentioned example.

Santiago, possessing an overly developed masculinity, is inevitably bound to show his feminine feelings in the unconscious mode. An intimacy, which he has never been able to give vent to because it has always been repressed, is bound to show its effect with

anything that he loves. This intense love is evident from Susan F. Beegel words, Santiago is wedded to the marlin, and his angling employs the language of seduction: "Yes", he said. "Yes". "Come on... Aren't they lovely? Eat them good now, and then there is the tuna. Hard and cold and lovely. Don't be shy fish" (Beegel, 1999: 41-42). "Then he felt the gentle touch on the line and he was happy" (43). Even after firmly hooking the marlin, Santiago's ordeal continues and he expresses a connectedness to the fish in language from the sacrament of marriage: "Now we are joined together" and "Fish...I'll stay with you until I am dead" (Beegel, 1999: 160). This feeling contributes towards appeasing his denied need for the feminine, which now, in the unconscious he does not avoid.

In the unconscious mode, he freely indulges with the anima. Thus the pull towards the sea, the love he has for it, in spite of her not allowing him a catch, makes him realize that it is this feminine influence that he longs for, which he has been negating throughout, in his conscious life. Now that he is in the unconscious, he realizes the effects the anima rejection has played in his life i.e. being persona possessed in advocating masculinity. Santiago wishes that Manolin were with him when starts to grapple with the fish and he realizes it is too big and difficult for him to handle. This is a little unlikely of Santiago to wish for help--something he would never do if he were on the land. This kind of behavior would make him less of a man. Somebody as macho and a champion as he is rarely ever needs anyone, let alone ask for somebody's help. Being in the sea, which is his unconscious, and with no one around him, Santiago very conveniently wishes he had Manolin around him. He is too old or tired to control the fish or the fish too strong and powerful for him. He would not have admitted to his helplessness on the land, i.e., in his conscious mode.

In spite of his wishing for help in his unconscious, Santiago quickly reminds himself that he has to prove his worth; this makes it evident that the anima that he has lately realized is not yet fully integrated. Therefore, he says, "but you haven't got the boy ... You have only yourself and you had better work back to the last line now, in the dark..." (38). Again, the "dark" is a reference to the unconscious side, and Santiago in his unconscious realizes that he has to face the anima -the marlin -and deal with it, i.e., integrate the anima, otherwise it will keep on emerging in some way or the other, making him realize the weakness of machismo. Therefore, the catching of the marlin is like coming into contact with his anima:

The old man knew he was going far out and he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into ... the part of the ocean that the fishermen called the great well because there was a sudden deep of seven hundred fathoms... (18).

Anything lying deep "seven hundred fathoms" is thus, a reference to the anima lying buried in the unconscious therefore, it is actually Santiago's anima that is lying deep in his unconscious that he goes out to seek but does not integrate right upto the end when he is defeated by the sharks.

In other words, we can say that what Santiago fails to realize is that neglecting his feminine self is his actual problem. It is actually not accepting his anima that has

ruined his position in the society, for had he integrated the anima, his masculinity would have toned down, and his old age would have taught him to accept the fact that he was too old to be a champion and compete with young anglers. Thus, trying to fix his problem of no more being the champion angler, in keeping with the demands of the society was bound to remain unfruitful.

References

- Bloom, Harold. (1999). Ed. and Introd. *Modern Critical Interpretations: Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man And The Sea*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishers.
- Fantina, Richard. (2005). *Ernest Hemingway: Machismo And Masochism*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Hemingway, Ernest. (2009). *The Old Man and the Sea*. New Delhi: Heritage Publishers. 2007, rpt.
- Lee, A. Robert. (1983). Ed. *Ernest Hemingway: New Critical Essays*. London, Totowa, NJ: Vision and Barnes & Noble.
- Mattoon, Mary Ann. (1981). *Jungian Psychology in Perspective*. New York, London: The Free Press.
- Rovit, Earl and Brenner, Gerry. (1986). *Ernest Hemingway*. Twayne's United States Authors Series. Boston: Twayne Publishers.
- Valenti, Patricia Dunlavy. (2002). *Understanding The Old Man and the Sea: A Student Casebook to Issues, Sources, And Historical Documents*. Westport, Connecticut, London: Greenwood Press.
- Whitmont, Edward C. (1991). *The Symbolic Quest: Basic Concepts of Analytical Psychology*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.