

ISLAMIC IMAGES IN HEMINGWAY'S THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with Islamic images in Hemingway's novel The Old Man and the Sea, a topic which has never been examined at all. Hemingway's ideas about Islam could have been derived from the profound Islamicization of Spanish culture which he had known through listening to stories around safari campfires, hunting and the proper behavior of man. The influence of Islam on hemingway's novel is evident from Islamic insinuations such as man's attraction to the sea, and Islamic ideals and ethics as can be observed in the image of the "line", the image of the "Left hand" vs. The "right hand", the image of pride, the image of endurance and man's infirmity, and the image of respect for and admiration of sea creatures. These images show affinities between hemingway's story and Islam.

ملخص

يعالج هذا البحث صورة اسلامية لم تدرس من قبل في رواية ارنست همنجواي الشيخ والبحر. انه لمن المحتمل ان تكون افكار همنجواي الاسلامية قد أخذها وعرفها من الحضارة الاسبانية التي تأثرت كثيرا بالاسلام والمسلمين من خلال سماعه قصصا عن الرحلات والصيد وسلوك الانسان. لقد بدأ تأثير الاسلام على الرواية واضحا من التلميحات والصور الاسلامية التي قدمها همنجواي مثل انجذاب الإنسان الى الماء والمثل والأخلاق الاسلامية التي انعكست في صورة اليد اليسرى ازاء اليد اليمنى وصورة الكبرياء والغرور وصورة احتمال المتاعب وعجز الانسان وصورة اللطف بحيوانات البحر. تثل هذه الصور على وجود صلة بين الرواية والدين الاسلامي.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway's novel, The Old Man and The Sea, is considered by critics as a reflection of the close connection of Man to Nature. "Always a keen and vigorous sportsman, Hemingway believed that the writer must keep in touch with nature by some form of action- if he withdraws from life, his style wastes away. Proving the truth of his

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Islamic images in Hemingway's ...

idea that the writer must keep in touch with life, he wrote "The Old Man and the Sea". (Notes 1967: 5). His subjects mainly deal with social problems and with men who face lonely and thankless tasks. In this regard, Campbell (1961) maintains:

All Hemingway's novels and many of the short stories are concerned with life on the threshold of death or disaster. (P.100) Certain other themes or ideas recur in Hemingway's writing-the emphasis on competition, the implied comparison between life and sports, and the question "who really wins ?"....Interwoven with this are the problems of loyalty or treachery to a country, a cause, or the person himself. The essential loneliness of the individual and the search for fulfillment are revealed. The relationships between man and man, man women, man and the creatures he hunts create conflicts. (P.101). In "The Old Man and the Sea" Hemingway presents old age facing life and death with courage, hope, and wisdom. (P.105).

Hemingway's life and career can be seen in large part as a never ended rebellion against the surrounding conventionalism and atmosphere of his birthplace. (For more information, see Notes 1967: 2-3). Impatient for a less sheltered environment and in continuous search of self-realization, he had an urge for travelling around, seeing new places and actively participating in wars and civil wars. (For more details, see The Encyclopedia Americana 1986: 82-83). This sort of life, especially his safari, could have been a means of introducing him to the Islamic mentality.

Islam is a feature in Hemingway's short story "The Old Man and the Sea" and it is surprising that it has attracted no critical attention till now. In his writings, however, there is no clear indication of how deeply Hemingway had investigated the faith. Indirectly, he adopts an air of familiarity with the subject. What is more likely is that Hemingway's information was derived from his reading or even actual contact with Muslims in his safari. "Journeys to Spain to watch bullfighting and to report on the civil war, hunting expeditions in Africa, fishing in the Caribbean, experiences on special missions and as war correspondent during world war II -all these are reflected in his books." (Campbell 1961: 99). The possible influence of Islam on this story of Hemingway is evident from Islamic insinuations such as man's attraction for the sea, Islamic ideals and ethics and other related subjects.

One of the different subjects that has attracted my attention is the close and intimate relationship that both Santiago, the old man, and the boy enjoy. It is a relation of dear friends who have both a deep feeling of responsibility and respect for each other. There is a possibility that there is a connection between their friendship and the repeatedly mentioning of the "line". The line connects the man to his fish and the pain caused by the line urges the man to recall his young friend waiting at home. This connection which may symbolize the relation between all creatures could be interpreted as follows. The presence of the boy would have increased their power and would have aided the old man in

moments of extreme pain. There we may recall the Quranic verse: " And hold fast, all together, by the Rope which Allah (Stretches out for you), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favour on you; for ye were enemies and he joined your hearts in love, so that by His grace, ye became brethren". (Surah 3, Al Imran: Verse 103) (1). Our assumption explains exactly the meaning of the verse: Holding on together to the principles of Islam supports them with enough power to survive in the cruel atmosphere of life.

As I have mentioned earlier, the reason for recalling his little friend was the pain caused by the line. The line is the only connection to the fish, and the only source of help is the boy. The pain indicates that there could be a wound in his relationship to the boy - a social wound - probably because the family forbid the boy to be related to the old man in his trip for he is "saloo". Thus, social restraint is a wound in the social correlation to which all should hold on.

In addition, the line represents the connection between the man and the fish, a connection between earth and sea. In other words, there is a relationship between every creature on this earth, all working under controlled forces and laws.

Another possible Islamic notion is Santiago's attraction to the sea. A certain number of verses deal with the sea and navigation. As subjects for reflection, they provide indications of divine omnipotence that arise from the facts of common observation. Some of these verses are the following:

1) It is He who has made the sea subject, that ye may eat thereof flesh that is fresh and tender, and that ye may extract therefrom ornaments to wear, and thou seest the ships therein that plough the waves, that ye may seek (thus) of the bounty of Allah and that ye may be grateful. (Surah 16-Al-Nahl: Verse 14).

2) Seest thou not that the ships sail through the ocean by the grace of Allah? - that He may show you of his signs? Verily in this are signs for all who constantly persevere and give thanks. (Surah 31 - Luqman: Verse 31).

At some point in the story, Santiago watches the birds flying in the sky (2):

3) The clouds were building up now for the trade wind and he looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, then blurring, then etching again and he knew no man was ever alone on the sea. (P.44)

Islamic images in Hemingway's ...

A similar description can be found in the Holy Quran:

Do they not look at the birds, held poised in the midst of (the air and) the sky? Nothing holds them up but (the power of) Allah. Verily in this are signs for those who believe. (Surah 16 - Al - Nahl: verse 79). Do they not observe the birds above them, spreading their wings and folding them in ? None can uphold them except (Allah) Most gracious: truly it is He that watches over all things. (Surah 67 - Al - Mulk: Verse 19).

Santiago, although a rather healthy elderly man, faces some challenging physical problems during his fish hunt out in the wide sea. Due to the longterm stress on his back, shoulders and hands, the left hand cramps leaving his right hand alone in this seemingly endless struggle. He shows deep concern about his left hand: "how do you feel, hand ? I'll eat some more for you... How does it go, hand ? " (P.43). It seems Hemingway wanted to put the right and left side of his body into opposition. The right hand is the one he trusts blindly "he decided that he could beat anyone if he wanted to badly enough and he decided that it was bad for his right hand for fishing. " (P. 52). But his left hand has always betrayed him in most decisive moments as can be seen in the following:

He had tried a few practice matches with his left hand. But his left hand had always been a traitor and would not do what he called on it to do and he did not trust it. (P.52).

Hemingway uses very intelligently the juxtaposition technique to symbolically present the idea of believers represented by the old man's right hand and Non-Believers represented by his left hand. In Islam, God warned believers against non-believers.

O ye who believe! Take not into your intimacy those outside your ranks: They will not fail to corrupt you. Ah! ye are those who love them, but they love you not- though ye believe in the whole of the book, when they meet you, they say, "we believe". But when they are alone, they bite off the very tips of their fingers at you in their rage. (Say: Perish in your rage: Allah knoweth well all the secrets of the heart. (Surah 3- Al- "Imran: Verses 118-119).

So believers should always be aware and alert concerning non -believers or converted Muslims since they still experience a state of instability. Thus, the Qur'an urges believers to pay particular attention to them as can be seen in the following verse:

The Believers, men and women, are protectors, one of another; They enjoin what is just, and forbid what is evil: they observe regular prayers, practice

regular charity, and obey Allah and His messenger. On them will Allah pour His mercy: for Allah is exalted in power, wise. (Surah 9 - Al - tawbah : Verse 71).

Hemingway describes the issue as follows: "He rubbed the cramped hand against his trousers and tried to gentle the fingers". (P.44). Although Santiago considers the cramp as a "humiliation" (P.45) in a time of need, he pays great attention to it because its lack of anticipation forms a sort of physical deficiency or weakness which may lead to greater losses afterwards. Therefore, winning the cooperation of the left hand is of great importance. Here the writer indirectly stresses the significance of unity in life. A long time ago, prophet Mohammad (peace and God blessings be upon him) stressed unity of such a kind, saying: " All the believers are like one man. If an eye of one becomes Sour, the whole body feels the pain".and, if he has headache, his whole body feels the pain" (Siddiqi and Shad 1988:126). This tradition or hadith clearly stands for the fact that "Islam has stipulated principles and regulations which relate and systematize the behavior of the believers towards one another". (Siddiqi and Shad 1988:115).

Santiago considers the lack of cooperation of the left hand as "a treachery of one's own body" (P.45). In Hemingway's works, " the problems of loyalty or treachery to a country, a cause, or the person himself" are depicted. (Campbell 1961:101). Nevertheless, the old man puts his faith into his left hand: "Surely it will uncramp to help my right hand. It must uncramp. It is unworthy of it to be cramped". (P.46). Allah warns against treachery; He says, "contend not on behalf of such as betray their own souls;for Allah Loveth not one given to perfidy and crime". (Surah 4- Al- Nisa: Verse 107). Similarly, in Surah 22- Al- Hajj: Verse 38; His Almighty says, "Verily Allah will defend (From ill) those who believe; Verily, Allah loveth not any that is a traitor to faith, or shows ingratitude". Hemingway thus asserts the necessity of good treatment and attention towards the other even if he is useless for a while.

Although an elderly man, Santiago takes upon himself the risk of going out "too far"; thus, he goes beyond his human limits facing extreme difficulties which wrecked both soul and body. The incapability of his left hand and the never ending pain in his hands, back and shoulders were some of the major obstacles on his journey-a journey of physical torture. The old man totally overestimates his physical capability urged by his undefeatable pride and determination to catch a fish. Because of his pride, he has gone too far "beyond all people", beyond his true place in a capricious world; in going out too far, Santiago has brought about his own tragic fate. (Notes 1967:28).

Pride is thus fatal in the case of Santiago, and Islam warns against pride as can be seen in the following: " For Allah loveth not the arrogant, the vainglorious" (Surah 4- Al- Nisa: Verse 36), and The prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) said that Allah said: "Pride is my cloak and greatness my robe, and he who competes with me in respect of either of them I shall cast into Hell-fire". (Ibrahim and Johnson-Davies 1980: 92).

Islamic images in Hemingway's ...

Man is free to choose within his human limits without endangering his physical and psychological well-being. The Holy Quran says: " ... And make not your own hands contribute to (your) destruction". (Surah 2- Al- Baqarah : verse 195), and " Oh no soul doth Allah place a burden greater than it can bear". (Surah 2- Al- Baqarah: Verse 286). Likewise, the prophet Muhammad (may peace and blessings be upon him) said: "your body has a right on you, and your eyes have a right on you, and your wife has a right on you, and your guest has a right on you". (Khan 1976: III).

As the sun rises, the fish starts to circle and the old man has to take up the slack line. Two hours later the fish is still circling and the old man is exhausted. He calls on God to give him endurance and promises to say " a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail Marys" (P.64) later on. Thus, in a moment of despair and suffering, Santiago turns to God, the supernatural power to give him courage and endurance: "I'm not religious," he said, "But I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish..."(P.47).

Man's infirmity was clearly pointed out in the Holy Quran as can be seen in the following Verse:

When trouble toucheth a man, he crieth unto us (in all postures)- lying down on his side, or sitting, or standing. But when we have solved his trouble he passeth on his way as if he had never cried to Us for a trouble that touched him! Thus do the deeds of transgressors seem fair in their eyes. (Surah 10-Yunus: Verse 12).

Santiago's position and attitude is in a way very closely related to the mentioned verse: He exclaimed. " God help me endure. I'll say a hundred Our Fathers and a hundred Hail Marys. But I cannot say them now. Consider them said, he thought. I'll say them later". (PP. 64-65). He may not remember saying them after the overcoming of adversity, and that would place him doubtlessly into the category of men whom God mentioned in the previous verse. However, it would also be explained in terms of what is considered in Islam an inner attempt not necessarily put into action as can be recognized in the following Hadith: The Messenger of Allah (the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said: "Actions are but by intention and every man shall have but that which he intended". (Ibrahim and Johnson- Davies 1976 : 26).

Courage and endurance are very likeable characteristics, especially welcomed in man. The old man's courage, determination and endurance are remarkable. He admits: "I am not good for many more turns; yes you are, he told himself. You're good for ever". (P.68). This moral and spiritual determination produced an unbelievable physical endurance in the old man:

With his prayers said, and feeling much better, but suffering exactly as much, and perhaps a little more, he leaned against the wood of the bow and began, mechanically, to work the fingers of his left hand. (PP.47-48) I'll kill him though... In all his greatness and his glory,... I will show him what a man can do and what a man endures. (P. 48).

As a matter of fact, Santiago endures the hunger and thirst throughout the journey, the pain of sitting for a long period of time, the cold of the nights and the heat of the days, and the deep cuts in his hands without complaining at all, thinking only of victory over the fish. The old man's endurance could be related to the following Hadith: "The Messenger of Allah (the blessings and peace of Allah be upon him) said:... And know that victory comes with patience, relief with affliction, and ease with hardship". (Ibrahim and Johnson- Davies 1967:70). Thus, "pain does not matter to a man. " (P. 62).

In Islam, all names related to courage and bravery are most likeable. Such names as qadir almighty, all- powerful', Muqtadir ' possessing power or strength', qawwiyy' mighty, powerful', and jabbar almighty, omnipotent' show God's power and dominance. When these qualities are reflected in man, moral and bodily courage is exhibited by him. The prophet himself is a perfect example of bravery and courage. He was present and to be seen wherever there was the greatest danger in the field of battle. (Majeed 1988 : 586 - 587).

The Holy Quran and the prophet's teachings want and urge us to acquire and cultivate good characteristics. Patience and endurance is one noble characteristic whereby Muslims and believers can obtain God's blessings. The Quran says, "O ye who believe! Persevere in patience and constancy; vie in such perseverance; strengthen each other; and fear Allah that ye may prosper". (Surah 3-Al Imran: Verse 200); " O ye who believe! seek help with patient perseverance and prayer: for Allah is with those who patiently persevere", (Surah 2-Al-Baqarah : 153); " And be steadfast in patience; for verily Allah will not suffer the reward of the righteous to perish", (Surah 11-Hud : 115); and " And bear with patient constancy whatever betide thee; for this is firmness (of purpose) in (the conduct of affairs", (Surah 31-Luqman : 17). Further, prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) said, " patience is half of faith", (Siddiqi and Shad 1988 : 61); "... Patience is illumination", (Ibrahim and Johnson- Davies 1976 : 78); and "whosoever remains silent, remains safe", (Siddiqi and Shad 1988 : 65).

Despite his ambition to catch the fish, the old man shows great gentleness, respect and even love for his sea- creature. "He began to pity the great fish that he had hooked". (P. 35). "Fish", he said, " I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends". (P.39). This is a typical reflection of Islam's message of love, kindness and consideration to all kinds of living things including animals. Islam prohibits the torture and unnecessary killing of animals, and when an animal is to be killed for

Islamic images in Hemingway's ...

consumption, the orders are to do so as kindly and painlessly as possible. Thus, the Islamic treatment of animals is full of love and kindness. (Majeed 1988: 559-60).

The Islamic influence with respect to this notion is put into the mouth of Santiago contemplating: "Most people are heartless about turtles because a turtle's heart will beat for hours after he has been cut up and butchered. But the old man thought, I have such a heart too and my feet and hands are like theirs". (P.26). Furthermore, Santiago insists on calling the marlin "brother" with whom he shares pain. He exclaims: "I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother". (P. 43). This is "the theme of man's oneness with nature" strongly reinforced by several incidents in the story (Notes 1967 : 25). (See PP. 21, 34 - 36; 40; and 44 for those incidents.). This attitude stresses the unity among all living creatures; man or sea animals are all alike- as being creatures of God, the Almighty. The Quran stresses this unity as can be seen in the following verse:

Do not the Unbelievers see that the heavens and the earth were joined together (as one Unit of Creation), before we clove them asunder? We made from water every living thing. Will they not believe? (Surah 21-Al-Anbiya' : Verse 30).

"As man's intellectual gaze over the physical world expands, he sees more and more how unity is the dominating note in God's wonderful universe". (Ali 1983 : 801).

This story of Hemingway pictures man's close relationship with Nature. It presents creatures as parts of Nature, sometimes in struggle with it, or in a state of observation and meditation. Islam has been described as "Religion turned towards Nature". There is a demand for joining meditation with observation, by pointing to so many facts in Nature and calling man to respond: "Do they not look at the sky above them? - How we have made it and adorned it, and there are no flaws in it? (Surah 50 - Qaf : verse 6). This is just one many other verses turned entirely toward Nature. In Islam there is a complete acceptance of the world and a lack of any sort of conflict with Nature. This acceptance of Nature in general implies the acceptance of human nature.

Man is a part of nature and there is no need to reject religion because of man's love of nature. There is also no need to renounce the struggle for worldly matters for the sake of religion. Moreover, Islam is very realistic in dealing with man as an individual. This religion tends to make us what we are- human- and it has never tried to destroy life, health, happiness and pleasure. Through prayer, observation, struggle and meditation, Islam carries on nature's work of shaping man. (Majeed 1988 : 174 - 76). There is no room for opposition to nature, and that is exactly what Hemingway tries to express in his story of "The Old Man and the Sea".

NOTES

1- All citations from the Holy Quran are taken from Yusuf Ali, the Holy Quran: Text, Translation and Commentary, Mary Land: Amana Corp., 1983.

2- All citations from the novel will be hereafter taken from Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, published by Charles Scribner's Sons: New York, 1961.

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