

among the aged. By roughly comparable measures, dependency of elderly Americans was 23 per cent in 1910, 33 per cent in 1922, and 40 per cent in 1930—before the Great Depression began to take effect. When the Depression struck, the situation grew even worse. Old age dependency rose nearly to 50 per cent in 1935, and to two-thirds in 1940. (174)

He also reports that “[i]n 1937, less than 5 per cent of elderly Americans had pensions: more than 50 per cent were unemployed” (176).

Fischer’s belief in the virtue and importance of government involvement in the economy colors his whole book, making it considerably less objective than Achenbaum’s, which tended simply to present facts. But when Fischer does stick to facts, his evidence is substantial and revealing. Especially interesting are his comments about the growing scientific interest in old age. “In the mid-twentieth century,” he reports,

as geriatrics [had] expanded as a field of medicine, social scientists [had] developed their own discipline for the study of old age—social gerontology. The first American scholar to show a sustained and serious interest in it was G. Stanley Hall, a psychologist at Clark University, who published a treatise called *Senescence* in 1922. But social gerontology was not a popular subject in the universities until the late 1940’s, when it suddenly began to grow very rapidly. The first important professional organization was the Gerontological Society, organized in 1945 with 80 members; by 1950 it had grown to 300; by 1960, to nearly 2000. (193)

Fischer describes the efforts of numerous significant scholars, in various scientific and social scientific fields, who made important contributions in the 1940s and 1950s to the study of elderly people and their living conditions (194). He and Achenbaum both show that in the decades just before the writing and publication of *The Old Man and the Sea*, old men *and* old women, and the relations between the elderly and people middle-aged or younger, seemed matters of growing interest to increasing numbers of Americans,

him.” Santiago, ever the wise and unselfish old man, recognizes this truth and never tries to turn the boy against his father.

It takes no time at all, in other words, for Hemingway to establish Santiago as an exemplary old man and Manolin as an exemplary boy. Walt Disney himself could not have asked for a better relationship than this, and the story probably proved so appealing in the 1950s and early 1960s precisely because it exemplified the ideal relationship between youth and age—an ideal embodied in such television programs of the time as *Father Knows Best* or *My Three Sons* or *The Andy Griffith Show* or *Leave It to Beaver* (although Beaver got into trouble far more often than Manolin does, as Manolin never strays from a romantic ideal of the perfect boy). Having lived through the turmoil of the Great Depression of the 1930s and the murderous conflict of World War II in the 1940s and now living through the prospect of nuclear apocalypse thanks to the invention and use of the atom bomb, Americans in the 1950s were understandably drawn to works of popular culture that promised some security, some peace, some sanity and hope in tumultuous times. No wonder they loved the sorts of radio and television programs just mentioned, and no wonder they loved the gentle love between the old man and a young boy depicted in Hemingway’s novella.

Manolin treats Santiago as probably the most important adult figure in his life, and Santiago treats Manolin as the kind of child he apparently has never actually had. They treat each other with mutual affection and respect—a fact all the more important because Santiago is now so obviously *disrespected* by the other adults in the community: “many of the fishermen made fun of the old man,” but—in typical Disneyesque fashion, “he was not angry” (11). He is an archetypal Wise Old Man, and he has too much self-respect to feel (or at least to show) any concern for the disrespect of others. Physically weak, he is spiritually strong. Meanwhile, “[o]thers, of the older fishermen, looked at him and were sad” (11). They are almost certainly sad, in part, because they can “relate to” the weakness and self-doubt he is now feeling. But it is the boy, not Santiago’s contemporaries, who makes an active effort to help the old man. Santiago is not a part of what we would now call a “senior

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bring it in intact will have been futile. The text shows us Santiago's thoughts about killing the *dentuso*, and we see that he enjoyed it: "But you enjoyed killing the *dentuso*, he thought" (105). He is a fisherman, as he reminds himself, and it is not necessarily a breach of decorum to enjoy killing the shark. But out loud, he tries to justify the killing: "'I killed him in self-defense,' the old man said aloud. 'And I killed him well'" (106). His thoughts are at odds with his speech, and the point seems to be to highlight his inconsistency.

In an extraordinary moment after he has killed the final shark, Santiago speaks to the remains of the marlin, and what he says reveals his culpability and feelings of guilt over the destruction he has caused:

He could not talk to the fish anymore because the fish had been ruined too badly. Then something came into his head.

"Half fish," he said. "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both. But we have killed many sharks, you and I, and ruined many others. How many did you ever kill old fish? You do not have that spear on your head for nothing." (115)

Although it is absurd to think about a man trying to rationally decide how to address a fish corpse, and this moment might be seen as comedic, the text also shows Santiago trying several strategies to intellectually permit himself to talk to it. He tries "half fish," which is a little undignified, and then he tries "fish that you were," which is less absurd but also less honest. Santiago appears to be searching for a way to erase his responsibility for the fish's death by trying to speak to it as if it were not dead.

Santiago also tries to avoid responsibility for killing the sharks by asking the dead marlin to share the blame. "We have killed many sharks," he says, suggesting a false equivalency between the marlin's killing for survival and his own wasteful and indiscriminate killing. Then Santiago fantasizes about mutilating the marlin by removing its bill and using it to fight the sharks. "Then we might have fought them together" (115), Santiago says wistfully, even though the idea is sentimental and false.

but did so with an exasperation that was palpable. After correcting instances where the steps or techniques of baiting hooks, drift fishing, or setting the hook were off and after all but scoffing “No draft beer in such a place” as La Terraza (246), Hemingway’s patience wears noticeably thin by Scene 131. He scolds, in a marginal note, “Why is he getting sleepy so early? It’s silly,” and he all but loses it too scenes later. When the script states that the fish line is over Santiago’s shoulders at that point, Hemingway fumes, “Not yet! Not until the fish is hooked” (248). Such gaffs had to be frustrating for a writer committed to realism and truthfulness in fiction.

When Warner Bros. was first considering filming sites, Hemingway insisted that the picture be shot in Cuba on the Gulf. Later he steered them toward Cojimar, where he knew all the fishermen by name and had even fished with some of them (Villarreal 119). His love of the fishermen was well known in Cuba, for shortly after *The Old Man and the Sea* was published, the Cuban government presented Hemingway with a Medal of Honor on behalf of “the professional marlin fishermen from Puerto Escondido to Bahia Honda” (Baker 506). Hemingway also was responsible for boosting sport-fishing tourism in Cuba. He was vice president of The International Game Fish Association (IGFA) during the years he lived near Havana and fished the Gulf, a position that made him ineligible to set any world records. But he is in the IGFA Fishing Hall of Fame, and particularly legendary for being the first angler to boat a tuna in the Bahamas undamaged by sharks (Hemingway *Conversations* 138). As his IGFA Hall of Fame entry reminds, “After his death in 1961, the fishermen [of Cojimar] melted down their anchors [and scrap bronze] and cast a memorial in Hemingway’s honor. It sits looking out over the Gulf Stream”—more of a tribute to Hemingway’s relationship with the professional Cuban fishermen than this film turned out to be.

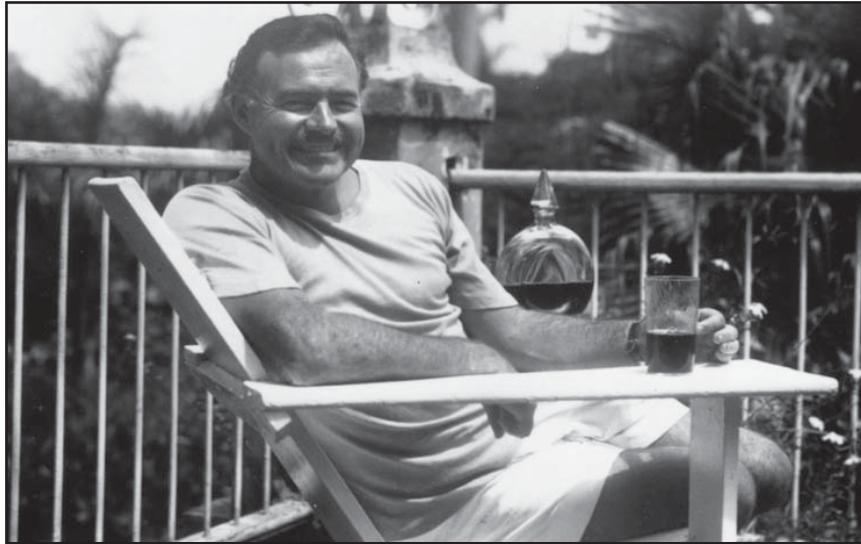


Fig. 16. Hemingway at the Finca Vigia, his home in Cuba, in 1946. Wikimedia. [Public domain.]

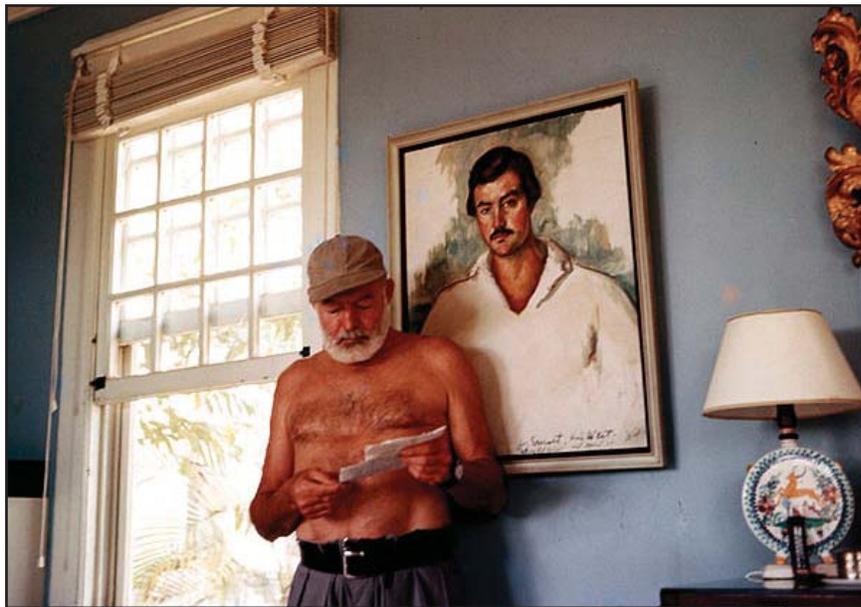


Fig. 17. Hemingway at his home in Cuba, circa 1953, standing in front of a 1929 portrait of himself by Waldo Peirce. Wikimedia. [Public domain.]