

Eating Fish, Eating Christ : The Meanings and Tastes of Foods in *The Old Man and the Sea*

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Synopsis : Compared with Ernest Hemingway's early works such as *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) which are filled with feasts and drinking, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), the final masterpiece of Hemingway, has less descriptions of foods and drinks. Eating, however, has significant implications in this work. Santiago's eating habit implies the influence of nutrition which spread to America in the beginning of the twentieth century. On the other hand, when Santiago kills the marline by a harpoon just like Longinus who pierces the side of Christ, eating the marline's meat evokes an image of Communion, despite the fact that Santiago regards himself as a not religious man. The purpose of this paper is to explore Santiago's ambivalent attitude toward religion by examining the relationship between the modern nutrition and the religious connotation of foods in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

1. Hemingway and Foods

"Ernest Hemingway was," Craig Boreth, the author of *The Hemingway Cookbook*, states, "a tremendous eater and drinker. For better and worse, he indulged his appetites to the fullest. His books are filled with episodes about food and drink, sometimes spectacular, other times intriguing in their mundane presentation" (Boreth xiii). Indeed, Hemingway had a continuing interest in foods and drinks throughout his life. Carlos Baker reports young Hemingway's broad interests including eating and drinking by quoting Ruth Bradfield's first impression of Hemingway: "A beautiful youth. He was slender and moved well. . . . He generated excitement because he was so intense about everything, about writing and boxing, about good food and drink" (Baker, *A Life Story*

117). Age could not rob Hemingway of his enjoyment of and interest in eating. In 1945, at the age of forty-six, Hemingway refers to his and his wife's relish for food in a letter to his friend Mary Welsh: "We both love good food and changes in food and we might just as well have fun with it" (Baker, *Letters* 595).

Hemingway's steady and strong passion for food and drink and his ability, to borrow Kenneth S. Lynn's phrase, "to provide succulent meals to his readers" (Lynn 157-58) are undeniably part of his appeal as a writer. Boreth mentions the realistic and tempting depictions of foods in Hemingway's works and its effect on the readers as follows:

The sounds of the words themselves—Aguacates, Purée de Mar-ron, Chambéry Cassis, or Amontillado—linger beyond the turn of the pages. The texture, tastes, and smells remain on the palate long after the dust jacket earns its keep. This was the foundation of Hemingway's art: to not only provide for readers a description of the emotion evoked but to communicate the source of that emotion, creating for the reader that very same sensation. (Boreth xiii)

In fact, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is filled with abundant wine, champagne, French cuisine in Paris, and large quantities of foods and alcohol in Spain. These various and massive meals and drinks convey a decadent feeling of the Paris of the 1920's and represent Jake's enthusiasm for the bull fighting festival in Spain which releases him from the conventional social order. *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), though it is set on a battlefield in Italy, contains appetizing descriptions of spaghetti, cheese and wine attract the readers' notice, and makes a vivid and effective contrast with the miserable circumstances at the front.

Even in the middle of the Spanish Civil War, Robert Jordan enjoys absinthe, wine and rabbit stew with the members of the guerilla force in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940). The rabbit stew made of two rabbits caught during their coupling implies the two human lovers, Robert and

Maria, who make passionate love in a place that is in close proximity to the battlefield of death. Moreover, Jordan's great appetite for the rabbit stew betrays his sexual desire for Maria, whom he calls "little rabbit." As Jefferey Meyers notes, Hemingway "describes meals to reveal character, express ideas, convey a mood, set the scene, and evoke the spirit of a foreign place" (Meyers 426).

The amount of food in Hemingway's works seems to decrease from his earlier novels to the works of his twilight years. In fact, according to the index of references to food and drink in Hemingway's works compiled by Samuel J. Rogal, fifteen kinds of drinks such as martini, absinthe and wine and twenty-nine kinds of foods such as hard-boiled eggs and roasted pig, are mentioned 121 times altogether in *The Sun Also Rises*. By contrast, *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Hemingway's last novella published in his lifetime, contains only fourteen descriptions of three kinds of drink: beer, rum and water, and seven types of foods, including fish, beans and rice (Rogal 203-88).

However, this does not necessarily mean that Hemingway lost his interest in food and drinks as he grew old. The functions and implications of food become much sharper and crisper as the descriptions are trimmed. One notable aspect of food in *The Old Man and the Sea* is that its "taste" is mentioned repeatedly in the novella. In *The Sun Also Rises*, only the names of food and drinks appear, as if the protagonist Jake were reading off the menu of a restaurant or a bar. On the contrary, even though the number of foods and drinks is lower than *The Sun Also Rises*, some kinds of foods and drinks, as well as their "tastes" in *The Old Man and the Sea* have a remarkable significance and a religious connotation.

The aim of this paper is to investigate the descriptions of foods and their "taste" in *The Old Man and the Sea*. I shall argue that these are underappreciated but significant elements for understanding Santiago's hidden desire and conflict between the new values founded on nutritional science and the traditional conventions of Christianity. Although

Santiago is described as an old man in Cuba, I shall regard him not as an aging Cuban fisherman in realistic way, but as one of Hemingway's protagonists whose value and conflict are deeply rooted in Hemingway's own experience and sense of value.

First of all, I'll examine Santiago's stoic behavior toward foods and their taste in the earlier part of the novella. His attitude towards foods hints at the significant function of foods as medicine based on modern medical science and dietetics in the twentieth century. Secondly, I will demonstrate the symbolic association between the marline and Christ that lays the groundwork for the unification between Santiago and Christ at the end of the novella. By focusing on the meanings of foods and their "taste" in *The Old Man and the Sea*, I shall set out to explore Hemingway's lifelong conflict between religion and his modern sense of values.

2. Foods as Medicines

Gerry Brenner suggests that the great and long-standing vogue of *The Old Man and the Sea* stems from "its remoteness from our world" (Brenner 3), such as the reference to the political upheaval in Cuba in 1950's, and its simple but symbolic story, which "makes Santiago's story meaningful to readers of different ages, cultures, and backgrounds" (Brenner 7). Indeed, at the first sight we scarcely find any direct suggestion about the historical atmosphere and society in 1950's. I contend that Santiago's attitude toward foods, however, reflects the modern and medical value about foods in early twentieth-century America.

In the opening scene of the novella, Santiago, who suffers from a poor catch of fish, does not feel hungry and only drinks a cup of coffee even on the very morning of fishing. He recalls that he once ate the turtle's eggs to "give himself strength" (*OMS* 37) and drank shark liver oil when he was young, because "it was very good against all colds and grippes and it was good for the eyes" (*OMS* 37), though "most fishermen

hated the taste" (*OMS* 37). We can assume from his words that he consumes the turtle's eggs and shark liver oil not for their taste but for their physical effect on his body and vision.

Santiago's soliloquy on the boat shows his practical attitude toward food even more clearly. He frequently states that he must eat fish "in order to keep [himself] strong" (*OMS* 48) and to restore his wounded "hand" (*OMS* 58-59). While he eats the raw tuna meat, he says to himself, "Chew it well . . . and get all the juices" (*OMS* 58), and addresses his own hand, "How does it go, hand? Or is it too early to know?" (*OMS* 59). He continues to ingest tuna, dolphin fish and flying fish despite the fact that he is "not hungry" (*OMS* 59) and the taste of raw dolphin fish is "miserable" (*OMS* 80), as though fish were medicine for his old and damaged body.¹

The motif of foods and drinks as a kind of medicine can be found in Hemingway's other work as well. In *Across the River and into the Trees*, which is published two years before *The Old Man and the Sea*, Colonel Richard Cantwell, who is fifty years old and is dying of heart disease, falls in love with a beautiful girl called Renata, and drinks a martini called Montgomery with her. When they drink the glasses of martini, Colonel Cantwell says, "They have a certain *effect* on me, too, the way Cipriani makes them" (*ARIT* 96; italic mine) and makes an additional order to the bartender Cipriani for "two Montgomerys, super Montgomerys, *with garlic olives*" (*ARIT* 96; italics mine). Shiro Oki writes that Colonel reminds Cipriani of "the garlic olive" because garlic has an "effect" as a fortifier or a tonic medicine and its "effect" is necessary for the elderly Colonel to make love with the young girl (Oki 13). Colonel uses martini with a garlic olive as a medicine for the decline of his sexual energy.

According to Harvey Levenstein, since scientists had discovered protein, carbohydrates, fats, minerals and water in the mid-nineteenth century, American people started to choose food on the basis of nutritional and biomedical discourses (Levenstein 46). For instance, orange was

preferred not only for its taste but also for its high content of vitamin C, spinach for its iron, and raisins was for their rich minerals (Whorton 87-89). Deborah Lupton observes that :

These ideas formed the basis for the discourse that became known as the “new nutrition,” which emerged in the late 1910s and lasted into the 1930s. The “new nutrition” was based on recommendations for selecting food on the basis of its chemical composition rather than other considerations such as taste or appearance. (Lupton 71)

Hence Santiago’s practical attitude toward food as a medicine for restoring his physical strength and curing his physical impotence may come from these new perceptions of food and nutrition in the early twentieth-century America, which Hemingway spent his boyhood.

We must draw attention to Santiago’s attitude toward his “hand” to understand his view on the human body. The old man frequently addresses his own cramped right hand as if it were another character independent of himself: “What kind of a hand is that. . . . Cramp then if you want. Make yourself into a claw. It will do you no good” (*OMS* 58). During the battle with the marlin, he is troubled by the wounded hand, and thinks that “if he [the hand] cramps again let the line cut him off” (*OMS* 85).

Such feeling of separation that a character feels in relation of a part of his body can be equally seen in *A Farewell to Arms*. When the protagonist Frederic swims across the river in order to escape from the front, he considers his operated leg not as part of his own body but as Doctor Valentini’s: “It was his [Doctor Valentini’s] knee all right. The other knee was mine. Doctors did things to you and then it was not your body any more. The head was mine, and the inside of the belly” (*FTA* 231). It is noteworthy, too, that Frederic feels his right knee, left knee, head and belly to be radically separate parts of his body. As

Yasushi Takano observes, Frederic comes to regard his body as a collection of flesh and organs that are partly the doctor's and partly his own after he has undergone surgery (Takano 50-53). Frederic's perception of his body existing individually beyond his control due to injury bears a close similarity to Santiago's attitude toward his wounded hand out of control.

More specific descriptions of the wounded parts of his body and the medical treatment that Frederic might have received in World War I can be found in the short story entitled "In Another Country," as the protagonist undergoes rehabilitation with a machine for bending his stiff and injured leg (*CSS* 207). In the story, the motif of damaged body parts being treated and reformed with a machine and modern medical science is depicted in detail. Takano notes that the patients are instilled with a new perception of the body by the mechanical treatment: namely, that the human body is comprised of parts which can be replaced with artificial products (Takano 51).

Although Santiago is not injured in the war and does not receive medical treatment in a hospital, this idea of the body as comprising parts that can be separated and repaired by modern medical technology has an indirect but decisive influence on Santiago's remark about his body. He treats his cramped hand as an uncontrollable and independent part of body just as Frederic does, and he has a sudden fancy to cut off his hand as though he wished to perform an amputation on his own hand that could be separated or replaced. Viewed in this light, Santiago's concept of food as a remedy for wounded parts of the body can be interpreted as the outcome of the substantial influence of medical science in the twentieth century, which Hemingway experienced throughout his life.

But foods and drinks not only act as medicines for his physical failure. They have a function as a tranquilizer, a drug for healing tension and anxiety. As the story draws to a close, Santiago's conflicting desires to be unified with the marlin and to kill it frequently cross his mind

and confuse him. The complexity of Santiago's wish is represented in a scene where he hopes: "I wish I could feed the fish. . . . He is my brother" (*OMS* 59), while at the same time eating the tuna and saying to himself: "I must kill him and keep strong to do it" (*OMS* 59). On the one hand, Santiago desires to feed the marlin because of his strong fraternity with the creature; on the other hand, he needs to eat what he kills as a fisherman. Santiago hopes to become the fish itself due to his respect to it: "Man is not much beside the great birds and beasts. Still I would rather be that beast down there in the darkness of the sea" (*OMS* 68).

The old man's ambivalent wish of becoming the fish and of killing it not only delays the fulfillment of Santiago's identity as a fisherman that he "was born for" (*OMS* 50), but can also be interpreted as a secret desire for suicide. Indeed, to kill the creature with which he identifies himself amounts to killing himself: "Fishing kills me exactly as it keeps me alive" (*OMS* 106). Moreover, Santiago is sometimes driven by an urge for self-mutilation caused by the bitter experience of his fight with the marlin. Food, which serves as a remedy for recovering Santiago's damaged body, as I have pointed out before, also has an important function as a tranquilizer to settle his nerves that occasionally become unbalanced due to his hard experiences on the boat.

As Santiago considers desperately that "if he [the hand] cramps again let the line cut him off" in the middle of the fight with the marlin, he soon realizes that "he was not being clear-headed" (*OMS* 85), and then tells himself to "chew some more of the dolphin" (*OMS* 85). Though Santiago thinks that "*it is better to be light-headed* than to lose your strength from nausea" (*OMS* 85; italics mine) by eating too much sweet dolphin fish, he finally decides to eat the flying fish: ". . . he picked it up with his left hand and ate it chewing the bones carefully and eating all of it down to the tail. It has more nourishment than almost any fish, he thought. *At least the kind of strength that I need*" (*OMS* 85-86; italics mine). Santiago's words about the meat of the fish

suggest that he regards a proper meal as one through which he can recover his “light-headed” condition, and its nourishment also gives him “the kind of strength” that he needs. In other words, food acts literally as a tranquilizer which helps Santiago to become “clear-headed” again and keeps him from harming himself.

In fact, foods and drinks relieve Santiago’s unbalanced mind and depression incurred from his fight with the marlin. In the scene where Santiago fights with the marlin, he feels an excessive sense of unity with and respect for the fish, which he addresses as follows: “You are killing me, fish. . . . But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who” (*OMS* 92). Even though Santiago notices that he is “getting confused in the head” (*OMS* 92) and “must keep your [Santiago’s] head clear” (*OMS* 92), he cannot stop identifying himself with the fish by thinking to himself: “Keep your head clear and know how to suffer like a man. Or a fish” (*OMS* 92). What is more, whenever Santiago tries to pull and turn the marlin, he feels he is losing consciousness owing to his strong sense of identification with the marlin (*OMS* 93). Finally, he feels “faint and sick” (*OMS* 94) when he kills the marlin with his harpoon, and he tells himself, “Keep my head clear. . . . I am a tired old man” (*OMS* 95), as though he needs to confirm to himself that he is not the dead fish but the old man who killed the fish.

Santiago, who suffers from the confusion caused by his act of killing the fish and his sense of unity with it, takes “a very small drink of the water” (*OMS* 95-96) just after the struggle with the marlin, and then he is “*feeling better* since the water and he knew he would *not go away* and *his head was clear*” (*OMS* 97; italics mine). This sip of water gives Santiago immediate relief from his confusion and depression. In this scene, “a very small drink of water” is more than just water to allay Santiago’s thirst, but an effective liquid medicine for reducing his bewilderment and the dizziness resulting from killing the marline he feels as

his brother or even as himself.

Santiago, having regained his strength and consciousness by drinking some water, would naturally like some more food and drink: "I better put a small lineout with a spoon on it and try and get something to eat and drink for the moisture" (*OMS* 98). The old man's need for drink and food after his success at fishing can be read as a sign of his hope in life. In fact, he takes and eats "the small shrimps" which are "very tiny but . . . nourishing and . . . tasted good" (*OMS* 98). The shrimp is one of the rare meals which he feels "tasted good" when he is on the sea. Considering the connection between Santiago's desire for good-tasting food and for a meaningful life, "the small shrimps" which are "nourishing" and "tasted good" embody the old man's great anticipation of a valuable and rewarding life in the future. Thus the water and shrimps in the final part of the novella act as a tranquilizer to prevent Santiago from harming himself and to regain his balance of mind and hope for the future.

3. Fish and Christ

While "foods" in the novella reflect the modern medical notion about the body and nutrition, they are accompanied by Christian imagery. I would now like to focus on the relation between "foods," especially fish, and Christ. The most noteworthy point in this respect is that "foods" serve not only as the reflection of modern values or the religious conventions but also as the bridge between them.

Many scholars do not hesitate to accept the connection between Santiago who climbs up the road with the mast on his shoulder in the final scene and Christ who ascended the hill of Golgotha bearing the cross on his back. However, we should not ignore the fact that Santiago confesses in the middle of the novella that he is "not religious" (*OMS* 64). Santiago says, "I am not religious. . . But I will say ten Our Fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish and I promise to make

a pilgrimage to the Virgin de Cobre if I catch him. That is a promise" (*OMS* 64-65). While the old man tries to pray "mechanically" (*OMS* 65), he cannot remember the prayer because of his fatigue. Then, he restarts to say his prayers quickly "so that they would come *automatically*" (*OMS* 65 ; *italic mine*).

Santiago's awkward prayer that he will catch the fish resembles Jake's long prayer, which verges on burlesque, for himself, his friends, the bull fighting, fishing and money (*SAR* 97) in *The Sun Also Rises*. Just as Jake's self-interested prayer suggests that he has lost his faith in God due to his traumatic experience in World War I, Santiago's insubstantial prayer, which is said "mechanically" and "automatically," implies his lost belief in God resulting from the many hardships of his life, such as the death of his wife and his continued bad luck at fishing.

Although Santiago loses the reverence for God, the marlin, the great fish which the old man endeavors to hook, acts as the medium to connect Christ and Santiago. As the first stage of the connection between Christ and Santiago, the old man relates himself with the marlin in the early part of the novella. The old man anthropomorphizes the marlin by repeatedly representing the fish's way of eating and strength as "like a male" (*OMS* 49). Besides, Santiago's words—"He [the marlin] is wonderful and *strange* and who knows how *old* he is" (*OMS* 49 ; *italics mine*)—suggest that the fish is "strange" and "old," just like Santiago himself when he tells Manolin, a boy who cares about him, that "I am strange old man" (*OMS* 14). Santiago, the "strange old man," shows his sense of unity with the "strange," "old" marlin by saying that "now we are joined together" (*OMS* 50).

The old man's identification with the fish gradually comes along with his physical likeness to Christ. When the marlin struggles to shake off the hook and pull Santiago down, he thinks as follows: "The wire must have slipped on the great hill of his [the marlin's] back. *Certainly his back cannot feel as badly as mine does*" (*OMS* 52 ; *italics mine*). Santiago suffers terrible pain from the injury on his back caused by the

line and the marlin, just as Christ was beaten with rods. In addition, Santiago is injured on his hand when the marlin dives suddenly into the deep sea: "He felt the line carefully with his right hand and noticed *his hand was bleeding*" (OMS 56; italics mine). A wound in the hand immediately reminds us of the stigma on Christ's hands.

At very moment when Santiago kills the marlin in the last part of the novella, the relationship between Santiago and Christ becomes clearer. When Santiago struck the harpoon "into *the fish's side* just behind the great chest fin that rose high in the air to the altitude of the man's chest" (OMS 94; italic mine), and "then the fish came alive, with his death in him, and rose high out of the water showing all his great length, and width and all his power and his beauty. *He seemed to hang in the air* above the old man in the skiff" (OMS 94; italics mine).

In this scene, the marlin which "seemed to hang in the air" is closely associated with Christ who was hung on the cross, as Arvin R. Wells maintains (Wells 59-60). Santiago who stabs the marlin's side with his harpoon takes the role of Longinus as he pierced Christ's side with his lance in order to finalize Christ's death. In addition to this, considering the fact that the fish is a traditional symbol of Christ, it is convincing that the great marlin hung in the air and speared in his side with a harpoon symbolizes Christ hung on the cross and stabbed with the Lance of Longinus (Halverson 53-54).

Santiago recalls this event as a kind of dream or miracle as follows: "At one time when he was feeling so badly toward the end, he had thought perhaps it was a dream. Then when he had seen the fish come out of the water and *hang motionless in the sky* before he fell, he was sure there was *some great strangeness* and he could not believe it" (OMS 98; italics mine). Santiago's words "there was some great strangeness" show that he regards the marlin which "hang motionless in the sky," suggestive of Christ on the cross, as a kind of supernatural event or the evidence of divine revelation.

The most significant point at this juncture is that when Santiago

eats the meat of the marlin, the conventional Christian imagery and the perception based on modern medical science intermingle. The marlin is attacked by sharks just as Santiago catches it, but then the old man, who is grieved at the loss of the fish, eats a piece of the meat of the fish where the sharks bit: "He chewed it and noted its quality and its good taste. It was firm and juicy, *like meat*, but it was not red" (OMS 106; *italic mine*). This is the most detailed description of the taste of food in the novella. Moreover, the meat of the marlin is represented as the most delicious food in the work as a whole, as though its deliciousness symbolizes the value and nobility of the fish. Santiago's remark about the meat of the marlin— "like meat, but it was not red"— makes a vivid contrast with a tuna that has "dark red meat"(OMS 57). This contrast implies that he regards the marline not as "dark" but "sacred" fish having white flesh. Considering the fact that fish traditionally symbolize Christ, it is reasonable to suppose that Santiago considers the marline as Christ himself. As Wells suggests, Santiago's act of eating the meat of the marlin symbolizing Christ can be recognized as Communion: the eating of the bread and the wine that symbolize the body of Christ (Wells 61). After Santiago eats the meat of the marlin, the most obvious allusions to Christ's crucifixion can begin to be applied to the old man.

When he finds other sharks approaching the marlin just after he has eaten the fish's meat, Santiago cries "Ay" (OMS 107). The meaning of his cry is explained as follows: "There is no translation for this word and perhaps *it is just a noise such as a man might make, involuntarily, feeling the nail go through his hands and into the wood*" (OMS 107; *italics mine*). The man whose hands have been nailed to the wood is no less than Christ. Santiago's terrible and sorrowful experience of seeing the meat of the marlin being eaten by numerous sharks is likened to Christ's Passion. When Santiago reaches the shore and starts to climb up the road with the mast on his shoulder; he "fell and lay for some time with the mast across his shoulder" (OMS 121), just like Christ

who fell down three times as he ascended the hill of Golgotha. The old man, finally, lies down and sleeps in his shack “with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up” (*OMS* 122), in the same pose as Christ hanging dead on the cross. Santiago, who is defeated and wearied to death by the fight with the marlin and the sharks, promises that he will go fishing with Manolin after the storm which significantly will last for “maybe three” (*OMS* 125) days, in the same way that Christ was resurrected three days after his death.

All these similarities between Santiago’s and Christ’s Passion after the old man’s eating of the marlin’s meat show that he finally attains the grace, nobility or even the divinity of Christ by eating the marlin which had been associated with Christ from the outset. The belief that one could attain the glory of Christ by eating his body was initially expounded in Thomas à Kempis’s *De Imitatione Christi*, and has become prevalent in Western societies. Kempis considered that people could gain the divinity of Christ by eating the body of Christ. Kempis speaks to Christ as follows: “You are the sweet refreshment of the soul, and whoever receives You worthily will be a partaker and heir of eternal glory” (Kempis 190). Interestingly, Hemingway possessed a French translation of *De Imitatione Christi* in his library in the 1950s (Reynolds 143), and thus it is no wonder that he should have applied the traditional perception of sacrament to Santiago’s act of eating the marlin as Christ. To put it another way, Santiago eats Christ through eating the meat of marlin that acts as Sacrament.

Eating the marlin as the symbol of Christ is related not only to the traditional imagery of Communion in Christianity, but also to the perception of food grounded in modern medical science. Let me draw attention again to the description of the “taste” of the marlin. Santiago praises the meat of the marlin for “its quality and its good taste. It was firm and juicy, like meat, but it was not red” (*OMS* 106). He implies that the marlin’s meat is a white meat of good quality although its “firm and juicy” taste is similar to red meat. Levenstein mentions that the

health-giving aspects of food drew the interest of middle-class Americans in the early twentieth century through the development of dietetics and a greater understanding of nutrients (Levenstein 59). As a result of this broad diffusion of basic nutritional knowledge, “white meat,” such as the meat of fish and of chickens, was regarded as healthy for its low-fat proteins, while “red meat” of beef and mutton was denounced as unhealthy because their fats caused high blood pressure and cardiac infarction. The white meat of fish, in particular, was counted as one of the main “productive foods,” a concept devised in 1918 to help consumers to choose foods according to their specific nutrients, including eggs, milk and green vegetables (Whorton 90). Hence, Santiago’s concern about the color of the marlin meat suggests his sense of values about “healthy” food based on modern dietetics and medical science.

The concept of “healthy” food is closely related to the concepts of morality and even religion. Lupton states that in western cultures “good food tends to be associated with the nutritious and the healthy, with purity, nature, the rural, asceticism, moral righteousness, the family, work, self-control and discipline, the everyday, duty, the sacred and the spiritual, with adulthood” (Lupton 154). In short, eating good, healthy, natural food is linked with morality, self-restraint and spirituality. By eating the white meat of the marlin, Santiago thus gains in physical health and mental purity because he eats both a productive food and Sacrament at the same time.

In the early part of the novella, Santiago’s act of eating shows the conflict between his modern “self” and the conventional community. Pasi Falk writes of the relationship between food and the traditional community that “sharing and incorporating food in a ritual meal implies the incorporation of the partaker into the community simultaneously defining his/her particular ‘place’ within it” (Falk 20). On the other hand, “the role of the meal as a collective community-constituting ritual has been marginalized” (Falk 25). Lupton refers to the connection between modern “self” and the choice of food as follows: “It is the individual

body that makes decisions on what is taken into the body and the self and this judgment of ‘taste’ becomes crucial to self-formation” (Lupton 18).

Santiago leads a solitary life without either religion or neighbors, and does not eat and drink as much as the other fishermen do, even though Manolin devotedly prepares meals for him. Moreover, Santiago takes the turtle’s eggs and shark liver oil despite the fact that “most fishermen hated the taste” (*OMS* 37). Santiago’s stoic attitude toward foods and drinks and the difference in his eating habits from the other fishermen indicate that he has become isolated from the community by his own volition. All these factors show how Santiago’s eating habits at the beginning of the work express his solitary situation and his sense of “self” being isolated from the traditional community.

However, the act of eating the marlin provides Santiago with the solution for his inner conflict between his modern self and the conventional Christian society. When the marlin, as the incarnation of Christ, is eaten by the sharks, the old man deliberates thus on religious topics such as sin and the saints :

Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish. I suppose it was even though I did it to keep me alive and feed many people. But then everything is a sin. Do not think about sin. It is much too late for that and there are people who are paid to do it. Let them think about it. You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish. San Pedro was a fisherman as was the father of the great DiMaggio. (*OMS* 104-05 ; italics mine)

Although Santiago suspends judgment about the issue of “sin” for lack of time and knowledge, this is the first time that he, who has previously declared himself to be “not religious” (*OMS* 64), ponders religious matters seriously. Santiago is obviously proud to find a similarity between himself and San Pedro, or Saint Peter, in his profession.

After the long speculation about “sin,” Santiago eats the meat of the marlin and begins to assume the character of Christ as though he has received Communion. As the origin of the word “Communion” implies, receiving the Sacrament means the sharing and communication of thoughts and doctrine between the flock of Christ and his priests. Though the act of eating the marlin as Sacrament, Santiago is, to echo Falk’s phrase, “eating into one’s body/self and being eaten into the community” of traditional Christianity (Falk 20).

4. Conclusion

In the early part of the novella, Santiago’s stoic eating habits represent his sense of alienation from the conventional community and the formation of a modern self that does not accommodate traditional Christian doctrine. In the final part of this work, which was the final masterpiece that Hemingway published in his lifetime, Santiago assimilates himself with the orthodox imagery of Christianity, while at the same time maintaining his modern self by eating the meat of the marlin as Sacrament. As Kempis calls the holy bread “the medicine of salvation” (Kempis 190), Santiago who considered himself as “not religious” (*OMS* 64), holds Communion with the conventional Christian community at last. So that he sublimates his hard life and death in the future in Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection. By the fusion of the medical context of food in the twentieth century and the old symbolism of food in Christianity, he accomplishes the union with Christ without losing his modern sense of value.

The Old Man and the Sea is, in important ways, a work about eating and being eaten. The marlin eats the sardines offered as bait, the sharks eat the marlin, and the old man eats the fish of the sea, including the marlin. As Santiago says, “everything kills everything else in some way” (*OMS* 106) in order to survive. “Food is a liminal substance,” Paul Atkinson says, which “stands as a bridging substance between na-

ture and culture, the human and the natural, the outside and the inside” (Atkinson 11). Therefore, foods in the novella are not less significant than wonderful meals in Hemingway’s other works. Through foods as “bridging substance,” Santiago undergoes an internal conflict between the traditional Christian community and his modern sense of values, and finally achieves a harmonization of religion and the self. The names of Santiago is versions of the name of Jacob who wrestles with an angel on his journey in the Book of Genesis. The old man struggles with an angel, or the marline, and then he reconciles his modern sense with the traditional beliefs of Christianity by eating the marline as Christ.

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Note

¹ Hemingway’s own experience of diet during the creation of *The Old Man and the Sea* is also reflected in Santiago’s stoic notion about food as a medicine for getting himself into shape. On 11 and 12 April in 1951, the very year Hemingway started to write *The Old Man and the Sea*, he complained about his diet in a letter to his editor, Charles Scribner :

Then keeping your weight down to keep your blood pressure down is a daily damned job. Eat three rye-crisps for breakfast, then a few carrots, young radishes and green onions from the garden when I finish work. Light lunch and either nothing or a peanut butter sandwich for dinner. (Baker, *Letters* 722)

On May 18, about one month after this letter, Hemingway writes again to Scribner, “About my diet : I train myself as well as I can” (Baker *Letters* 726), and then, just one day after the second letter, he tells Scribner about the vitamin B 1 capsules he has been prescribed by a doctor for counteracting “any nervous effect from alcohol” (Baker, *Letters* 727) and about an episode from his childhood when he learned to eat vegetables after suffering from constipation due to his unbalanced diet.

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