

The Old Man & the Sea and the 'contagious' effect at the Fugard

 By [Terry Levin](#)

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Following the adaptation of Paul Gallico's *Snow Goose*, which played to sold-out houses in April this year, Contagious Theatre is back at the Fugard Studio with the adaptation of Ernest Hemingway's masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea*.

The original story is about an ageing fisherman's struggle against a giant marlin off the coast of Cuba. If your first thought of Cuba is the Che Guevara t-shirt or Fidel Castro, the association is real.



The author and Fidel Castro knew each other and shared a love of fishing; Hemingway dedicated his 1954 Nobel Literature Prize to the Cuban people.

Cut to the Fugard where the plotline of the old fisherman pitting himself against the fearsome adversary is brought to life under the artistic direction of Jenine Collocott, who has won numerous awards including Fleur du Cap and Naledi Awards for Best Design and Director.



A multiplicity of colourful quayside characters

It is Collocott's consummate stage craftsmanship and signature masks that enable the actors James Cairns, Taryn Bennett and Jaques De Silva to embody a multiplicity of colourful quayside characters.



Clever staging succeeds in adding visual interest via a carousel of scene changes – sure to keep even the most attention-deprived audiences engaged. Together with Sue Grealy's original music score, Jaques de Silva's singing voice and banter weave a thread of humour and enhance the evocation of the play's Spanish flavour.

Special mention must go to James Cairns. His moving portrayal of the heroic Santiago, embroiled in the epic battle against the mythical marlin and predatory sharks is a riveting high point. Cairns is offset by de Silva and the charms of Taryn Bennet, who plays both the apprentice Manolin and female love interest.



Enduring mystique

Perhaps the enduring mystique of the story lies in the authenticity and appeal of fishing life with its symbiotic relationships between man and oceanic depths – like Johah and the Whale, *Moby Dick* and this story – that serve as metaphors for the hope and courage required to overcome the limitations imposed on us by others and which we impose on ourselves.

Concepts such as human potential, faith, the relationship of boy to man, bonds of masculinity, heroic determination and even allegorical associations with Christian archetypes such as fishers of men and the tragic hero pinned to the mast, have all been attributed to Hemingway's themes. The beauty of theatre is that unlike any other screened entertainment, it provides a *tabula rasa* onto which viewers may project their associations and meaning.



There's even an African connection to be rediscovered in *The Old Man and the Sea*.

Apart from supporting the prodigious talents of local artists, the Fugard Theatre – with its festive atmosphere, welcoming communal spaces and the smell of freshly popped corn – offers more worthwhile reasons to leave the comfort of the couch, even on a cold winter's night.

The Old Man and The Sea is on show at the Fugard Theatre Studio till the 24 August. Tickets available via thefugard.onetix.com.

The Contagious Theatre's The Old Man and The Sea is an adaption of Ernest Hemingway's Pulitzer and Nobel Prize winning short novel (1952): by Nick Warren and Jenine Collocott.

Performers: James Cairns, Taryn Bennett and Jaques De Silva.

Direction and design: Jenine Collocott

Original music: Sue Grealy

Old Man puppet: Alida van Deventer

Masks: Jenine Collocott

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