

The Endless Horizon: Gaining and Suffering of Santiago

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords: Existential, philosophical, Struggle, Suffering, Allegory.

Received : 15.02.2026

Revised : 15.06.2026

Accepted: 25.06.2026

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ABSTRACT

This article explores and delves into the profound symbolic and existential aspects of *The Old Man and the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway with the theme of suffering, resilience, and human growth through the development of the character Santiago. Through his endless struggle against the marlin, Santiago represents the struggle of human existence in which victory and suffering are interwoven in one journey. The purpose of this paper is to examine the way in which Hemingway develops the inextricable connection between a personal suffering, and the quest for a meaning in life, arguing that although the challenges which face Santiago overwhelm him, it is through this very struggle that he finds the experience of growth and affirmation of his dignity as a human being. This study draws upon existential philosophy and psychoanalytical theory as a theoretical guide, in an attempt to show how Hemingway uses the techniques and symbolization of his narrative to reveal deeper philosophical themes. The analysis concludes that Santiago's story is a universal allegory for the human condition where the value of the struggle for it far outweighs the outcome.

INTRODUCTION

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952) is one of Hemingway's most influential writings that portray the solitary plight of Santiago, an aging fisherman, as he wages a war against a huge marlin in the Gulf Stream. The novel not only speaks to Hemingway's unique style, minimally written, it also explores some deeper philosophical themes such as suffering, sacrifice, and the idea of human perseverance (Fustes et al., 2021). The text touches on great themes of human perseverance, the fragility of victory and the existence questions that characterize human existence. At its most basic level, *The Old Man and the Sea* depicts an age-old struggle between two fundamental forces, man and nature, but the conflict which Hemingway lifts it with is a deeper philosophical conflict, the conflict between meaning and a universe with no guarantees. Santiago the protagonist is an instance of an archetype of endurance. He is the symbol of the existential individual, trapped in a struggle with the forces of the universe which are beyond his control but for which he struggles for some way of imposing his will. The dichotomy between man's quest for his goals and the intrinsic suffering that accompany such endeavours are summed up in the title of the novel which is *The Old Man and the Sea*. Santiago's journey is not only a physical one but also emotional and psychological as he deals not only with the harshness of the nature but also his own doubts, insecurities, and the passing of the time. Through the detailed study of Santiago's battle of the marlin, this paper attempts to analyze the duality of his journey and his gains and his suffering. While the eventual capture of the marlin is a form of victory, the suffering that he is put through in the process makes the concept of victory complicated. This paper explores how Hemingway uses these themes to explore the whole human experience, in which there is meaning to be found in struggle, and suffering is an intrinsic part of gaining. By analyzing the novel from the perspectives of existentialism and psychoanalysis, this paper will argue for how Hemingway portrays the complexities of human dignity, identity, and the struggle to find meaning in life.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* has been widely analyzed by critics, who have considered its existential, psychological, and symbolic elements. One of the most prominent themes in critical literature is the novel's treatment of the theme of suffering and the quest for meaning. Many scholars have interpreted Santiago's struggle as a metaphor for the human condition and the argument in this interpretation is that like Santiago, individuals are continually faced with challenges that seem impossible to overcome but in the end are only an agent of transformation (MEANING, n.d.). Hemingway's portrayal of the sea has also attracted much attention, with some of the commentators including (Denton, 1996) arguing that the sea is a symbol of both the physical and psychological worlds that offer a home for human existence. The sea is the place of sustenance and hardship as the duality of life is. For Santiago it is a great uncontrollable power which gives him his life for about as

much as it challenges his will and represents the unpredictable aspect of the life. The novel's treatment of isolation has been yet another important theme for study by scholars. Hemingway presents Santiago as someone who is isolated and separated from society and his peers. However, (Blanchard, 2016) argues that this isolation is not necessarily a bad thing but an integral part of Santiago's self-realization. Santiago's time in isolation causes him to confront his inner most fears and desires and for this he becomes a more complete person at the end of his journey. His inner conversation, reflecting upon his past as well as his hopes and dreams, becomes an important tool by which he finds his own strength and meaning.

In addition to interpretations of an existential nature, there have been psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel, which have delved into the psychological complexities in Santiago. Some critics (Muñiz-Velázquez & Pulido, 2019) have proposed that Santiago's obsession with the marlin represents a deeper and unconscious desire for control and immortality. His struggle, then, is not only with the outside forces of nature, but with his own mortality. This is consistent with (Freud, 1917) theories on the "death drive" in which Santiago's willingness to suffer could be argued to have been an attempt to prove his existence in a world that is indifferent to him. *The Old Man and the Sea* has been the subject of numerous analyses and interpretations by critics who have explored its existential, psychological and symbolic themes. Faulting is a major issue to explore in critical literature, and the suffering and search for meaning in the novel are among the most prominent. Many scholars have seen Santiago's fight as a metaphor for the work of the human condition, in that human always encounter feats that appear insurmountable, but ultimately are the catalyst for transformation (Baker, 1972) and (Gurko, 1968). This shift is based on what (Morton, 1980) terms Hemingway's code hero, who expresses "grace under pressure" while facing a "existential dread. There has been a more extensive study of sea depictions. As (Sylvester, 1966) has commented, Hemingway pictures the sea (la mar) as an active source of physical support and mental hardship. The sea, which is a power over which human beings have no control, as much as it gives life it also, puts human will to the test, which symbolizes the unpredictable in human life. Isolation has been one of the novel's many themes which scholars have found to be important. Hemingway describes Santiago as being isolated and separate from society and his peers. But as (Walton, 2022) contends, it is not just a social absence but a provocation that is central to Santiago's process of self-realization and spiritual orientation. As Santiago travels in isolation, he is left to face his deepest fears and desires, making him a more whole person at the end of his journey. Through his inner monologues, which consider his past as a young man in Africa and his link with the boy Manolin (Jobes, 1968), his inner fight is made an important means through which he is able to draw psychological strength (Rosenfield & Rosenfield, 1997).

Alongside its existential more literal readings, psychoanalytical readings also have explored the profound psychological complexity of Santiago.

(Galenson, 2006) and (Larson, 2011) argue that Santiago becomes so focused on the marlin because his pursuit is an unconscious attempt to redeem his waning masculinity, authority and ultimate control over time. His battle is thus as much against himself as it is against the natural elements. This fits well with the theories of Freud (1917) on mourning and the ego; Santiago's openness to suffering can be interpreted as a psychological process in order for him to justify his very own being in an indifferent universe, a means (Weeks, 1962) calls self-justification. Whatever we may think, include their differing commentaries in this mountain, one central meaning links all of these views: *The Old Man and the Sea* is a profoundly insightful reflection on the nature of success and failure (Wagner-Martin, 2000), and often of course it is about the effort that counts most (Donaldson, 1977). Santiago's endeavour to catch the marlin falls inevitably short because he loses his catch to the sharks; yet, in his physical failure, the sense of his struggle and perseverance and his dignity in the face of complete defeat gives his journey much meaning, greatly illuminating the human condition (Savola, 2001) and (Hinchliffe, 1963).

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative analysis approach. The analysis involves close reading of some of the relevant passages in the text with particular focus upon Santiago's inner monologue, his physical struggle with the marlin, and the symbolism associated with the sea and the fish. The goal is to uncover the thematic elements of the suffering, perseverance and human dignity and representational of these elements. By careful examination of Hemingway's structure of the works, their character development and their uses of symbolism, the study shall interpret the novel's reflection of the broader concerns from both the philosophy and psychology. The analysis is accompanied by secondary sources that are critical essays and scholarly works discussing *The Old Man and the Sea* from the existential, psychological and literary views. These sources assist in placing the novel in a wider context in terms of philosophical dialogues into the existence of man, its sufferings, and meaning. Additionally, psychoanalytic criticism also plays a role in this paper's discussion, as one may also try to explore in depth the psychological underpinnings of Santiago's character, understanding in what ways Santiago's internal desires and unconscious motivations influence the course of his actions and interactions with the world around him.

RESEARCH RESULT

The Result includes an exploration of the themes of suffering, struggle and the personal growth as embodied in *The Old Man and the Sea* by Santiago. Hemingway's description of Santiago's struggle with the marlin is a profound commentary on the human condition, in which the quest for meaning and personal dignity is often hand-in-hand with immense suffering and existential challenges. Santiago's journey, which initially seems to promise an easy win, becomes more and more complicated as he runs into a struggle that moves beyond the physical realm and into the psychological, emotional and philosophical realms of the human experience.

DISCUSSION

Existential struggle and suffering of Santiago

Santiago's struggle against the marlin can be read in terms of existentialism and the work of Albert Camus in particular and his "absurd hero" of *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). In this philosophy, the hero is confronted with an indifferent and meaningless universe and goes on with the struggle, not because the battle will win, but because the battle is a worthy struggle. Santiago's resolve against the odds of success, his dogged hunt for the marlin against exhaustion, hunger and the cost taken on his body, speaks to Camus' notion that life is fundamentally absurd. Yet, in the struggle meaning is made. Camus argues, "One must imagine Sisyphus happy," (Lampe, 2017b) and implies that it is not the accomplishment of the goal that is of value, but the trying to accomplish it. This speaks volumes to the experience of Santiago. Although he catches the marlin, his victory is short-lived and the fish is consumed by sharks before he can get back to shore. However, Santiago's effort, perseverance and dignity in his struggle are a symbol for the existential belief that the act of struggling for meaningful goal is more significant than the tangible result. His uncompromising battle against the marlin is a parallel to the hero of existence's refusal to surrender to despair in the face of the absurdity of the indifference of the universe.

The Sea as the Symbol of the Indifferent Universe

The sea in Hemingway's novel is more than a setting, it is a symbol for the great, existential challenge that humankind encounters. In many ways the sea represents an indifferent universe, and reminiscent of the existentialist concept that world means nothing, and does not support the individual. Santiago in his isolation on the sea is faced with his own vulnerability and powerlessness. The sea is in this sense a metaphor for the existential void in which Santiago (like all humans) must struggle to put meaning onto an indifferent world. The vastness and the insecurity of the sea qualify the insecurity and the chaos of human life. Santiago thinks about the sea: "La mar is the mother of all," (Hemingway, 1952, p. 72) recognizing it's nurturing and destructive power. This duality of the Sea as nurturing and also destructive is used to suggest the ambiguity of human existence. While the sea does give Santiago his livelihood and sustenance, it is also the place of his suffering. His existential struggle is paralleled by the ever changing and wet-inconsolent nature of the sea - for human is to navigate through the unpredictability of the meaning, death and life.

Santiago's respect of the marlin and the sea demonstrates his knowledge of the relationship between life and death; suffering and death. The fish, even though it is an enemy, is a worthy opponent, its battle with which emerges in the last, as a struggle for mutual recognition, the recognition of Santiago's existence and dignity, and the marlin's existence as a worthy enemy. The sea in

its irresponsible enormity is a powerful force against which Santiago has to exercise his human will. Santiago's Transformation and the Role of Pain

Santiago's suffering is a central element to his character development, as well as to thematic structure in the novel. Pain because it is both physical and psychological is an inevitable part of the human condition and contributes to Santiago's own personal growth. His physical suffering -- the exhaustion, the cramps, the thirst, and the deep physical competency of the fight -- are inextricable from his emotional and spiritual journey. As he struggles with the marlin, Santiago has to go through his vulnerability and isolation. The pain that he suffers helps him to come to an understanding of his limitations and his mortality. Hemingway writes that, "He was an old man who fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days now without taking a fish" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 9). This is an early description of Santiago's isolation and it bears the theme of solitude, a theme that runs throughout the novel. However, it is due to this loneliness and pain that Santiago finds meaning in his battle with the marlin. As he suffers physically he thinks of his past and his personal failings and his need to prove himself to not only to others, but to himself. This suffering doesn't come out as being meaningless, but more as a process that allows Santiago to find his inner strength. In his reflect, he adds "Pain does not matter to a man" which means suffering is an integral part of his identity as a fisherman and as a homo-sapiens (Hemingway, 1952, p. 90). Santiago's suffering becomes his redemption in which he becomes more self-aware. This is an important insight in existential philosophy where suffering as well as struggling are important in creating meaning in life.

Psychological Implications of Santiago's Isolation

Santiago's isolation is another important part of his persona since it functions to highlight his existential crisis and to underline the psychological ramifications of loneliness. Although Santiago does not have any physical companions during his journey, it is his inner dialogue that relates him to the outside world. The psychological complexity of Santiago character is reflected by the way he talks to himself, the marlin and the boy, Manolin. These monologues address his inner struggle and his conflict with reconciling the two - his individuality and his need for connection. Psychoanalytic interpretations of the novel suggest that Santiago's obsession with the marlin is brought on by his subconscious drive to prove himself, not only as a fisherman, but as a person who can overcome a formidable enemy. The marlin, in a psychoanalytic sense, can be seen to be a projection of Santiago's id - his primitive and unrelenting will to impose some sort of a control on an indifferent world. Freud's idea of the death drive, the unconscious drive towards destruction, may here be also relevant. Santiago's unquitting fight with the marlin is his unconscious fight with death, that final challenge in life. The marlin is the other, the opponent who does not abandon to fate, the ultimate existential threat, but in overcoming it asserted in himself his power over his fate.

Victory and Defeat: The Relationship of Success and Defeat

Santiago's victory over the marlin is, however, hollow when the fish gets eaten by sharks before he is able to bring it to shore. This tragic twist hits up the theme of impermanence and vulnerability of human achievement. Despite his tremendous effort, Santiago's victory is elusiveness, embellishing an inherent inconsequence of the human endeavours in an indifferent world. This outcome is consistent with Camus philosophy that life is often meaningless as a result of efforts made by outside forces that are beyond a human's control. However, in defeat, Santiago's humanity is affirmed. However, Santiago's dignity has nothing to do with the success of his struggle or the failure, his refusal to cease fighting. Even though the fish is lost he reflects, "He was not a man to be defeated. . .he had fought it in the day and in the night" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 122). This declaration sums up the existential notion that it is the fighting that holds victory and not the victory. Santiago's resistance and persistence to failure is the very action of growing as the person he or she is. The sharks killing the marlin are forces of entropy and inevitability of decay. In many ways they are the outside forces that are being constantly deployed to destroy man's accomplishment. Santiago's fight with the marlin is symbolized with his fight against these forces. However, the loss in this battle is not so much to his power, but, rather, speaks of the complexity of the human experience, where suffering and defeat are not mutually exclusive and where personal dignity and character can prevail in spite of them.

Santiago as the Symbol of Human Dignity

In spite of the defeat, the character of Santiago is human dignity. Through his internal and external struggles, he transcends the concept of success in terms of external factors and the more existential notion of dignity; one that is fluid from the struggle itself. Santiago's rejection to succumb to despair in the face of impossible odds illustrates the nature of his character: as a man who refuses to let his failures define his character. This is the very argument of Hemingway's philosophy for the novel, that the struggle is where actual meaning can be found. Hemingway's rendering of Santiago's battle with the marlin is a rich commentary on the human condition, in which the search for meaning and personal dignity is often accompanied by unspeakable suffering and existential challenges.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *The Old Man and the Sea* is a poignant exploration of the themes of suffering, struggle, and human dignity. Through the character of Santiago, Hemingway pursues the existential battle of man against nature, whereby the very aspect of battle defines the human experience. Santiago's journey is one of perseverance with victory not as what happens externally, but as what happens internally to sustain the fortitude to suffer and continue in the fight. The use of symbolism, narrative structure and character development by Hemingway is an attempt to bring out the complexity of human existence. Santiago's struggles against the marlin are part of the larger human struggle for

meaning in a world that does not offer any guarantees. In this light, the novel provides profound perspectives in value of persistence, importance of dignity and inevitability of suffering in human condition.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Methodological Scope: The research of this study purely employs a qualitative method of textual analysis or in other words close reading which is applied to the solutions of *The Old Man and the Sea* novel. This method is good for topic development but lacks research on the audience reaction to it and comparison with other cultures.

Theoretical Binarism: While the paper, as the title suggests, tries to connect existential philosophy and psychoanalytical thinking, it tends to simply deal with the two gigantic bodies of thought (Camus and Freud), potentially flattening out some of the very particular and historical/political concerns of Hemingway's late works. Further research could expand on the united psychological-existential perspective used here and incorporate ecocritical or post-colonial theories into an exploration of the relationship between Santiago's inner 'ego' and the changing 'colonial' world in the 1950s. **Comparative Studies:** A comparative study could be undertaken between Santiago and other "absurd heroes" in modern literature so as to trace the work between subconscious drives and existential dignity over the span of literature.



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