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SURVIVAL FITNESS OF SANTIAGO IN ACHIEVING FREEDOM AND MEANINGFULNESS OF LIFE IN *THE OLDMAN AND THE SEA*

HARITHA

Assistant Professor, Department of English, VISTAS.



ABSTRACT

“Man is condemned to be free because once thrown into the world, he is responsible for everything he does”. Searching for meaning becomes the predominant struggle during the twentieth century. After two massive destructive wars, people started searching their place and position in their living world. As the result, people started questioning about their freedom and life. Twentieth-century Existential philosopher Jean-Paul- Sartre comes out with the greatest ideology of life, in his work *Existentialism is a Humanism*. Where he states that existence of a person is prior to his or her essence. This core concept of Sartre turns into a backbone of Hemingway's noble winning work, *The old man and the sea*. The Leading character Santiago struggles to attain freedom and meaningfulness of life. Throughout the story, Santiago will be trying to catch fish in the sea but unfortunately, he fails every time. When he caught a huge size fish and which became food for sharks and dolphins. The author consciously showed Santiago's struggles in the sea for three days along with sharks and with his jackpot fish Melvin. Hemingway symbolically represented the fish as Santiago's freedom and meaningfulness of life. The struggles which he underwent to find the eternal meaning of life can be compared with entire human being's struggle in attaining meaning and freedom of life. This paper deals with the survival fitness of Santiago in achieving freedom and meaningfulness of life in *The old man and the sea*.

Keywords: Existentialism, freedom, survival fitness, struggle, Santiago, Melvin.

Introduction

Existentialism is a French philosophy which emphasizes individual existence, freedom and choice. It can be defined as human being defining their own meaning in life, and try to make rational decisions despite existing in an irrational universe. It focuses on the basic questions of human about his/her existence in the world and also the feeling that there is no purpose or explanation at the core of existence. Existentialism originated with the 19th-century philosophers Soren Kierkegaard, and Friedrich Nietzsche, although neither used the term in their work. In the 1940s and 1950s, French

Existentialist such as Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus (1913-1960) and Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986) wrote scholarly and functional works that popularized existential themes, such as dread, boredom, alienation, the absurd, freedom, commitment and nothingness. They believed that the greatest good was to rouse the individual to an awareness of himself and his freedom. My whole life, Kierkegaard wrote in his papers and journals is an epigram calculated to make people aware (23).

Existential philosophy starts by doubting the reality of the perceptible world of objects and things. But the critique of objective knowledge

cannot always remain at the idealist stage. It must push its investigations further, beyond the opposition of subject and object, beyond the perceptible world. This sphere of primary life is that of existing and existence. To exist for man is to dwell within himself, in his own authentic world, rather than to be at the mercy of the social and biological world. At Kierkegaard's time, my existence is like that of a piece of the chessboard, of which the opponent says; that piece cannot move - like a deserted spectator, for my time is not yet come. (Kierkegaard, papers 4 journals, 1839).

Existentialism believes that there is no god or any other transcendent force, the only way to counter nothingness is by embracing existence. Existentialists state that personal experience and acting on one's own convictions are essential in arriving at the truth and that the understanding of a situation by someone involved in that situation is superior to that of a detached, objective observer. It is similar to the concept of subjectivism. The main ideologies of existentialism are atheistic, theological or agnostic. French Philosopher Nietzsche proclaimed that God is dead and that the concept of God is obsolete and the important factor for Existentialist is the freedom of choice - "to believe or not to believe". Jean-Paul Sartre in his *being and Nothingness* (1943) defines two types of realities which lie beyond our conscious experience: the being of the object of consciousness and that of consciousness itself. The object of consciousness exists as "In-Itself". However conscious, sadness is always consciousness of something and the unity of self is understood as a task for the for-itself rather as a given. Simone de Beauvoir, another important existentialist spends much of her life alongside Sartre, and she wrote about feminist and existential ethics in her works, including *The Second Sex* (1949) and *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1947).

Existentialism begins with the often - quoted slogan; existence precedes essence. It seems to be arguing that philosophers and philosophical traditions so far have been concentrating on what is common to all human beings. In other words, there is an overemphasis on what constitutes the essence of man, which is understood in various ways. While the religious and theological literature links it with

god, the secular and rational traditions have been emphasizing on human nature which was often identified with universal rationality. Existentialism is not a philosophical school like rationalism or empiricism. It is hard to isolate common doctrines from the writings of the various existential thinkers, who subscribe to diverse views. Most of the existentialist thinkers emphasize the importance of individual man living his own life, rather than just being a member of the crowd.

Initially, the existentialist often undertook an analysis of modern life in terms of the specializations of both manual and intellectual labour and secondly, of a notion that we can call immanence. Existentialism in literature has keywords of Existence, essence, personal choice, aesthetic stage, religious stage, metaphysical conception of truth, the death of God, freedom, existential situation, authentic existence, inauthentic existence, and existence precedes essence, dasein contingency. Existentialism initiates a new style and method of philosophizing with new objectives and goals.

The notion is that humans exist first and then each individual spends a lifetime changing their essence or nature, in a simpler term, it is a philosophy concerned with finding "self " and the meaning of life through free will, choice and personal responsibility. Belief is that people searching to find out who and what they are throughout their lives as they make choices based on their experience, beliefs, and outlook. Mostly, Existentialist believes that a person should be forced to choose and be responsible without the help of laws, ethnic rules or traditions. Existentialism takes into consideration the underlying concepts of human free will; human nature is chosen through life choices, a person is best when struggling against their individual nature, fighting for life.

The Old man and the Sea was an enormous success for Hemingway when it was published in 1952. At first glance, the story appears to be an extremely simple story of an old Cuban fisherman (Santiago), who catches an enormously large fish then loses it again. But, there's much more to the story that is survival fitness of twentieth-century people, trying to exist in the world which author

clearly depicted through the character Santiago. *The Old man and the Sea* helped to revive Hemingway's recognition as the world-renowned writer- with the award of the Nobel Prize for literature.

Hemingway pays great attention to the skill and dexterity of survivalist technique in Santiago's use of coping with the fish. When Santiago lets the fish have enough line so that it won't break his pole, which depicts the humanistic struggle of living life in the absurd world. In this work, with the fish and the boat he dragged out to the sea for three days and it portrays the pain of getting success. The existential feeling of the human clearly put forth in this work, when the protagonist looked upon the sea and knew how alone he was now. But he could see the prisms in the deep dark water and the line stretching ahead and the strange undulation of the calm. The clouds were building up 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. (OMS 68).

Hemingway brings to the fore the power and masculinity of a simple man - in a simple habitat. It is important to first consider a couple of the basic precepts of a protagonist who seek meaning and order in a chaotic and meaningless universe. Similarly, the existentialist struggles with his own sense of alienation and isolation in order to define him or herself. With these tenets in mind, it becomes quite obvious how these things readily apply to Hemingway's *The Old man and the Sea* and the novel as a whole, there is no reason or meaning to the old man has lost his luck at fishing; there is no sense of order or justice in the sharks taking his catch. "Unless sharks came, he said aloud. If sharks come, God pity him and me" (OMS 77). Yet through the crucible of these experiences, the old man's character is revealed

The character Santiago in *The Old man and the Sea* represents a noble and tragic individualism revealing, what a man can do in an indifferent universe which defeats him, and Hemingway's mature view of the tragic irony of man's fate; that no abstraction can bring man an awareness and understanding of the solidarity and interdependence without which life is impossible; he must learn it, as

it has always been truly learned, through the agony of active and isolated individualism in a universe which dooms such individualism. No one should be alone in their old age, he thought. But it is unavoidable. I must remember to eat the tuna before he spoils in order to keep strong. Remember, no matter how little you want to, that you must eat him in the morning. Remember, he said to himself. (OMS 54).

Hemingway chose to render the existential dilemma of alienation and isolation quite literally through character Santiago, by having Santiago initially to ostracize and then set adrift, alone, for three days in his skiff. Though Santiago does not, find meaning and order as exists in his beloved baseball box sources he does seem to find an inner peace that will stare off his sense of isolation and alienation, by thinking about the small boy who came to learn fishing from him. "I wish the boy was here," he said aloud and settled himself against the rounded planks of the bow and left the strength of the great fish through the line he held across his shoulder moving steadily towards whatever he has chosen. (OMS 56). These lines hedge his life from emptiness and happiness. The extreme struggle in survival is the battle between physical and mental feelings which was neatly analyzed in *The Old and the Sea* when Santiago must battle both physically and mentally against the nihil and its ultimate negation of human enterprises.

In this novel, sea compared as his source of life and fishes considered to be as his freedom and meaningfulness of life. In order to attain meaningfulness of life, he was fishing continuously though he fails every time. This shows the survival fitness of the protagonist. The novel opens with the adjective which everyone calls the old man, as an unlucky old man because every time he goes for fishing with positive thoughts, he returns with the empty hand. But he never cared his failure and his emptiness. He boosts his failure by dreaming about the lions. At last, when he hooks the great marlin, he fights him with epic skill and when the sharks come, he is determined to "Fight them until I die", because he knows that "Man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated". (OMS 131) Santiago struggle with the great fish and his fight

against the sharks, however, and beyond the love and the brotherhood which he comes to feel for the noble creature he must kill, there is a further dimension in the old man's experience which gives to these their ultimate significance. I wish I could feed the fish, he thought. He is my brother. But I must kill him and keep strong to do it. Slowly and conscientiously he ate all of the wedge-shaped strips of fish (OMS 67). For in killing the great marlin and in losing him to the sharks, the old man learns the sin in to which men inevitably fall by going far out beyond their depth, beyond their true place in life. "I killed him in my self-defence," the old man said aloud. "And I killed him well" (OMS 120).

In the first night he struggles with the great fish, the old man begins to feel loneliness and a sense almost of guilt for the way in which he has caught him; and after he has killed the marlin, he feels no pride of accomplishment, no sense of victory. "I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish," he said. "Neither for you nor me. I'm sorry, fish." (OMS 124) Rather, he seems to feel almost as though he has betrayed the great fish; "I am only better than him through trickery", he thinks, "and he meant me no harm". When the sharks come; it is almost as a thing expected, nearly punishment which the old man brings upon himself in going far out "Beyond all people, beyond all people in the world". And he hooking and killing the great fish. He has driven his harpoon deep into the marlin's heart, and the blood of the great fish, welling from his heart, leaves a trail of scent which the first shark follows. He tears huge pieces from the marlin's body, causing more blood to seep into the sea and thus attract other sharks; and in killing the first shark; the old man loses his principal weapon, his harpoon.

The shark closed fast astern and when he hit the fish the old man saw his mouth open and his strange eyes and the clicking chop of the teeth as a drove forward in the meat just above the tail. The shark's head was out of the water and his back was coming out the old man could hear the noise of flesh ripping off the big fish when he rammed the harpoon down on to the shark's head at a spot where the line that ran straight back from his nose. There was the only heavy sharp blue head and the big eyes and the clicking, thrusting all swallowing

jaws... (OMS 115) Thus, in winning his struggle with the marlin and in killing him, the old man sets in motion the sequence of events which take from him the great fish whom he has come to love and with whom he identifies himself completely. Ultimately, Santiago represents every man's struggle to survive. And just as Santiago's effort to bring the Marlin back to land intact is doomed, no man can ever escape death. Yet through Santiago's struggle, Hemingway makes the case that escape from death is not the issue. As Santiago observes near the end of his struggle with the marlin, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated". In other words; victory over the inevitable is not what defines a man. Man's struggle against the inevitable, even when he knows it is inevitable, that defines him. And the more difficult the struggle, the more worthy the opponent, the more powerfully a man can prove himself. The fish is my friend too, I have never seen or heard of such fish but I must kill him. I am glad we do not have to try to kill the star (OMS 85, 71).

The survival struggle between his meaningfulness of life and the sharks depicts the existential feeling of every human being. When we are living in the absurd world and finding meaning the of life, we face the same struggle and confidence as the Santiago does in *The Old man and the Sea*.

Hemingway certainly appears to be interested in the battle between life and death. His novella shows how death can invigorate life. If we compare *The Old man and the Sea* with Hemingway's study bullfighting in death in the afternoon, we see how killing and death brings men to an understanding of his own mortality his own power over it. This consideration prepares the ground for applying an existentialist perspective to the novel's Christian allegory, which reaches its climax in Santiago's Crucifixion. Shouldering his heavy mast like a cross, he starts to climb up the hill but has to collapse in fatigue and then reshoulder the mast five times before reaching his shack. The old man's struggle for survival of life shows that this novel undoubtedly deals with the theme of existentialism.

The Old man and the Sea by Hemingway considered being a noble winning piece of literature because of the survival fitness of every human being

in finding the existential meaning of life. Existentialist philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre says that existentialism is nothing other than the existence of a person prior to his essence. Hemingway's protagonist Santiago explicitly undergoes the ideology of Sartre; a Man can be Destroyed but not Defeated.

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