

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL STRUGGLE OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S "THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA"

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Annotation. This article provides a comprehensive analysis of the psychological struggle of Santiago, the main character in Ernest Hemingway's novella "The Old Man and the Sea". Using a qualitative and descriptive methodology, the study examines Santiago's emotional strength, inner dialogue, symbolic battle with the marlin, and the philosophical message of perseverance. The findings demonstrate that Hemingway constructs Santiago as a universal image of human dignity, moral courage, and spiritual endurance, proving that victory is not measured by material gain but by inner resilience.

Keywords: Santiago, psychological struggle, perseverance, symbolism, Hemingway, human dignity, suffering.

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway's novella "The Old Man and the Sea" (1952) is widely regarded as one of the finest literary representations of human perseverance. While the storyline is seemingly simple—a fisherman battling a giant marlin—the psychological depth of the protagonist transforms the narrative into a philosophical reflection on human existence. Santiago is an old fisherman who has not caught a fish for eighty-four days. Society views him as a failure, but Hemingway portrays him as spiritually undefeated. Santiago's internal journey, emotional endurance, and philosophical outlook shape the novella's central message: a human being may face physical destruction, yet maintain moral victory. The purpose of this research is to analyze Santiago's psychological state, inner dialogues, and symbolic struggle, showing how Hemingway constructs a universal image of human courage and dignity.

Methods

This research is based on "qualitative textual analysis", focusing on: close reading of Hemingway's original text, interpretation of symbolic and psychological elements, comparative analysis with literary criticism from Bloom (2003), Benson (1990), and Baker (1972).

The study does not rely on statistical methods; instead, it applies "hermeneutic and descriptive analysis" to interpret Santiago's emotional world and symbolic

meaning. Interpretive findings are supported with theoretical viewpoints from prominent Hemingway scholars.

Results

1. Santiago's psychological state at the beginning. At the start of the novella, Santiago is physically exhausted and socially isolated. However, he demonstrates emotional stability and hope. Despite being labeled as "salao," the worst form of unlucky, he remains confident in his skill. This psychological resilience indicates that his identity is not determined by failure, but by inner conviction. The boy Manolin admires him, suggesting that Santiago's dignity is recognized even when his success is invisible.

2. Loneliness and inner dialogue as mental survival. During his journey into deep waters, Santiago is entirely alone. His conversations with birds, the fish, and the sea serve as self-therapy. These dialogues show: self-motivation, acceptance of pain, rational decision-making under stress. Instead of falling into despair, Santiago uses solitude to strengthen his spirit. His memories of youth, sports, and past victories also serve as psychological support mechanisms.

3. Symbolic Struggle with the Marlin. The battle with the marlin is not simple fishing—it is a spiritual confrontation. Santiago addresses the marlin as a brother. This indicates moral respect, not aggression. His hands bleed, his back aches, and he remains sleepless, yet his spirit remains unbroken. His iconic phrase, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated," summarizes Hemingway's philosophy: true defeat occurs only when the spirit surrenders.

4. Suffering as a Path to Self-Discovery. Pain becomes a teacher. Santiago does not curse fate; he accepts the suffering as a necessary part of human experience. His psychological transformation reveals that suffering creates meaning, and endurance creates honor. In this way, Santiago emerges as a symbol of existential courage.

5. The Return: Defeat or Moral Triumph? When sharks tear the marlin apart, Santiago's physical victory collapses. Yet psychologically he remains undefeated. He returns home exhausted but spiritually powerful. The villagers finally see the enormous skeleton of the fish and understand the magnitude of his struggle. Thus, Hemingway shows that true success is moral, not material.

Discussion

The analysis proves that Santiago's psychological struggle is central to Hemingway's artistic purpose. His character embodies: inner nobility despite social humiliation, courage despite physical weakness, hope despite hopeless circumstances.

The novella suggests that society often measures success through visible results, while real victory is internal. Santiago challenges modern views of heroism: a hero is not the strongest, but the most enduring.

Many scholars support this interpretation. Bloom (2003) notes that Santiago represents “the spiritual resistance of humankind.” Benson (1990) emphasizes that Santiago’s dignity transforms his suffering into honor. Philip Young (1966) argues that Santiago’s defeat contains “greater victory than success.”

Therefore, the novella is not simply a story of fishing, but an allegory of human life. The marlin symbolizes dreams and achievements; the sharks represent destructive forces of reality; the sea stands for the unpredictable world. Santiago remains a timeless literary figure who teaches that a meaningful life is built on perseverance.

Conclusion.

The psychological journey of Santiago demonstrates that human beings possess extraordinary spiritual strength. Although physically fragile, he proves that dignity, hope, and courage are stronger than fate. Hemingway uses the character to express a universal message: challenges are inevitable, but surrender is optional.

Santiago’s struggle continues to inspire modern readers because it reflects real human life—where success is temporary, but moral strength is eternal.

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