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SANTIAGO'S OPTIMISM IN HEMINGWAY'S *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

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ABSTRACT

Optimism is a truly positive characteristic that is attractive to many people. Often in old age people often become less optimistic and more pessimistic. In the novel *The Old Man in the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, Santiago can be seen as wise optimistic older man. Santiago is surprisingly happy throughout his old age; much of this might have come through wisdom. His faith and courage through bad situations helps to develop him into a remarkable character. Life is nothing until it is lived; it is a man that gives meaning to it. This research paper focuses on the reflection of "optimism" in Ernest Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. The concept of hero whose triumph consists of stretching his own powers to their absolute limits regardless of their physical results gives *The Old man and the Sea* an existential approach. It confronts us with the man who is not capable of making an ultimate effort but makes it successfully and continuously. As an existential being, one should think of the entire humanity while making a choice and it is truly

observed in Santiago's relation with his foe, the marlin. Both Santiago and the marlin are linked together literally and metaphorically in the struggle for survival. This paper identifies Ernest Hemingway as an outstanding American writer who believes in continues struggle to achieve something better.

KEYWORDS: *The Old Man and the Sea* , truly positive characteristic, remarkable character.

INTRODUCTION

The research paper entitled "Santiago's optimism in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*", establishes the significance and relevance of the key terms introduced in the key statement.

This paper identifies Ernest Hemingway as an outstanding American writer. He is described as on optimistic writer who believes in continuing struggle to achieve something better. He looks upon life as a kind of struggle and challenge. His approach is neither defeatist nor negative in nature even though he is a writer of a lost generation, of an era of chaos and disillusionment.

Although Hemingway was writing years before existentialism became a prominent cultural idea, his questioning of life and his experiences as a searching member of the lost generation gave his work existential overtones and we can see glimpses of existentialism in one of his famous novels *The Old Man and the Sea*.

"A man can be destroyed but not defeated." (1) These words spoken by Santiago, the central character in *The Old Man and the Sea* depicts the inevitable optimism and courage not only of Santiago but of Hemingway also. There is no doubt in that Hemingway was fully occupied with the technique of shaping his own personality and his personal experiences into his works and characters. His novels are not merely fiction but



they are the picture of life itself.

The Old Man and the Sea- Enduring and existing forever

Optimism is a major component of Ernest Hemingway's fiction. We see the focus on the strength and perseverance of the individual, the underlying theme that we create ourselves, existence before essence. It's the responsibility of Hemingway's characters to create their essence, act as if something has meaning and create a type of moral code.

It is very difficult to generalize the characters of any writer. So is the case of Hemingway. Hemingway's depiction of his characters is so real that they resemble life-like characters. They can be divided into two types: Hemingway's protagonists and Hemingway code hero. Persons who are beaten by violence and war are the protagonists and the persons who have inherited honour and courage to get through their life are code peruse. Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea* is the best example of Hemingway code hero. This Hemingway code presents human endeavour, courage, heroism, affirmation, optimism and existence as against the pressure of disheartening elements upon him. Through this code, Hemingway has shown that man's life is full of struggles and it is man himself who has to act and dare to face them with determination. Hemingway seems to believe in Arthur Hugh Clough's oft quoted line, "Say not the struggle not availeth."

Hemingway was not only a brilliant writer but he was fully stuffed with craftsmanship also. *The Old Man and the Sea* is the best example of this virtue of Hemingway. This novel is an account of Hemingway's personal struggle, alienation and affirmation. It is a crafted piece created by Hemingway, the craftsman.

Life is nothing until it is lived; it is man that gives meaning to it. Existence precedes essence. If God does not exist, there is at least a being with whom existence precedes essence. That being is man. That being is Hemingway's Santiago. The hero, Santiago is a master but he has no luck anymore. He has faced the failure to catch the fish for 84 days but he does not lose hope. The boy Manolin says about him, "There are many good fisherman and some great ones. But there's only you" (56). In fact, he is not merely a fisherman; he is a fisher of men. Santiago, though worsted, refuses to be defeated. He believes in victory. "But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated (78). He does not lose hope even after his failure to catch the fish for 84 days. And on the 85th day, he catches a big fish, a marlin. Santiago believes that luck does its work only when a man's efforts go along with it. He believes that to hope and to do are the complement of each other. Luck has its place in some sense in a man's life and he may hope it from day to day but it doesn't have any meaning unless the man can endure pain.

Optimism is a truly positive characteristic that is attractive to many people. Often in old age people often become less optimistic and more pessimistic. In the novel *The Old Man in the Sea* by Ernest Hemingway, Santiago can be seen as wise optimistic older man. Santiago is surprisingly happy throughout his old age; much of this might have come through wisdom. His faith and courage through bad situations helps to develop him into a remarkable character. One of the various ways, Santiago's positive attitude on life shines through in the book, is when the little boy leaves his boat. Manolin is forced to leave Santiago's boat due to his father is convinced that Santiago is unlucky. Instead of being upset, however, Santiago never gets discouraged over his luck and keeps trying. Santiago also does not lose heart over the boy leaving. He is even happy for Manolin that he will be on a luckier boat. This shows his kind heart and his never-ending faith. In Santiago's old age his luck has run out and he has become poor. This doesn't stop him from being happy, though. He continues to fish and love Manolin. This is most likely because Santiago looks for happiness and health not wealth. Material possessions are not first in his mind. In fact, they are close to last. This state of mind helps Santiago to be more carefree and live for what really counts. Santiago's passion for fishing helps to keep him going in life. In the battle with the marlin there are many times when he could have given up, yet he kept going. Throughout the whole battle he continued to talk and encourage himself. He kept a positive view on the outcome. Even after the first days he kept a straight state of mind and did what

was needed to stay alive.

The world not only contains the possibilities of heroic adventure and emotion to which everyone, on whatever level, can respond but it also has continuity. Santiago is very old and has not much time left. But indeed he is the clearest representation of the hero because he is the only major character in Hemingway who has not been permanently wounded or disillusioned. To be a hero, one is to do something greater, is to be ready for greater dangers and is to take more risk without caring for defeat and death. The concept of hero whose triumph consists of stretching his own powers to their absolute limit regardless of the physical results give *The Old Man and the Sea* special place among its author's works. It confronts us with a man who is not capable of making the ultimate effort, but makes it successfully and continuously.

Man is a free being; he can choose anything for himself. What we choose is always the better; nothing can be better for us unless it is better for all. It means that in making a choice, we should think of the entire humanity. According to existentialism, everyman is to be treated as an end in itself and never as means. Each man has the responsibility for creating values. In creating values, he is choosing freedom and responsibility. He cannot choose evil. He will choose good as good is always positive affirmation of the self. Unethical action is the contradiction of the self by the self which results in 'Mauvaise foi' or self-deception. The search for values must be undertaken in the phenomenon of man's choosing. In the act of choosing, man brings value to being.

There was a great struggle between Santiago and the marlin. This struggle lasted for a long time. Yet Santiago in spite of being tensed, respects his foe, the marlin. He says to fish, "I'll stay with you until I am dead!" He says "Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends" (28). At first, Santiago feels that it is a sin to kill the fish, but then he convinces himself:

You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and sell for food.
 You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman.
 You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after.
 If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more? (94-95).
 Again he says, "I killed him in self defence, and I killed him well" (95).

Santiago's respect for his great adversary turns to love as he realizes that both of them are linked literally and metaphorically in the struggle for survival. He was feeling guilty too for having to kill the fish. "I shouldn't have gone out so far, fish... I am sorry fish"(110). And also "I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both"(116). An extraordinary thing had happened for somehow or other a reverence for life's struggle. This veneration for humanity, for what can be done and endured and this grasp of man's kinship with the other creatures of the world and with the world itself a victory of substantial proportions. It is the knowledge that a simple man is capable of such decency, dignity and even heroism and that his struggle can be seen in heroic terms, and largely distinguishes this book. For the knowledge that man can be great, and his life great, might be in itself an approach to greatness. To have had the skill, then to convince others that this is a valid vision in Hemingway's vision. The experience that Santiago gains is an incommunicable one but it is not without value to the community of men. He is proved as a champion of mankind for men and not for himself.

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