

A Reflection Of The Theme: Isolation And Perseverance In Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man And The Sea

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Abstract:

The Old Man and the Sea by Hemingway explores the themes of loneliness and resilience through the narrative of Santiago. He is an elderly fisherman enduring a prolonged period of misfortune. Despite the disapproval of his fellow fishermen, Santiago is determined to fruitful fishing and plans to cross the Gulf Stream. His epic struggle with a gigantic marlin over three days illustrates his extraordinary perseverance and unwavering determination. Although Santiago ultimately returns to the village with just the marlin's skeleton after sharks attack his catch, his journey highlights the courage inherent in perseverance. Perseverance in the face of adversity captures the essence of the human condition, and a novel persuasively shows how isolation, both emotionally and physically, may develop inner strength. The story of Santiago's lone struggle becomes an epic narrative of triumph over adversity and the strength of the human spirit. This research paper investigates Santiago's isolation, unwavering courage and enduring patience, which guide him towards a triumphant victory in his life.

Keywords: isolation, perseverance, determination, endurance and redemption.

Introduction:

The Old Man and the Sea is Hemingway's seventh popular novel published in 1952 when he was alive. The novel gains immense popularity in America and abroad. Hemingway was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1953 and it was a contributing factor in his obtaining the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954. In The Old Man and the Sea, isolation and perseverance are two themes that Ernest Hemingway portrays in a very skillful manner. It is the story of old fisherman Santiago who lived a solitary life in Cuba. He experiences emotional isolation due to his disconnection from the town and its inhabitants,

compounded by his physical alone on the enormous sea. Despite his deep affection for boy Manolin, Santiago confronts his significant challenge with the marlin without support. Santiago's personality is defined by his determination. His resolution to catch the marlin and then protect it from the shark shows perseverance. His firm devotion to his work, even when he was ill, tired, and had lost his loving wife. Hemingway demonstrates him as a powerful example of the strength of the human spirit.

Isolation explores the state of being separated, either physically or emotionally, from others, often resulting in feelings of loneliness and a sense of being cut off. It can be a consequence of life events or self-imposed and can have a profound psychological impact. Isolation can be categorized into several types: physical isolation, which involves separation due to location; emotional isolation, where individuals feel disconnected despite physical presence; self-imposed isolation, chosen due to fear or a desire for solitude; and social isolation, characterized by a lack of social interaction. The psychological impacts of isolation include loneliness, depression, increased anxiety, difficulties in forming relationships, and reduced self-esteem. In literature many writers narrate the theme of isolation. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* depicts Gatsby's isolation stemming from his unfulfilled pursuit of Daisy and his inability to connect with others, leading to his downfall. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* explores the consequences of isolation through Victor Frankenstein and his creation, emphasizing both physical and emotional detachment. Lastly, Jhumpa Lahiri's *Mrs. Sen's* illustrates the isolation faced by an Indian immigrant woman in America, highlighting her struggles with language and cultural barriers.

Perseverance is another theme used by Hemingway in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Perseverance is the ability to persist through challenges and obstacles, maintaining focus and determination to achieve goals. It fosters resilience and personal growth by turning setbacks into learning opportunities, emphasizing the importance of continuing efforts despite adversity. It is a key factor in success, demonstrating unwavering commitment to goals despite obstacles. The theme of perseverance in literature emphasizes people's capacity to overcome obstacles and attain their objectives through resolve and diligence. This concept is often shown through people confronting challenging situations or seeming insuperable obstacles. Prominent instances encompass, Langston Hughes' poem 'Mother to Son', employing a staircase metaphor to illustrate the challenging journey of perseverance; Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life*, highlighting her victory over physical obstacles; and Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*, examining survival and perseverance in a desolate environment. The

protagonists in Hemingway's novels are shown as having a quiet perseverance that allows them to fight despite difficult circumstances.

Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is a classic novel that examines themes of hardship, perseverance, and the human experience. The old fisher man, Santiago lives in a small village by the sea and goes fishing every day but returns with his empty skiff. Being without a catch of the fish, he has to suffer a lot. Due to his poverty, he lived in a very small shack. He has very little to eat and depends on the neighbors and the boy Manolin. Hemingway narrated in the story that Santiago has suffered 84 consecutive days without a catch, resulting in the townspeople seeing him as unfortunate. He describes the man's isolated condition:

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.
[OMS,1]

During the first forty days, he had been accompanied by a boy. However, when it had been forty days since the boy had last eaten a fish, his parents informed him that the old man is now absolutely and totally *salao*, the word used for the most unfortunate sort of bad luck. Being an old man Santiago shivered in a chilly morning and he was shaking with fear. On the other hand, he was aware that he would soon be rowing and that he would be shivering himself warm. It had been a long time since he had enjoyed eating, and he had never brought a lunch with him. One bottle of water was all that he need for the day, and it was stored in the bow of the skiff where he was sailing. His wife passed away early from his life. He had no children of his own. He lived lonely and solitude life. Bereft of the relation he established a very cordial relationship with his employee, Manolin. Manolin look after him like an employer, friend with fatherly respect. Santiago didn't want to remember his past. Because his past gave him pain and he felt tormented. To keep himself aloof from the memories of his wife. He put down his wife's photo from the wall so that he could not feel alone:

On the brown walls of the
flattened, overlapping leaves of
the sturdy fibered guano there
was a picture in color of the
Sacred Heart of Jesus and another
of the Virgin of Cobre. These were
relics of his wife. Once there had
been a tinted photograph of his
wife on the wall but he had taken
it down because it made him too

lonely to see it and it was on the
shelf in the corner under his clean
shirt.

[OMS, 9]

This is a poignant excerpt that reflects Santiago's deep personal loss and an emotional connection associated with his wife. It evokes his sense of longingness and solitude, capturing how material things can preserve memories and yet sometimes become too painful to confront.

Santiago caught big fish in his past. He harpooned big marlins and sold them in the nearest market. In his youth he was one of the successful fishermen who went deep into the sea where no one dare to go. Far beyond in the sea, he caught and fought with the massive shark and defeated them. He recalled he was the strongest man on the dock. He had played the hand game with the great Negro from Cienfuegos. In the words of Bob Corbett:

Hemingway celebrates the courage and raw guts of this old man, even recounting a time in Casablanca when he had spent an entire day in an arm wrestling match with a much larger man in a seaside tavern. Hemingway celebrates a concept of humans as beings who go it alone, fierce, brave, courageous without even thinking about it, oozing strength from the nature of the best of the species. [Corbett, Book Review, 127]

In a hand wrestling match between Santiago and a strong Negro competitor, the combat is so intense that his hand wrecked and the blood ran under their fingernails. The atmosphere is charged with tension, and the Negro nearly gains the upper hand at one point. Santiago ultimately prevails, earning the title of "The Champion" and breaking the Negro's confidence. However, Santiago decides to retire from hand wrestling to protect his fishing hand, as his left hand is unreliable for matches.

Santiago, hindered by physical ailments and advancing age, lacked both professional assistance and contemporary fishing gear, such as motorboats and safety lines, resulting in his failure to capture marketable fish. Going into the deep sea his fellow fishermen caught the fish every day. Successful fishermen in Havana were involved in the process of catching sharks. They butchered their marlin and transported them to the fish house, where they waited for the ice truck to transport

them to the market. The shark factory was located on the other side of the cove, where they were hoisted, removed, and salted. The successful fishermen were able to make a profit from their catch. Returning with the empty skiff became Santiago's daily routine. The town's people and his fellow fishermen laughed at him and ridicule him telling salao. His sole companion the boy became very sad by this situation of his master:

It made the boy sad to see the old man come in each day with his skiff empty and he always went down to help him carry either the coiled lines or the gaff and harpoon and the sail that was furled around the mast. The sail was patched with flour sacks and, furled, it looked like the flag of permanent defeat. [OMS, 5]

Hemingway depicts the stark reality of defeat. He describes the patched sail as 'the flag of permanent defeat'. The empathetic sorrow the boy feels for the old man amplifies the emotional weight. The old man was too naïve to contemplate when he had achieved humility. He recognized that he had achieved it, understood that it was not dishonorable, and acknowledged that it included no diminishment of genuine pride. Notwithstanding the situation, Santiago persists in his determination. He decided to dive far into the Gulf Stream in pursuit of a significant catch. He wanted to show the people that he was not a salao. He planned and told the boy to remain at home because he didn't want to take a risk of the boy in far of the sea where was the kingdom of terrible sharks.

Whatever equipment available taking it into the skiff, the old man set out for his expedition to save his dignity as self-respect. Facing many obstacles and enjoying the wonders of nature he reached into a deep fathomed sea. He explores the Gulf Ocean, observing the Gulf weed and fish congregating in deep, seven hundred-fathom depths. He admires flying fish and birds, but feels sorry for the delicate dark terns. The ocean can be cruel and sudden, making birds like sea swallows too delicate for the sea. According to him, the beauty and cruelty of sea, contribute to the unique and delicate nature of its creatures. Far deep into the sea he throws his baits. He noticed the movement in one of his baits. He was happy feeling the gentle pulling and then he felt something hard and unbelievably heavy. It was the weight of the fish and he let the line slip down, down, down, unrolling off the first of the two reserve coils. As it went down, slipping lightly through the old man's fingers, he still could feel the great weight, though the pressure of his thumb and finger were almost imperceptible.

The fight between the huge fish marlin and Santiago begins. Marlin fight for his life while the old man fights to prove his ability. The long fight exhausted both of them. The huge fish with heavy weight was not task of single man while Santiago was the man with many disabilities for catching or killing the fish. His skiff is so small to bear the weight or carry the fish to the shore. Whenever the fish jerked and circle around the small boat Santiago felt himself in danger. Days and nights passed between their struggles to overcome. Santiago's strength began to down. He became tired and injured by pulling the rough and thin wire. In the tug of war his left hand deeply cut down by the sharp wire pulled by marlin. He shivered by pain and the blood flow. He told the fish: "I'll stay with you until I am dead" [OMS, 31].

Santiago, being alone in a far, deep dark ocean, felt worry of himself. Sometimes he thought his decision was wrong to be in far sea. On the other hand, choosing to give up can be seen as a betrayal of his own values, beliefs, or identity. He feels like a form of self-destruction by abandoning the very essence of his life. Shuichi Chiba comments: "Even though this mission is suicide, giving up and letting go would also be a sort of suicide, because he has betrayed who he sees himself as" [Shuichi Chiba, Book Review, 5]. He was caught himself in a big trouble. His determination does not allow him to skip the mission return to home as usual he lived. He wanted to show the boy that he was not misfortunate. He thought himself: "No one should be alone in their old age" [OMS, 28]. He knew no man was ever alone on the sea. He faces solitude, his memories and inner resilience keep him tethered to the broader human experience.

Santiago passed his night deeming lions are the symbol of his young days. The fish was squirming deep into the sea. He suddenly boomed and jumped up alongside the skiff. The old man frightened. The jerk of the fish again wounded his left hand. He looked across the sea and knew how alone he was now. He talks himself: "How do you feel, hand?" he asked the cramped hand that was almost as stiff as rigor mortis" [OMS, 34]. He had no feeling of his left hand but he braked all he could with his right and the line rushed out. Finally, his left hand found the line and he leaned back against the line and now it burned his back and his left hand. His left hand was taking all the strain and cutting badly. He gained all his strength and succeeded in killing the fish while it was begun to circling near the side of the skiff. He killed the fish with strong blow of harpoon in its head. Santiago's triumph over marlin became the ultimate example of his strong perseverance in the adverse situation.

The fish is so big that he could not load the carcass into his boat. So, Santiago strapped the bloody fish to the side of his boat. By doing that, Santiago basically invited every shark for

miles around to come enjoy a ton of free fish. During his return sail, the blood of marlin spread in the sea which invites the sharks for attack. Santiago faced another peril of the sharks in the night. First shark attack on marlin he consumes the big part of flesh from the marlin's body. Hemingway describes:

He took about forty pounds, the
old man said aloud. He took my
harpoon too and all the rope, he
thought, and now my fish bleeds
again and there will be others.
[OMS, 58]

The old man's thoughts reveal the emotional weight of his losses. The shark took about forty pounds of flesh. Then many sharks attacked and devours the marlin as each shark rips enormous chunks out of the marlin, Santiago loses more and more of the fish despite his valiant attempts to repel them by stabbing them in the head with his spear. Even with the fact that just the fish's 18-foot skeleton remains.

Santiago is grateful to have made it back to shore alive. Too weak and exhausted to deal with the remains, he leaves the fish skeleton by the boat and slowly carries the boat's mast back up the hill to his little shack where he falls asleep. Although Santiago returns to the town devoid of visible prizes, his journey affirms his courage and steadfast disposition. Santiago's success with the marlin gives him hope for his future. He will no longer be the failing fisherman but the victor of his village.

Santiago embodies perseverance as he finds profound meaning and satisfaction in his relentless struggle against life's challenges. His existence revolves around the fight against misfortune, where pride and self-worth are tied to his vocation. Despite enduring physical pain and repeated failures, he remains tenacious, viewing his work as a passionate endeavor rather than a mere survival tactic. Santiago rejects passive acceptance of fate, instead embracing the chaos of his battles, which infuse his life with purpose. He asserts that humanity is destined for resilience, famously stating, "But man is not made for defeat". [OMS, 59]. His journey reflects themes of existential struggle, highlighting that while physical defeat may occur, the spirit remains unconquered. Santiago's unwavering dedication and dignity in the face of suffering exemplify the human spirit's capacity for perseverance, demonstrating that meaningful existence arises from steadfast effort and the courage to confront life's absurdities.

Conclusion:

Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is the novel that examines themes of isolation, perseverance. Santiago, epitomizes loneliness, detached from his community

and its members. Despite his profound fondness for Manolin, Santiago fight with an enormous fish, His determination to capture and defend valued fish demonstrates his perseverance and dedication to his profession. Both of these concepts are delicately woven throughout the story, with the narrative emphasizing that isolation may be used to create inner strength and self-sufficiency, while perseverance is essential for overcoming challenges.

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