



EXISTENCE AND ABSURDITY IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S "THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA"

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Abstract

Ernest Hemingway's novella "The Old Man and the Sea" explores profound themes of existence and absurdity through the struggles of Santiago, an aging fisherman. This article examines how Santiago's relentless battle with the marlin serves as a metaphor for the human condition, emphasizing resilience in the face of life's inherent absurdities. By delving into Santiago's isolation, the futility of his efforts, and his embodiment of the tragic hero, the narrative highlights the complexities of finding meaning in an indifferent world. Ultimately, Hemingway's work invites readers to confront their own struggles and find purpose in the act of striving.

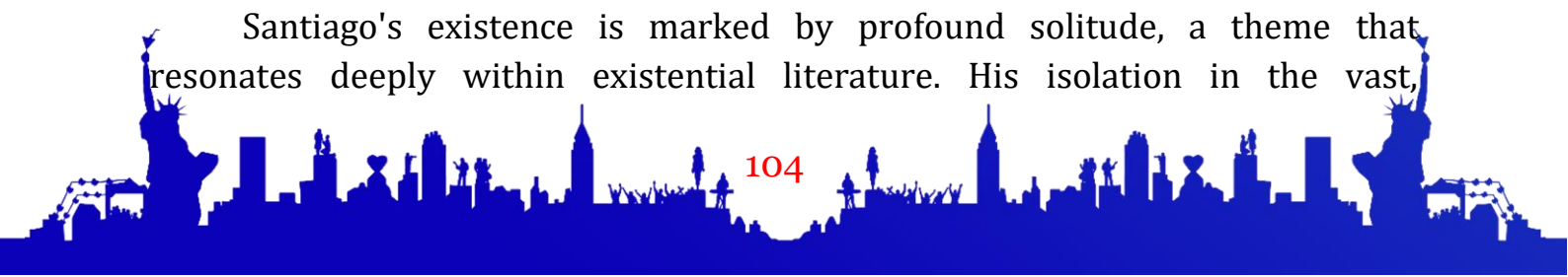
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Ernest Hemingway's novella "The Old Man and the Sea," published in 1952, is a profound exploration of human existence and the inherent absurdity of life. Through the struggles of Santiago, an aging fisherman, Hemingway delves into themes of resilience, isolation, and the search for meaning in a world that often seems indifferent to human suffering. This article examines the existential and absurdist concepts within the narrative, highlighting how Santiago's journey reflects the complexities of the human condition.

The Struggle for Existence

At the heart of "The Old Man and the Sea" is Santiago's relentless struggle against the marlin, which serves as a poignant metaphor for the broader human experience. This struggle encapsulates the essence of perseverance, showcasing how individuals confront the challenges of existence. Santiago, despite his advanced age and physical limitations, embodies the spirit of resilience that is often necessary to navigate life's adversities. His determination to catch the marlin reflects an existential belief: that individuals must forge their own meaning through their actions, even when faced with seemingly insurmountable odds.

Santiago's existence is marked by profound solitude, a theme that resonates deeply within existential literature. His isolation in the vast,





unyielding sea mirrors the human condition, where individuals often grapple with their own struggles in silence. This solitude is not merely a physical state; it represents the emotional and psychological landscape of human life. In the quiet vastness of the ocean, Santiago confronts the inherent uncertainties of existence, reflecting the universal truth that we often face our deepest battles alone.

The old man's relationship with the marlin transcends mere competition; it evolves into a profound connection that underscores Santiago's identity as a fisherman and, more broadly, as a human being. The marlin becomes more than just a fish to catch; it symbolizes Santiago's aspirations, dreams, and the very essence of his being. This relationship illustrates how struggles can foster deep connections, serving as a reminder that our challenges often define who we are.

Through this ongoing struggle, Hemingway emphasizes that existence itself is a battle—one fraught with difficulties, disappointments, and existential dilemmas. Santiago's fight against the marlin is not just a physical contest; it is a representation of the human spirit's quest for purpose and meaning in a world that often appears indifferent. As he battles the marlin, he grapples with his own fears, doubts, and the relentless passage of time, ultimately revealing the complexities of existence.

Moreover, Santiago's determination to triumph over the marlin serves as a testament to the human spirit's resilience. Each pull of the fishing line signifies not just a struggle for survival, but a refusal to succumb to despair. This unwavering resolve invites readers to reflect on their own lives, encouraging them to confront their challenges with the same tenacity that Santiago exhibits.

In essence, "The Old Man and the Sea" serves as a profound meditation on the struggle for existence. Through Santiago's relentless pursuit of the marlin, Hemingway captures the essence of what it means to be human: to fight against the odds, to seek meaning amidst chaos, and to acknowledge that the very act of striving is what gives life its depth and significance. Santiago's journey becomes a universal symbol of resilience, illuminating the path for those who grapple with their own existential struggles.

The Absurdity of Life

Hemingway's portrayal of absurdity is evident in Santiago's experiences, particularly in the aftermath of his epic battle with the marlin. After finally catching the fish, Santiago faces the harsh reality of losing it to sharks. This loss encapsulates the absurdity of his struggle; despite his immense efforts, the outcome is ultimately meaningless. The marlin, once a symbol of





accomplishment, becomes a mere skeleton, highlighting the futility of human endeavors in the face of nature's indifference.

This theme of absurdity resonates with existentialist philosophers like Albert Camus, who argued that life is devoid of inherent meaning. Santiago's journey reflects this philosophy; he fights against the marlin not just for survival, but to affirm his existence in a world that seems apathetic to individual struggles. The novella illustrates how the pursuit of meaning can often lead to disillusionment, yet it is through this struggle that one can find a sense of purpose.

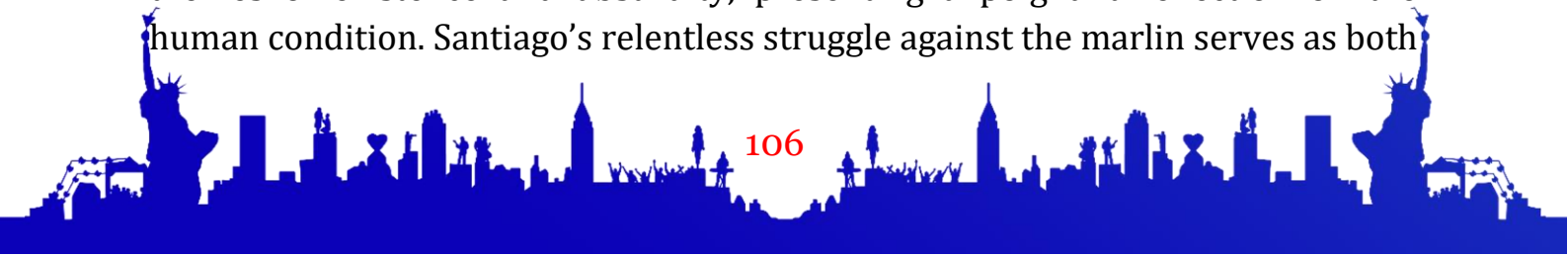
Santiago: A Tragic Hero

Santiago embodies the qualities of a tragic hero. His unwavering resolve and dignity in the face of adversity highlight the essence of the human spirit. Although his battle with the marlin ultimately ends in loss, it is his courage and perseverance that define him. In existential terms, Santiago's struggle represents the human capacity to confront the absurdity of life with grace and resilience.

Hemingway's depiction of Santiago's character challenges the notion of success and failure. Rather than focusing on the outcome, the narrative emphasizes the importance of the struggle itself. Santiago's journey becomes a testament to the idea that meaning can be found in the act of striving, regardless of the result. His mantra, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated," encapsulates the essence of existential thought: that the human spirit endures, even in the face of absurdity.

In my view, "The Old Man and the Sea" encapsulates the essence of the human spirit and its capacity for resilience. Santiago's journey resonates deeply with anyone who has faced adversity, reflecting the universal struggle to find meaning in life. Hemingway's portrayal of the absurdity of existence serves as a reminder that while outcomes may be beyond our control, the act of striving itself is what defines us. The novella inspires readers to confront their challenges with courage and determination, emphasizing that true fulfillment lies not in success, but in the unwavering pursuit of our goals. Santiago's mantra, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated," serves as a powerful affirmation of the enduring strength of the human spirit, a message that is particularly relevant in today's complex world.

In "The Old Man and the Sea," Ernest Hemingway masterfully intertwines themes of existence and absurdity, presenting a poignant reflection on the human condition. Santiago's relentless struggle against the marlin serves as both





a metaphor for the existential quest for meaning and a commentary on the absurdity of life's outcomes. Through Santiago's journey, Hemingway encourages readers to confront the challenges of existence with courage and resilience, illustrating that while life may be inherently absurd, the act of striving itself can imbue our lives with purpose and significance. This enduring message resonates with readers, inviting them to reflect on their own struggles and the meaning they derive from them.

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