

HEMINGWAY'S SANTIAGO: A STUDY IN EXISTENTIALISM, INDIVIDUALISM AND INTERDEPENDENCE

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Since the time of Plato and Aristotle theorists have striven to characterize the essential elements in a work of art, and these explain its ability to pass from the world of the personal and the finite to that of the transpersonal and infinite. Each creative artist has his or her own sensitivity and mode of dealing with his or her material and each seeks to answer questions about certain basic problems confronting humanity—the problem of existence, interdependence and independence etc. The outlook of the artist may vary but all art strives for permanence. The artists who have the ability to go beyond the surface reality live forever through their art.

Ernest Hemingway started with the simple sensations of flesh and blood and after a long toil discovered that something beyond this seamy surface was more vital and permanent. He found the man was in a state of misery and that the burlal forces of life push and pull this crown creation of God. But this did not deter him. Hemingway was deeply impressed by the stamina of his old Santiago. Marvelling at his inexhaustible inner resources, Hemingway declared man morally invincible. He thought of celebrating such heroic virtues of man in his artistic works, and this was a challenge to his artistry.

When the inhabitant of this planet looks at modern literature—if he looks at all—he usually finds in it much to denounce. But despite all trauma and toughness our modern literature represents a great achievement. It teaches how to exist as an independent struggler and how to be dependent upon the society. Hemingway's genuine artistry gives us his own intuition—his own insight, his own way for the existence of man in society.

Hemingway is an architect and he looked upon each book as a challenge to his creativity and craftsmanship. He says: "For a true writer, each book should be new beginning where he tries again for something that is beyond attainment. He should always try for something that has never been done or that others have tried and failed."¹

A writer's job is to use his imagination and insight to obtain some kind of weapon to fight with the major problem of existence in human society and then to hand over that weapon to others. His characters are bloodied prize-fighters, hired-killers, disembowelled bull-fighters, crippled, hunters of wild animals, deep sea fishermen etc. all struggling for existence and all at the same time, stressing comradeship.

Hemingway spent the whole of his life in bringing up the tiny Nick Adams to his old age in his best novel, *The Old Man and the Sea*. He declared that in writing, "I have moved through arithmetic, through plain geometry and algebra, now I am in calculus. If they don't understand that to hell with them."² He perhaps implied the reconciliation of the tension between his observing self and the objective reality. With the help of the protagonist, his Code-hero, he has been able to embody an intensely-felt personal problem of existentialism and interdependence.

Hemingway experienced the horrors of war personally, which left their scars on his mind. They deeply affected not only his life but also shaped his writings. All the shocking events, after-effects of war, disillusionment, frustration, the despair and the defeatism of the age shaped his vision and enabled him to adopt a definite tragic line of action.

Because of the turns and twists of the age to which he belonged, Hemingway was eager to write only about the first and foremost problem of man- the problem of existence. He turned to nature to solve and harmonize all the problems of man. He likes his heroes to be strong and brave men of action who are little given to reflection, courageous even in the face of death as Santiago the old Cuban fisherman.

The term 'existentialism' means 'pertaining to existence'. Philosophically, it applies to a vision of the condition and existence of man, his place and function in the world and his relation or lack of being one with god. Basically, Existentialism is of two kinds-Theistic Existentialism and Atheistic Existentialism. Theistic or Christian Existentialism means that in God alone man may find freedom from tensions and discontent. Faith in God is the only means to find peace of mind and spiritual serenity. Atheistic existentialism implies that existence precedes essence. It believes that man fashions his own existence and only exists by doing so and in that process and by the choice of what he does or does not do, gives essence to that existence.

The central theme of existentialism concerns the eternal freedom of man, the independence of his thinking and selection of decisions. Man finds himself in the midst of unacceptable forms of existence and the only way-out is to alienate himself from the society or situation.

He comes out with the feeling of total dissatisfaction with the existing order of things. He faces dilemma when he has to participate unwillingly in the activities of life.

Existential philosophy believes that the existence of man is absurd as his end or death cannot be avoided. The inability of man to change his self and the surrounding world poses existential threat before him. He suffers from existential dilemma when he realizes the impossibility of developing and realizing his creative potentialities in a social world that is hostile to his freedom of action.

The fundamental question that the philosophy of existentialism raises is how to answer the absurdity of man's 'existence', when a man knows that his 'being' is surrounded by nothingness' and that his 'being' is going to dissolve into death.

All existentialists regard the material or outside world as absurd or impervious to 'reason'. They have no faith in democracy. They are 'elitist's. An elite understands the dilemma that he is facing in life and also knows that life is absurd and meaningless.

Existential philosophers believe that if a man wants to achieve something in life and wants to discover his own potentialities, he must isolate himself from the common people.

Hemingway had seen total eclipse of human values and degeneration of man during war. This war-torn generation, which had no ethical standards to lie by and no stable society to live in, became the 'lost generation'. Hemingway's characters are wounded both physically and psychologically. Their hurt psychology finds revengeful expression in their acts of sex, fishing, hunting etc.

In *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago struggles for survival while trying to catch a big fish in the sea. Here Hemingway presents the dilemma of man. In an effort to get success and happiness, he is alienated not only from society but also from his own self. Hemingway's solution is: Man can gain happiness in the company of other men whether he is at the height of success or at the bottom of failure. In other words, he has absolute faith in comradeship. The boy Manolin, in this sense is the future Santiago. The book celebrates the religion of man more forcefully and convincingly for here is nature and here is man. Here also is something about the nature of manhood."³

Santiago is a man of sterling faith and unflinching courage and therefore 'every day is a new day'⁴ for him. His struggle with the fish is natural : he is born to be a fisherman and the fish is born to be a fish. 'But man is not made for defeat ---- A man can be destroyed but not defeated.'⁵ At last Santiago is beaten since he is all alone while sharks

came in a pack. The old man is completely exhausted and has to sit down five times before he reaches his shack. But the end of the novel shows his joy and confidence and readiness for more fight. It ends with him sleeping in his bed with the palms of his lacerated hands upwards, and 'dreaming about the lion',⁶ the symbols of courage and bravery. The novel, thus, is a study of the trinity-the pursuer, the pursued and death.

The novel is a mirror wherein everyone may perceive a personal likeness. Santiago represents tragic individualism revealing what man can, and should do in 'an indifferent and sometimes hostile universe which shatters everyone alike. Santiago carries the banner with the slogan of long-accepted truth that man learns by suffering. He suffers from anguish and despair but he is not subjected to mere mechanical rules of nature. He asserts himself and determines his future. Santiago represents the whole humanity in its natural struggle for existence. Endurance is the pivot round which the whole view of his manhood revolves.

Santiago is an Existential hero in the grand style. From the common lot of people, he is an uncommon individual, an old hero who exists even after the grim battle with the sharks all alone. He says : "Fight them until I die." Taking himself to the vast fathoms of the sea he puts forth the bare fact that a man is introduced with his destiny all alone. While achieving the extra-ordinary and great goal man is swayed by his own desires and ambitions, sense of guilt and capacity to endure.

Santiago can be classified as belonging to the school of Danish Theologian Soren Kierkegaard, a germinal existential thinker of the nineteenth century. The basic theme of his philosophy is the 'despair that infuses all life'. Man is always terrified at the annihilation of his own personality of death. Hell, he says, is not to be seen after death. Hell is inside all of us in the form of 'despair'. Kierkegaard says that every person has to face and carry his 'personal' despair or 'existential predicament' wherever he goes---"⁷. This world to Kierkegaard is hostile and unsafe, "the whole existence frightens me---- the most inexplicable thing of all is my own

existence."⁸ Even then, faith, he says, is a miracle, yet no man is excluded from it; faith is the highest form of passion in man-the passion that took Santiago all alone even after eighty four days for a hunt of the fish. He struggled and suffered in order to live. Furthermore, when the great trial comes one must be alone. The pressure and the agony cannot be shared or sloughed off on others, but must be endured alone. Santiago, his hands chafed and bleeding from the pull of the marlin, his face cut, in a state of virtual prostration from his struggle, several times wishes the boy, Manolin, were with him to ease the strain but it is essential that he must go unaccompanied, that in the end he must rely upon his own resources and endure his trial unaided.

Naturally if a man wishes to survive, and more so, if he plans to assert himself so that he may unfold his potentialities, he must not shirk involvement and endless struggle. Hemingway emphasizes this basic principle of human existence. The line that links man and life, according to Hemingway, should remain, "Taut up to the very edge of the breaking point,"⁹ and if the "hands begin to bleed"¹⁰ it is only human.

Santiago, the true hero, never accepts defeat because he knows, in Hemingway's words, that defeat signifies surrender of the ideal. The victory for Santiago is essentially the overcoming of the sordidness of the world in which he lives and the knowledge such a success brings makes him unsuitable to live in that world. The character sketch of Santiago is remarkable for its stress on what man can do and on the world as an arena where heroic deeds are done. Santiago is confronted with a universe filled with tragedy and pain. He reflects the spirit of Greek tragedies which represent men fighting against over-whelming odds and winning moral victories. The sharks cannot really break his indomitable will power, though they deprive him of the marlin, his rightful prize after a resolute fight.

Like Dante's *Inferno*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* is lucid and pictorial. The voyage of Santiago is similar to that of Ulysses. As the voyage of Ulysses ends in shipwreck, Santiago's voyage ends in material disaster the loss of the giant fish. The old

man feels the absence of the boy, Manolin. This actually is Hemingway's signal to solidarity and democracy. Santiago comes to know that 'no one should be alone in their old age'.¹¹ In spite of all this, he wants to show to the marlin 'what a man can do and what a man endures'.¹² A real fight means respect for each other. The old man regards the fish as his friend or brother. "Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother, come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who."¹³

Santiago's struggle with the fish is natural. He is a fisherman and to him the killing of the fish is an old accepted livelihood. He kills me exactly as it keeps me alive. The boy keeps me alive, he thought, I must not deceive myself too much."¹⁴ But as soon as he comes to know that half of the fish has been destroyed by the sharks, he realizes his fault of going alone and too far out: "Half-fish", he said, "Fish that you were. I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both."¹⁵

Associations and organisations usually curve in but Hemingway's heroes, with the security of a self-generated morality, with a code within them, stand their ground. In Santiago's epic fight against the marlin and sharks we see what determined human will, purged of the weaknesses of the flesh, can achieve. Royce suggests: "The great adventure of life resides in the search for ultimate's, but not the attainment of them. Our history books are filled with the testimony of what happens to the people when they become convinced, they have the truth. They perish."¹⁶

The suggestion of Royce is very pertinent in the case of old cuban fisherman Santiago. He is on the side of truth, he is hopeful of his victory in spite of the odds and obstacles. He is satisfied with the battle he wages to preserve his manhood. For Santiago, duty is a genuine sentiment and he lays down his life doing what he believes to be his duty. In the novel, death is accepted and then dismissed as the trap-door to nothingness. Death is the end, but man may achieve greatness before that end. This is the message given by Santiago to the diseased humanity.

The entire stage was against Santiago, his sail looked like the flag of permanent defeat, his outward appearance was also shaky and old but his experienced eyes were cheerful, hopeful and undefeated. He is in a trance like state induced by hunger and lack of sleep, but still he has unwavering hope, "My big fish must be somewhere."¹⁷ He finally catches his luck in shape of giant marlin, eighteen feet from nose to tail weighing over fifteen hundred pounds: "He say him first as a dark shadow that took so long to pass under the boat that he could not believe its length."¹⁸ All the time Santiago is hopeful of his victory in spite of the dangers approaching him, "I'll stay with you till I am dead."¹⁹

Anguish is a universal phenomenon. Though a man suffers from anguish and despair, he is not subjected to mere mechanical rules of nature. As Robert Penn Warren Points out, "Santiago and all men are ultimately defeated but are defeated upon their own terms."²⁰

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