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The Death Drive And Psychological Heroism: A Freudian Reading Of Self-Destruction And Perseverance In The Old Man And The Sea

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ABSTRACT
This research paper provides a psychoanalytic reading of Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea (1952), focusing specifically on the manifestation of Freud's death drive (Thanatos) in Santiago's struggle and its relationship to heroic identity. While previous criticism has explored the novella's themes of endurance and struggle, this study argues that Santiago's journey represents a complex negotiation between the life instincts (Eros) and death instincts (Thanatos), where true heroism emerges not from victory but from the ego's capacity to integrate self-destructive impulses into meaningful action. Through close textual analysis grounded in Freudian theory—particularly The Ego and the Id (1923) and Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920)—this paper demonstrates that the sharks' destruction of Santiago's prize, far from representing external misfortune, symbolizes the unconscious death drive that undermines achievement even at the moment of triumph. The novella thus redefines heroism as the psychological capacity to persist in the face of inevitable loss, transforming self-destructive impulses through sublimation into dignified endurance. This analysis contributes to Hemingway scholarship by offering a systematic application of the death drive concept to understand why Santiago's apparent defeat constitutes his greatest victory.

Keywords: Death Drive, Thanatos, Psychoanalysis, Hemingway, The Old Man And The Sea, Freudian Theory, Sublimation, Psychological Heroism

Introduction

The Old Man and the Sea by Ernest Hemingway (1952) has remained a tribute to the power of human perseverance against all the odds. The novella tells about the adventure of Santiago, an old Cuban fisher, who after eighty four days of no fortune catches a big fish on the Gulf Stream. The resultant fight is three days and nights, which ends with Santiago winning the fish only to see his victory destroyed by sharks on the long way back home. He comes back to the shore with the skeleton of the marlin, worn out and beaten in material things, but not broken somehow in heart.

The classic readings have dwelled on Santiago as the depiction of the so-called Hemingway code hero, namely, a character that shows grace under pressure and retains dignity in the face of certain imminent defeat (Gurko 1955, p. 398). Baker (1972) considers the novella as a Christian allegory of pain and salvation, whereas Young (1966) focuses on the existential aspects of it, asserting that Santiago sets meaning by

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struggling with an unconcerned universe. The text has been the subject of more recent criticism about its ecological implications (Brinkley 2003), its concept of age and malehood (Strychacz 2003).

Yet, even these readings fail to provide sufficient answers to one of the major dilemmas of the novella: why does the hardest attempt of Santiago lead to a complete loss of material? Why do the sharks, who come on at the very moment of his greatest success, ruin all that he has struggled to win? And why this destruction, instead of ruining his heroism, should appear to be necessary in completing it?

The paper states that a Freudian psychoanalytic approach, namely an emphasis on the death drive (Thanatos), can be used as the most compelling approach to the understanding of this paradox. The idea of the death drive proposed by Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) is an unconscious drive to destruction, dissolution, and a leveling of tension to zero, and eventually, a regression to an inorganic state. More importantly, Freud stated that this drive works in parallel and in contradiction to the life instincts (Eros), and human behaviour is a complicated interplay between these contradictory forces.

When applied to The Old Man and the Sea, this framework shows us that Santiago is not fighting against nature, but a deeper psychological struggle, where the ego runs between the impulses of creativity and affirmation of life, and the impulses of self-destruction and the drive of entropy. The sharks in this reading are not outside of the author but symbolic expressions of the drive to death within Santiago, the unconscious force that undermines success, tempts failure, and repetitively turns to traumatic repetition. The heroism of Santiago, not to vanquish this drive, then, consists in changing it with sublimation to dignified perseverance with favor of loss but without psychological destruction.

Research Objective

To demonstrate how Freud's concept of the death drive (Thanatos) illuminates Santiago's struggle in The Old Man and the Sea, arguing that the novella's tragic structure—in which triumph inevitably gives way to loss—represents the psychological reality of self-destructive impulses operating within heroic endeavor, and that true heroism consists of the ego's capacity to sublimate these destructive forces into meaningful persistence despite inevitable defeat.

Literature Review

Old Man and the Sea has created a lot of critical commentary since its publication, a lot of it devoted to determining what Santiago is a hero, and what he means by his ambiguous victory-in-defeat. The early criticism defined the pattern of the code hero that has been prevalent in further interpretation. According to Gurko (1955), Santiago was the representative of the ethical code developed by Hemingway: The world breaks all people and he who will not be broken kills, but Santiago is one of those who do not want to be broken (p. 399). In this reading, the theme of stoic endurance and moral integrity at the sight of unavoidable suffering is highlighted.

Baker (1972) also developed a symbolic-religious reading, that the three-day battle of Santiago is like the passion of Christ, and the novella serves as a parable about redemptive suffering. He sees the cruciform symbolism of Santiago pulling his mast up the hill and the scratches on his hands and assumes that the experience of the old man is a metaphor to the human condition viewed through the perspective of Christian sufferings (p. 304). Although Baker admits that the text is symbolically rich, his interpretation is confined to outside moral structures but not inside-psychological

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processes.

Existential readings were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s in which Young (1966) claimed that Santiago makes meaning by making genuine commitment in his struggle, despite the result. This idea is continued by Gibson (2006), who argues that the marlin is a symbol of Santiago as an idealised version of himself, that is, a man he was and one he aims to be (p. 38), so the struggle is in fact an act of self-affirmation. These meanings are a step nearer to the realms of psychology, yet they cannot be described as as theoretical as the systematic psychoanalytic analysis.

Later criticism has examined the issues of masculinity, aging, and ecology. Strychacz (2003) discusses the way masculinity is enacted by Santiago and shows fears of being old and weak. Brinkley (2003) provides an eco-critical interpretation of the want to kill the marlin as he questions the morality of what Santiago wants to do. Although these strategies add to our insight, they fail to answer the overall construction paradox to the novella: the need of Santiago to lose.

Psychoanalytic methods to the work by Hemingway are present but are quite limited when it comes to this text. Brenner (1980) explains the theory of Hemingway of a wound to a creative production. Fantina (2005) discusses the topic of masculine anxiety in the works of Hemingway. Nevertheless, a longer-term psychoanalytic approach to the death drive has not paid special attention to its relevance to The Old Man and the Sea, although the idea is very relevant to a work organized around obsessive conflict which results in the necessary annihilation.

Death drive, which was formulated by Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) is the radical change in psychoanalysis theory. Freud theorized that on top of the pleasure principle, which corrects to maximize pleasure and minimise pain, is a more basic tendency of the dissolution of every tension that is eventually directed into a compulsion to death and dissolution. According to Freud (1920), the goal of all life is death (p. 38) i.e. living organisms strive to achieve the inorganic state in which they were born and follow their own way to this unavoidable destination.

Most importantly, the death drive is projected in forms besides self-destruction and includes repetition compulsion, the need to re-create traumatic experiences, and the act of sabotaging of success at the time of success (Freud 1923). The latter display is especially applicable in the case of Santiago, where the sharks strike exactly when he has made a victory against him, killing his victory in a manner so obviously premeditated, and seemingly pre-established by his subconscious, that it almost looks like a movie.

The paper contributes to the Hemingway scholarship by offering the first analytical attempt to utilize death-drive theory on The Old Man and the Sea in order to show how the psychoanalytic concept explains the structure of the novella, its symbolism, and the tragic inevitability.

Theoretical Framework: The Freudian Death Drive

It is based on the idea of the death drive (Thanatos) conceptulated by Sigmund Freud in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920) and elaborated in The Ego and the Id (1923). Such a complex understanding of this construction will require a discussion of the overall dualistic scheme of human instincts developed by Freud.

The initial form of the pleasure principle was the belief that human behavior is mediated, formulated by Freud, as the need to maximize pleasure and minimize pain. However, his work as a clinician in trauma survivors in whom he saw himself as compulsively reenacting painful scenes, and his more general observations of self-destructive tendencies in the human condition, induced him to theorize about a more basic drive at

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ISSN Print: 3007-3146

work below the pleasure principle (Freud, 1920, p. 12). He called this the death drive (Todestrieb or Thanatos), an instinct drive toward the elimination of all tension, which eventually results in a drive towards death, dissolution and the inorganic state.

According to Freud (1920), the goal of all life is death (p. 38), which also stated that living things are products of inanimate matter and possess an inherent tendency to become the inanimate. The life instincts (Eros) strive to create more and more complicated organizations of the matter, unite energy and safeguard life. The death instincts, on the other hand, function in reverse, attempting to disorganize, unbind and go back to simplicity and quiescence. Most importantly, the death drive does not merely manifest itself as conscious suicidal intention, but instead it functions subconsciously via a number of mechanisms:

Repetition Compulsion:
The tendency to reproduce traumatic or painful events, purportedly to be able to deal with them with the help of retrospective processing when in truth they continue to inflict pain (Freud, 1920, p. 21)

Self-Sabotage:
Minimization of success when success is about to happen, and is usually explained after the fact through the implementation of the post-hoc defense of bad fortune but is actually due to unconscious wishes to fail (Freud, 1923, p. 49).

Aggression Turned Inward:
Destructive impulses turned back to themselves, taking on a new form as guilt, self-criticism or the form of masochism (Freud, 1923, p. 54).

Entropy Seeking:
A drive to reduce complexity, avoid stimulation and seek minimum tension states, the nirvana principle (Freud, 1920, p. 56).

In Freudian structural model, death drive brings conflict in the psyche. Id has libidinal (Eros) and aggressive (Thanatos) drives. These conflicting forces have to be negotiated by the ego which also has to meet the requirements of the external reality and internalized moral expectations of the superego. The motivation of death is not a matter of psychological health, simply because it is impossible to eliminate it, but the ability of the ego to control it and distribute the destructive energy in terms of sublimation into activities that are socially acceptable or meaningful to the person.

According to Freud, (1915) in his book, instincts and their vicissitudes (p. 94), sublimation is the process of diverting the instinctual energy off its original purpose into a higher cultural or creative goal. Such a defense mechanism allows the ego to accept the instinctual pressures and convert them into positive action. Sublimation, in relation to the death drive, may convert the self-destructive drives into risk-taking, aggressive struggle, or achievement of daunting ambitions--pursuits that embrace Thanatos but do not give up altogether.

To literature, the death drive provides a template of the analysis of characters apparently driven to self-destruction, the saboteurs of their success or the irrational in a fight which rational calculation would dictate they should leave. It throws light on the stories built around unavoidable loss, tragic heroism, and the ability of the human being to find a meaning in the loss.

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Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Methodology

In this exploration, close textual analysis of The Old Man and the Sea is developed using the Freudian psychoanalytic theory, namely the death drive. The methodological approach is divided into a number of steps:

Determination of Manifestations: The main excerpts of the novella are examined and analyzed in terms of the manifestations of the death drive- the compulsion of repetition, self-destruction, self-directed aggression, and the entropy-seeking behavior. Special emphasis is placed on the inner monologues of Santiago, his experiences with the marlin and sharks, his dreams and structural development of success to failure.

Symbolic Interpretation: The symbols in the text are interpreted in the psychoanalytic paradigm, in terms of how they may signify unconscious forces, which is the conflict between Eros and Thanatos.

Analysis: Ego Management Analysis: The analysis discusses the way Santiago manages the ego in the cases of conflicting drives and the cases of sublimation, when self-destructive drives can be converted into effective action.

The explanation is supported by both psychoanalytic theory and Hemingway criticism in terms of secondary literature, which guarantees both theoretical rigor and grounding on the text. It is not psychoanalyzed, of Hemingway but rather of the internal logic of the text and the further illumination of the heroism of Santiago.

Textual Analysis

The Compulsion to Go Too Far Out

The main action of the novella, which is the choice of Santiago to head well out of range of everyone into the Gulf stream, having gone eighty-four days without a catch, can be interpreted as the force of the death drive to the extremes of experience and danger. Santiago has a pragmatic reason: far out there are good fish (Hemingway, 1952, p. 28). Nevertheless, there is an implication of a greater, subconscious power at work.

Santiago directly admits to going beyond what is wise: “I went too far it was (Hemingway, 1952, p. 120) and he says it on numerous occasions, like a ritual. This repetition does not imply the feeling of regrets but an unconscious understanding of all-controlling urge. He was not just miscalculating, he was being driven to next-level, to venture into dangerous grounds which deep inside him he knew would result in pain.

This tendency is consistent with the description of repetition compulsion provided by Freud (1920), in which people recreate traumatic or dangerous scenarios in the manner that they seem to be trying to control them in a hindsight fashion. The eighty-four days without a catch that Santiago has suffered already makes him a man who is unlucky, and instead of going fishing on the inland side where he could take smaller game and break the streak, he goes deep sea where he will either experience the best victory or the worst. It is all or nothing, no medium success.

In this case death drive comes out in the form of a compulsion to the intensity of experience regardless of the result. As Freud (1920) observes, individuals who are susceptible to Thanatos tend to look into scenarios where they get the highest stimulation and then the highest tension release- exactly what Santiago did in the three-day fight only to lose the prize. It is not about death but about the enhanced experience of struggle or being pushed to the utmost extremes of sustenance.

Further, the isolation of Santiago is also present, as he thinks that no one should be alone in old age. But it is inevitable" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 48) -delivers what Freud (1923) would affirm to be an expression of the death drive. Through a structured process of removing himself of all social connections, Santiago can no longer fish with his scrawny

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boyfriend Manolin, his wife is dead and his fishermen colleagues will deride him, as his behavior displays a subliminal attitude toward shrinking all relationships to nothingness. The bold journey into the outer extremes of the Gulf Stream is a method not only of bringing him physically nearer to a state of total dissolution but also of immersing him in the state of total abandonment, and so to actualize his own enterprise of eroding intersubjective associations by the entropy principle.

The Marlin as Life Instinct and Its Necessary Destruction

The relationship that Santiago has with the marlin is a complex erotic game of Eros and Thanatos. The fish is the symbol of life that is as symbolic as vitality itself, beauty and life-force that Santiago has experienced to lose to the inescapable rhythm of age. His very words are those of the highest expression of the life instinct when he keeps talking of the nobility of the marlin, how he is beautiful and noble and afraid of nothing (Hemingway, 1952, p. 54). But the story forces him to destroy the very being that he loves: I love you and respect you very much. However, I will murder you to death before the day is over (Hemingway, 1952, p. 54). This contradiction underlines the very nature of the struggle between Eros and Thanatos: a need to tie, hold and relate against an equally strong desire to ruin, end and degrade the living by turning them into the dead.

The self-destructive aspect of this killing is explicitly recognised by Santiago, who thinks, as he kills him, fish, that it is me, the old man. But you have a right to. A paradox within himself manifests itself in the next line, where Hemingway tells us, that he has never seen a better or a more beautiful or a more peaceful or more noble thing than you, brother (Hemingway, 1952, p. 92). The fish kills Santiago but Santiago willingly plays along in the killing, thereby being involved in a mutually beneficial annihilation which seems nearly sacramental. In this connection, the death drive functions in the form of identification: by destroying an idealised object, Santiago dismantles certain aspects of himself at the same time.

The length of the struggle of three days is also important. Freud (1920) notes that death drive occurs in form of the long process of suffering which seemingly seems to be disproportional to any reward. This would lead to a logical decision that Santiago needs to cut the line and go after more controllable fish; rather, his conscious mind defends the action by pride and a sense of duty to prove something. But even these rationalisations are disguising a greater addiction to maximal suffering. The long period that lasts gives life energy a chance to make the most of struggle as must inevitably lead to its exhaustion.

When Santiago eventually kills the marlin, the story does not talk about victory rather, a collective desolation that resembles death: He put his pain and whatever was left of his strength and his lost pride against the pain of the fish (Hemingway, 1952, p. 93). The two beings are exhausted to the last bit, proving that the life instinct has been stretched to its utmost limit and replaced by the imminent take-over of the death drive.

The Sharks: Externalized Death Drive

The closest expression of the death drive in the novella is the instantaneous coming of the sharks following the victory of Santiago. Freud (1923) argues that death drive tends to frustrate success at just the right time; therefore, the attack of the sharks is intentional at the time when Santiago has achieved his goal. This time is then an architectural and not an accidental one: the death drive is most effective when the life instinct (Eros) has accomplished its creative work.

The first reaction of Santiago towards sharks proves unconscious perception of this

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ISSN Print: 3007-3146

inevitability: Santiago neither liked to see the fish anymore because he was mutilated. It was a punishment because of going too far (Hemingway, 1952, p. 103). The punishment notion implies that there is an internalised guilt, the superego, which causes pain to the ego due to the transgression. But the crime committed here is not moral, in the usual sense of this word, it is the daring to be too much, to accomplish what there was doom to fail.

The systematic and destruction is important. The sharks do not just eat parts of the meat, they strip the marlin to a skeleton which Santiago says is the worst thing (Hemingway, 1952, p. 108). This fulfills the object of the death drive of complete reduction and recidivism to minimum complexity. The surviving marlin that was attached to Santiago by a struggle is no longer attached and turned into a bare mechanism, and the skeleton is an ultimate triumph of the death over life.

The struggle that Santiago has to do against the sharks is useless but imperative. He kills a number of them; others leap up: sharks like wolves. They arrive when there is the odor of blood (Hemingway, 1952, p. 102). This necessity means that the sharks are not just outward, but reflective forces that Santiago has in his heart. According to Freud (1920), death drive cannot be avoided by any form of outer manipulation, but it is innate to the organism. Santiago can fight the sharks one by one, but he can never defeat the principle they represent, the entropy that makes all success meaningless.

Additionally, the tools that Santiago uses gradually fail. He loses his harpoon, his knife breaks, the oar breaks, and he ends up beating the sharks with a tiller when it is dark: he struck them in the darkness not even able to see the sharks anymore (Hemingway, 1952, p. 118). Such progressive loss of defense ability is a simile to the irreversible loss of ego in its struggle against drives of the unconsciousness. The ego is temporarily resistant, although the patient tenacity of the death drive eventually breaks through the defensive of the conscious.

The image of blood is particularly impressive. The sharks are attracted to the water by the blood of a marlin thus determining that they will come as soon as the fish is felled. It implies that even the performance of the goal (killing the marlin) sets the circumstances of its self-destruction. Success is bound to stumble on its own grave, hence making way to a bright example of the working of the death drive by compromising success.

Sublimation and Psychological Heroism

The material in the case of Santiago seems to be a contradiction through the psychoanalytic theory; however, his response to the rampaging sharks can be interpreted as an example of ego sublimation, i.e. the transformation of self-destructive instincts into socially productive behavior. Against all odds of hopelessness, Santiago continues to fight even after the more sensible reasoning of hope are now lost as seen in his thoughts: You liked killing the dentuso, he thought. He couples on the live fish like thee. He is no louse and not a wandering stomach like some sharks. He is handsome and with reputation and no fear of anything to come (Hemingway, 1952, p. 106).

This passage highlights how Santiago is able to find meaning (or even aesthetic enjoyment) even in the process of destruction itself, which is a bloody affair. He is not disillusioned by the carnivorous instinct of the sharks, but he admits something noble in their being, as of the marlin before. This type of unsurrendered acceptance is evidence of a successful sublimational act: the acknowledgment of the strength of the death drive alongside a denial to permit it to destructively destroy the psyche.

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DIALOGUE SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

Freud (1915) holds that sublimation is the most effective defence mechanism and it allows the instinctual energy to be discharged into culturally appreciated avenues that are not repressed. The displacement of the death drive by Santiago does not follow the pattern of denial, but instead, it is the reinvested shift of his face with the inevitability of loss into the model of character, dignity, and human endurance. This is why the heroic aspect comes to life not through the taming of the sharks as such, but through the continuation of the mental integrity in the face of the deprivation of all material gains.

This principle is summed up in Santiago who, on his return to shore, gives his last thoughts: Man is not born to lose. A man may be ruined but not beaten (Hemingway, 1952, p. 103). The aphorism is a psychological victory over the material loss. The destroyed is used to suggest the physical and exterior annihilation of the ego whereas the word defeated is used to indicate the internal capitulation or surrender of self and purpose, all of which Santiago is consciously and willingly fighting back.

The difference explains that Santiago is a hero at the psychological realm. Death drive is able to destroy his physical body, to deprive him of his energy and to turn his prize to bones; but not to conquer the ability of the ego to give his struggle its own meaning. The given phenomenon can be attributed to the fact that Freud (1923) sees the ultimate triumph of the ego in the synthesis of the conflicting forces life and death into a unity of self-concept, which is able to tolerate restrictions and at the same time maintain honor.

Dreams of Lions: The Return of Eros

The dream motif that is repeated in the novella provides an added support to the life/death drive discourse. In the course of the story, Santiago repeatedly sees lions in the sands on the African coasts, the reminders of his youth: he simply dreamed about places now and about the lions on the beach. They were playing cat in the sense of the dusk and he was in love with them like with the boy (Hemingway, 1952, p. 25).

According to the Freudian dream theory such repetitions are explained by the theory as the unresolved psychic conflicts and subconscious desires (Freud, 1900). Here the lions are a symbol of Eros - vitality, playfulness, youth, an all-encompassing life power gauged at its peak. The constant dreamscape of Santiago is, therefore, an indication of an unconscious attachment to the life instinct, and continues without being surpassed by the death drive as the waking states increasingly become submissive to them.

It is interesting to note that Santiago does not dream about the fishing adventures, victorious battles, or a picture of expertise. Rather he dwells upon the naked vitality of the lions that live without utilitarian intent and that such dreams are the quintessence of the pleasure principle in its naked state, without any form of practicality or survival imperative. Here the Eros overshadows Thanatos in this unconscious haven, giving respite on a temporary basis.

This is where the denouement of this novella returns: the old man was dreaming of the lions (Hemingway, 1952, p. 127). Once the fatigating annihilation of material means of his victory, the inelastic insisting of his body to the extreme of its power, the exhaustion of all the exterior awards through the death drive, Santiago consciously recedes into the symbol of pure life power. This denouement alludes to the idea that the death drive can annul material success and physical fortitude but the Eros is strongest on the lowest level of the psyche.

This latest dream reflects the immortal aspect of the paradoxical nature of the death drive introduced by Freud (1920) of immortality, of an insistence that life perpetuates in its self-creation, when it is heading towards death. The fact that the lions come home at night, despite the loss of physical luck, the heroism is expressed in the ability of the ego

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DIALOGUE SOCIAL SCIENCE REVIEW

Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

to maintain this dialectic balance, preventing the manic (denial of all Eros) and suicidal (despair) extremes.

The Skeleton as Memento Mori

The physical remains of the dead marlin that Santiago hauls to land are a physical reminder of the ultimate declaration of the death drive: the degradation of life to its basic form. However, this skeletal artefact accomplishes more than the alive fish was able to; it puts the struggle of Santiago in a universally understandable form.

The tourists who think that the skeleton belongs to a shark give a comical but tragic example: Eshark" (Hemingway, 1952, p. 126). The effect of the death drive, that of the individuality and meaning of life and the removal of all that is good, noble, and creative to bare structure instead of structure as a spirit, is marked in their perception, limited to a generic threat instead of the specific nobility of the marlin.

On the other hand, Manolin, who understands the situation with Santiago, sees the skeleton in another way. His crying and demand to come out and do a joint fishing trip together symbolize the realization of a younger generation of how Santiago had achieved something despite the material disintegration. The skeleton, in spite of it being a dead thing, reveals the key points of Santiago, his capacity to fish such a fish, to survive three days of competition and to bring it to the house despite the sharks hunting it.

The skeleton, according to the psychoanalytic perspective, is the residue of the ego after the libidinal energy in it has been consumed by the death drive. The fact that Santiago is coming back with this corporeal skeleton alone- depleted, exhausted, lacked of illusion, but still with the structural integrity, proves that ego still remains even in abstract functions. This perseverance is a mental triumph of total disintegration.

Conclusion

This psychoanalytic exegesis of The Old Man and the Sea by Hemingway proves that the case of Santiago is the archetypal human condition of negotiating between Eros and Thanatos being the drive to create, to connect, and to endure, and the other drive to destroy, dissolve, and to become entropy. The tragic form of the novella, according to which success is always followed by defeat, does not refer to misfortune or external evil, but, on the contrary, to a deep psychological fact: the death drive is placed against success at the moment of its victory, which then forces the organism to pain and complete destruction.

The heroism of Santiago, which is considered right, lies not in overcoming the death drive, which, in its metaphysical context, is impossible, but in overcoming it with success. He translates self-destructive tendencies into purposeful action thus saving psychological integrity in the process of losing all material benefit. His statement that a man cannot be ruined, but defeated is the epitome of the psychoanalytic understanding that the ego has the capacity to overcome the death drive shattering external victory by understanding the meaning in the fight itself.

The repetition of the dream about lions serves as the reminder of Eros persistence at the bottom of the unconsciousness which ensures the life drive still makes its way to the surface even when the body is tired and the death drive seems to win the battle. The cyclic nature of the novella, which the fateful journey of Santiago back to the sea and the endless cycle of life and death imply, is such that the war between life and death cannot be resolved in any final way and it continues as long as life does.

The brilliance of Hemingway is his ability to realise that heroism needed to be redefined in the world where there was no higher meaning or promised benefits. In such a universe

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Vol. 3 No. 12 (December) (2025)

where everything is temporary and death is the only thing guaranteed, heroism has been made purely psychological, the ability of the ego to channel suicidal urges towards noble endurance. The marlin that Santiago skins until it is only the skeleton of the fish becomes the ideal symbol of this mental heroism: the meaning preserved despite the complete loss of the material.

This interpretation will add to the research on Hemingway by providing the first organized use of a concept of the death drive to The Old Man and the Sea and in so doing, demonstrating how much research in psychoanalysis preoccupies the symbolism and tragic progression of the novella. It shows that the struggle of Santiago is not a man-against-nature story, but the human story of all people to maintain psychological integrity in the face of the antagonistic pressures of life and death instincts. Thus, the novella is not merely a fishing story but a deep reflection on heroism in the world where the death drive ensures that all successes are short-lived and all the triumphs will inevitably be destroyed.

Further studies could further this discussion in relation to other works by Hemingway and could explore how the death drive functions in his complete work particularly in works that focus on war, violence and masculinity. Alternatively, comparative analysis might also focus on how other modernist authors, such as Faulkner and Conrad and Kafka, express the impact of the death drive in human endeavor and its implications to current-day views of heroism in the twentieth century.

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