



ISSN: 1994-4217 (Print) 2518-5586(online)

Journal of College of Education

Available online at: <https://eduj.uowasit.edu.iq>

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Keywords:

code hero, Ernest
Hemingway,
Hemingway's iceberg
theory (theory of
omission), Star's style
guide, nada.



Article info

Article history:

Received 20.Mar.2024

Accepted 13.Jun.2024

Published 15.Nov.2024



Uncharted Nada: Santiago's Revolutionary Persistence in Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea

A B S T R A C T

The present study deals with Ernest Hemingway's novel The Old Man and the Sea (1952). Significantly, it explores revolutionary hints while facing nada through Hemingway's iceberg theory. It inquires about the cloaked reasons behind Santiago's trip to the sea, and how Hemingway creates revolutionary hints through them. It aims to portray Santiago's trip as a revolt against nada and materiality, making a call for persistence. It encourages people under pressure to change through facing, revolting, dreaming, and action. The study finds that Santiago achieves his great dream by facing his resilient conditions. Consequently, he proves himself to himself, showing that man is not to be appreciated by material trophies, but by potential power. This way, he becomes an everlasting revolutionary model for all generations.

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31185/eduj.Vol57.Iss1.3855>

العدم المجهول : اصرار سانتياغو الثوري في رواية همنغواي الشيخ والبحر

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الخلاصة

تتناول الدراسة الحالية رواية ارنست همنغواي- الشيخ و البحر (١٩٥٢) تهتم الدراسة بسبر اغوار المضامين الثورية اثناء مواجهة المخاوف خلال نظرية همنغواي- الجليد. تتساءل الدراسة عن الأسباب الكامنة وراء رحلة سانتياغو للبحر، و كيف خلق همنغواي مضامين ثورية خلالها. انها تهدف لتصوير رحلة سانتياغو كثورة ضد الخوف من المجهول و المادية منادية للسمود تحت الضغوطات. انها تشجع الناس تحت الضغط للتغيير من خلال المواجهة، الثورة، الحلم، و الحراك. اكتشفت الدراسة بان سانتياغو حقق حلمه العظيم بالتغلب على ظروفه القاهرة. وعليه فقد اثبت نفسه لنفسه و برهن بان الانسان لا يمكن ان يثمن بمكاسبه المادية و انما بقواه الكامنة. وهكذا اصبح اسوة ابدية بالتحدي لكل الأجيال.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بطل المثاليات، ارنست همنغواي، نظرية همنغواي الجليد (نظرية الحذف)، دليل نمط النجوم، العدمية.

The prominent American author, Ernest Miller Hemingway (1889-1961) started his career as a reporter for The Kansas City Star and then, joined the First World War. After the war, he stayed in Paris and became a Toronto Star reporter. There, he met a group of authors called, The Lost Generation. The group includes authors like, "F. Scott Fitzgerald, Thornton Wilder, Sherwood Anderson, and Ezra Pound. He also met Russian authors like Leo Tolstoy, Ivan Turgenev, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Anton Chekhov, and Pablo Picasso. They all influenced him very much and helped to improve his talent. (Balakrishnan, 2023; IMDb & Shelokhonov, 2017)

After years of success and glory, Hemingway's talent declined due to his declining health. That defected his everyday life as well as his writing productivity. Consequently, critics attacked him, accusing him of being too old to produce a good work like before. Hemingway implicitly compared himself to Santiago in his novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. Others accuse Santiago of becoming unlucky and cannot catch a fish like before. Therefore, it is an allegory of Hemingway at that time. (Kalbach, 2024) Like his challenging protagonist, Hemingway regained his previous fame through this novel, which won the Pulitzer Prize (1953) and the Nobel Prize in Literature (1954). (IMDb & Shelokhonov, 2017)

1.2 Hemingway's Writing Style

It is essential to glimpse the author's writing style and themes because of its mutual relation with his theory. Hemingway creates his distinctive writing style utilizing his early experience as a journalist. His minimalistic and thematic style is called the Star Guide Style - after the name of the magazine he worked for. In this style, he uses positive, short, and simple sentences and paragraphs but is still rich and vigorous. (Ballan, 2023)

In his novels, Hemingway creates a moral awareness that spirals from man's awareness of the larger universe, where man is a tragic tiny thing, though he has a glorious status. Accordingly, Hemingway's novels present the gloomier side of human life. They deal with themes such as death, violence, and darkness. In doing this, he attempts to explore the nature of the individual's dilemma in this world. He views life as an everlasting struggle where man has to prove the supremacy of his free will over other forces. He explores the psychological and physical toll war has on the human spirit. (Balakrishnan, 2024) Disillusionment of the lost generation in the aftermath of both World Wars, courage, and endurance are recurring themes in Hemingway's works. His style is a reaction to these wars. (Ballan, 2023)

Hemingway sets man's life in fiction, "against the background of his world and universe to examine the human situation from various points of view" (Balakrishnan, 2024). Hemingway believed that setting and atmosphere were crucial for establishing mood and tone. By using sensory details and vivid imagery, he creates a rich and immersive world for the reader. (Shipra, 2023) He uses everyday speech expressing belief and disbelief, trust and distrust, hope and despair to expose the inner psyche of his characters, for example, the old man (Santiago) in parallel with the surrounding people.

Hemingway portrays the fragility of the individual's life and the futility of conflict. To assert the dignity of his existence, the individual has to endure a relentless and unbalanced battle against a world that violates his identity or fulfillment. Where a free-willed man, with limited physical power, faces a hostile society and apathetic nature. He proves his dignity through his ideals. This perpetual (outer and inside) struggle ends only with death. (Balakrishnan, 2024; Ballan, 2023) Hemingway's dissatisfaction with modern life sends cloaked messages throughout his novels where he criticizes social norms and views by employing his iceberg theory.

1.3 Hemingway's Iceberg Theory (Theory of Omission)

Hemingway establishes the iceberg theory in psychology and literary analysis. It compares a literary text to an iceberg where there are seven-eighths of the visible part underwater. (Roullier, 2013; Shipra, 2023). Hemingway states,

If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about, he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Ernest Hemingway in *Death In The Afternoon*, 1932 as cited in Noë, 2021)

This means, that what is visible to the audience is merely the tip. Narrative, plot, dialogue, and action comprise the visible surface while thoughts, feelings, motives, symbolism, theme, and subtext are concealed beneath the surface. Even though these elements may not be apparent, they are very much present, like the massive expanse lurking beneath the surface of an iceberg. (Perelman, 2021)

Hemingway's iceberg theory is well known as the omission theory, where saying less suggests more. The author of a literary text omits unnecessary elaborating information from it. Therefore, the deeper meaning of the narrative should shine implicitly beneath. Hence, the reader must infer and interpret its significance, motives, and meaning through the characters' dialogues, actions, and other subtle cues. In doing so, the reader will participate in the novel and contribute his ideas to its interpretation. (Ballan, 2023; Roullier, 2013; Shipra, 2023) Consequently, Hemingway creates emotions, rather than describes them. This way arouses empathy by having readers share the feelings of the characters. (Balakrishnan, 2024) Part of his iceberg theory, Hemingway creates a kind of hero called the code hero.

1.4 Hemingway's Nada and Code Hero

The code hero concept refers to a group of characteristics Hemingway uses to construct his protagonists. Interestingly, it is not he who coined the phrase 'code hero' but a scholar called Philip Young. "The characteristics of a Code Hero stem from the state of the world just after World War I, which most writers describe as a world without meaning. Hemingway's heroes find meaning only through themselves and not externally." (Bostock, 2020, Para. 1) Psychologically speaking, code heroes are the epitome of his beliefs and views. Like him, Hemingway's heroes are often engaged in sports like bullfighting and hunting. These heroes participate in a relentless struggle against natural forces. They search for purpose in the middle of a progressively chaotic world (Elsevier Publishing Company & Frenz, 2023; Shyam, 2023)

One must conduct oneself with honor, courage, endurance, and dignity, a set of principles known as "the Hemingway code." To behave well in the lonely, losing battle with life is to show "grace under pressure" and constitutes in itself a kind of victory, a theme clearly established in *The Old Man and the Sea*. (Young, 2023)

Hemingway's protagonists share some traits to live properly in this meaningless, and miserable world. These traits show a pursuit of authentic experiences reflecting his beliefs and views concerning; masculinity, courage, honor, self-reliance, honesty, independence, free will, and self-determination. (Ballan, 2023; Sarkar, 2022) A code hero prefers to challenge and never gives up or admits defeat. "Death rather than humiliation, stoical endurance rather than servile submission, are the cardinal virtues of the Hemingway hero." (Balakrishnan, 2024) He is wounded either physically or emotionally, alienated, and has to overcome challenges in the battle of life, showing resilience, conduct, and integrity, which Hemingway called "grace under pressure". In this way, Hemingway attempts to put action and experience in the first place rather than philosophical contemplation and introspection. (Ballan, 2023).

The code hero experiences trips and adventures. This way, he becomes a real man and proves himself. His ultimate defeat is only death. He fears the dark and nothing; nada. (Jarrett, 2024) Nada, as a metaphysical state, symbolizes the code hero's life. It means nothingness. "It is an uncontrollable force that should never be forgotten." (Karolina, 2024) Seeing night as a symbol of death, most of Hemingway's Code Heroes fear darkness, which they have to face one day. To escape it, the code hero drinks heavily at night and sleeps during the day. It is also the time when he enjoys everything life offers. (Bostock, 2020)

Though "nada" encapsulates a central theme in Ernest Hemingway's short story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, and reflects the idea of nothingness, it applies to many other works like *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway highlights the meaninglessness and emptiness of life:

Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it all was nada y pues nada y nada y pues nada. Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. (Hemingway, 1987, p. 386)

Hemingway highlights this towards the end of both stories, capturing the old men's internal struggle with the concept of nothingness. For example, Santiago finds solace in the sea to counteract the darkness of "nada" away from the dry land and its sharks

A Code Hero is a man of action, rather than words, yet he believes discussing these actions decreases their value. Furthermore, he never exposes his emotions because he believes it is a remark of weakness. (Bostock, 2020) This is part of the iceberg theory, where Hemingway lets readers interpret emotions themselves. In his novel *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway constructs Santiago as the epitome of a code hero who faces nada. He has the three essential features; "honor and integrity, grace under pressure, and determination to succeed." (Ivy Panda. 2023)

1.5 Santiago; the Revolting Hero

According to the present study, it is not necessary to make a political uprising to be revolutionary. For example, Collins Dictionary (2024, Para. 3) states, "Revolutionary ideas and developments involve great changes in the way that something is done or made." The Cambridge Dictionary (2024, para. 3) also views revolution as, a fundamental change in the way people do things and "a big change or improvement in the way that something works or looks, or in the way that people do a particular activity." Furthermore, it is "a drastic and far-reaching change in ways of thinking and behaving." It includes some types like alteration, change, and modification. When an event occurs due to the passage from one phase or state to another, it is called a revolution. (Vocabulary. com, 2023) Therefore, a revolution is not limited to political change that includes violence and is intended to make a great change and reform in governments. It can be a positive individual act to alter anything from its previous negative status through facing and challenge. For all the earlier mentioned reasons, Santiago is a revolutionary hero.

There are many revolutionary hints in Hemingway's novel *The Old Man and the Sea*. According to his iceberg theory, he urges readers to infer them. Actions and diction help to explore them. The novel opening provides insight into Santiago's personality and rebellious nature through subtle descriptions rather than actions. However, as the story progresses, and he dives into the depths of the sea, these descriptions turn into actions. These actions demonstrate his rebellious and challenging spirit through his struggles facing obstacles. Once he overcame the obstacles, they are nothing to fear (nada).

Hemingway (symbolically) implements baseball to mirror life's ebbs and flows, showcasing the value of perseverance through adversity. Likely, Santiago's firm professionalism and unshakable faith guide him toward triumph despite numerous setbacks. By relating to the fish he has hooked, he learns to overcome his weaknesses. Hence, the story highlights the importance of living genuinely and taking decisive action in adversity. Rather than being consumed by his loss, Santiago meditates on his commitment to living authentically.

In his famous quote from his novel, *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway says, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places. But those that will not break it kills" which is true for Santiago. The world (including people, nada, and circumstances) breaks him, but he never gives up. He kills the marline. (Shipra, 2023) Despite his physical struggles and age, Santiago overcomes obstacles with courage and strength. As usual, he defines himself through his choices and commitment to other beings. Hence, killing the giant marline implies killing nada. The one that challenges others and forms giant obstacles in their face.

Through Santiago, Hemingway demonstrates the importance of challenge rather than relying on past victories or others (like Santiago's young apprentice, Manolin) who may have more physical strength but lack the wisdom and experience of older generations like Santiago. "The thousand times that he had proved it meant nothing. Now he was proving it again. Each time was a new time, and he never thought about the past when he was doing it." (Hemingway, 1952.p: 51) The old man determines and focuses on the present moment, rather than dwelling on past accomplishments. (Shipra, 2023) Here, Hemingway also implies a revolutionary feature by emphasizing the significance of consistently putting effort into maintaining one's position rather than relying solely on past accomplishments. It is crucial to avoid complacency and instead strive for constant self-improvement through action, change, and challenge.

Challenging, the old man revolts silently. He keeps going in his path of action and struggles to revenge on himself, his bride, aging, and the negative social norms. Doing this, the old man is still alive. He alters the image of the other old fishermen who sit sadly telling stories about their previous glory. He remains calm, letting his deeds and hard labor speak. This way he persists and calls others to fight their inner fears of nada.

Santiago dislikes a change that implies giving up and defeat eventually. He cannot escape because he is a man of victory, challenge, and rebellion. He belongs to his past victorious days of prosperous fishing trips which he recalls from his dreams to reality. Being away from the harshness of the world does not indicate an escape, but rather a rebellion and challenge to all the world's limitations and miseries. He goes to nothing but sea and sky and comes back with nothing but a skeleton of a huge marlin. Materialistically speaking, he gets nothing. He fights nada and gets nada. Hence, nada is meaningful and he achieves what words cannot interpret.

Unlike people of materialistic thinking, Santiago appreciates even his prey, so he is a man of moralities and honor,

In his struggle with the fish, Santiago, as Hemingway's code hero in *The Old Man and the Sea*, utters words that point out his level of integrity. He respects and loves, not only people but also animals. "Fish, I love you and respect you very much...But I will kill you dead before this day ends" (Ivy Panda. 2023)

Santiago keeps on revolting by giving new principles in life. As this alters the prevailing principles, he is establishing a new understanding of opponents. One that is honorable, unlike the prevailing one created by war. He is killing not for the sake of killing. Therefore, integrity and honor are major values in Santiago's life. (Ivy Panda. 2023) He is not showing or celebrating his victory, rather he prefers a rest. He loves his opponent and highly appreciates it. He also appreciates its companionship and calls it "brother". However, this love does not prevent him from killing it. The old man has piety, unlike materialistic people in the novel and real life. This belief gives him hope and motivation. His persistence is also motivated by his loyalty to his craft and the sea.

Santiago, as a Code Hero, religiously follows moral values, rejecting social and cultural morals. "He only really believes in self-discovery and blunt honesty. (Bostock, 2020). Hemingway has intentionally created a world that is devoid of belief and is driven by materialism. Santiago seems to be the only character who still holds on to his beliefs, while others are hesitant to venture out into the sea, fearing bad luck the old man endures. He says tomorrow I will catch a fish when others mock his luck. He says, "Tomorrow is going to be a good day with this current." (Hemingway. 1952, p 9) He is proving luck to be nothing (nada) and that people should not rely on it. He challenges people's nada facing it with great belief and courage. Santiago mentions, "I may not be as strong as I think... But I know many tricks and I have resolution." (Hemingway, 1952, p 16) He keeps on planning a way for victory, to achieve his goal. It is a hope that ignites a self-belief in the face of nada. With the nada of failure and fabricated shackles, he finds an elopement whenever they restrict him or stand in his face.

Rebellious features of the code hero also appear in quotations like, "But man is not made for defeat," he said. "A man can be destroyed but not defeated." (Hemingway, 1952, P. 103) Hemingway exemplifies the iceberg theory here, as he implies a lot about the challenge and struggle of Santiago. These quotes clarify how Hemingway implements this theory to convey the experiences, emotions, and thoughts of Santiago besides his perseverance, and determination. (Shipra, 2023)

Through his masterful use of minimalism and omission, Hemingway creates a nuanced and emotionally rich portrayal of Santiago and his rebellious journey to prove himself. He faces difficulties and roams of people in the same way he washes his wounds in the salty sea. The marline also bleeds in the same salty sea, but he is the winner and the fish is the trophy. This pain heals his wounds. This indicates the harshness of life, where people have to struggle and bear to gain the harvest of their hard labor. hence, it is not a fishing trip, but rather a revolt trip. He turns pains and misery into a victory. "You did not kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman." (Hemingway, 1952, p 105) This indicates his revolt for the sake of his pride and craft as well.

Santiago is determined to make a significant change in his life, just like the wind does. Before his great journey, Santiago tells Manolin about his plan to go, “far out to come in when the wind shifts. I want to be out before it is light.” (Hemingway, 1952. p.9) He challenges others’ fears (nada) through his fishing trip and life trip as well. He goes where there is “nothing but the sea and sky.” (Hemingway, 1952. p.35) He determines to find a fish beyond people’s restrictions. “My choice” reflects the old man, “was to go there to find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world.” (Hemingway, 1952. p.41) By doing so, he (symbolically) invites people to challenge, rebel, and break out of the shackles of their nada like him.

Santiago’s rebellious soul never stops motivating him, "In each new role, he convinces himself that he is at ease.... He was comfortable not suffering, although he did not admit the suffering at all." (Hemingway, 1952. p.54) He is ready for the fish whenever it jumps and appears. Jean-Paul Sartre's philosophy that man defines himself through his choices (Sigh Thakur, 2022) applies to Santiago. His determination, strength, and perseverance, establish him as an undefeated, resilient real hero and a revolutionist who makes victories from miseries. He faces challenges with hope and strength, never giving up to danger. He understands that pain is insignificant compared to the ultimate goal. Knowing the objective ahead illuminates his trip and gives it purpose. His demonstration, “What a man can do and what a man endures.” (Hemingway, 1952. p.55) modifies his path.

According to Sartre, each individual creates their essence through their actions. The old man reveals courage and endurance as he lives as a genuine subject, expressing his freedom through his deeds without any deceit. The novel portrays Santiago as a responsible character who faces dangers and never shirks away from them. Although he feels remorse for killing the giant fish, he remains determined to catch it. (Thakur, 2022)

Santiago goes fishing for 84 days but fails to catch any fish. His helper leaves him, and other fishermen consider him *salao* (very unlucky). Thus, his life (as a professional fisherman) has no meaning (nada). Nevertheless, he remains unbroken, refusing defeat, and challenging his alienation and bad conditions. Moreover, he never complains or broods. This way, he turned his loss into a victory, enduring a tough fight and struggle to hook a marlin on the 85th day. Being so challenging to catch, causes Santiago great physical strain and emotional distress.

Although the fish circles, Santiago grows exhausted, and the line cuts his hands, but keeps persisting, “Now you are getting confused in the hand” or “Don’t think old man” (Hemingway, 1952. p.89) or, “You think too much” (Hemingway. 1952. p.90). In an attempt to capture the fish, “he took all his pain and what was left of his strength and his long-gone pride, and he put it against the fish’s agony and the fish came over onto his side and swam gently on his side.” (Hemingway. 1952. p.80) He is not only fighting against external forces but also the most important internal forces. This is the most important rebellious feature. It involves inner change and self-determination. Such acts prove that all shackles are mere nada once man challenges them.

Killing the marlin does not end the old man’s struggle, it rather increases with the arrival of the sharks that start eating it. Though consumed, he fights till the last shark kidnaps

the last morsel of the fish. "One came; finally, against the head itself, and he knew that it was over... There was nothing more for them to eat" (Hemingway, 1952. p.102-103) Being a code hero, the old man neither complains nor elaborates on what he endures to anyone when he comes back with the skeleton of the giant marlin. When the boy asks him how much has he suffered, the old man replies 'plenty'. He seems to revolve and start a new page, planning with the boy for their coming fishing trip. (Thakur, 2022) This exposes part of Hemingway's code hero mentioned earlier, he wants to establish for people. This hero avoids talking about an achievement because this decreases its value. Hence, man is the center of the universe, rather than his deeds.

The fish is consumed once the old man catches it. This scene is very significant. It asserts that production never affects man. Santiago is professional and has countless good features, being unable to catch a fish for 84 days shouldn't affect his status. Therefore, he should remain a glorious man. When the old man catches the fish, he cannot show it to people. Only he gets the skeleton. It serves as a crown for victorious leaders who are crowned by kings to prove their victory while their heroism in battle is invisible to the public. The old man is also crowned by the sea, catching a big marlin. No one can see all his potential or how he struggled in his life, which is summarized by his last journey

Santiago has a sense of dignity, "if you were my boy, I'd take you out and gamble," He said, "But you are your father's and your mother's, and you are in a lucky boat." (Hemingway, 1952. P.8) Though the boy wants to be with the old man like before, and they share many thoughts, both of them cannot stop the authority of the boy's parents. Despite the old man's revolt against the fable thinking of society (that believes he has no luck), he still respects positive social authorities that restrict the boy. The old man challenges himself and the outer world but refuses to make the boy go against his parents because he is a responsible man with dignity. Therefore, he is revolting positively against negative issues socially and personally.

1.6 Conclusion

To be a revolutionist, man needs to free himself, choose, try new things, challenge fears, and change his idleness through action, determination, and perseverance. This is how life becomes meaningful and valuable. Santiago, with all his shackles, revolts, and challenges nada to resurrect his pride and undefeated soul. He is a man of adventure and that's how his life gets its essence, and he regains his social status. He rebels and achieves triumph. Revolutions stem from inside first, and that's how Santiago's inner revolution leads to a concrete change.

Hemingway creates a revolutionary, seminal masterpiece for all generations to alter life's miseries. He invites people to persist and go beyond restrictions and shackles created by the outer and the inner realms. A man is a man when he challenges, not when he remains idle or gives up. These things are authentic and possible for most people. Only they need enough courage to make decisions and go beyond the fabricated shackles and restrictions that, once man overcomes, prove to be nothing but nada.

Santiago's dreams resurrect his strength and encourage him to challenge. As motivators, they overlap with his achievements. His deed motivates his ambition and awakens his dreams, and his dreams awaken his ambition for new victories. Since people see the surface - the visible part of the iceberg; therefore, Santiago has to prove that he is still able to produce, even for the last time. Thus, he produces a giant thing (the marlin). Avoiding elaboration in *The Old Man and The Sea*, Hemingway shows the inability, to mention, the potential power of Santiago, leaving room for readers to infer. Therefore, achievement is not everything, and it is not a fair thing to measure or evaluate people.

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