

On Hemingway's Code Hero

Haiying Zhang* Wei Qi** Hebei University

Abstract: This paper has discussed the process that Hemingway makes the image of the Code Hero and makes some comments on this image. It's useful for us to improve standard of appreciating foreign literature and helpful for us to know something about the social reality and historical background at that time. Besides, it teaches us to be a strong-willed man. The Code Hero shows human's courage to challenge nature and great spirit to defeat the nature.

Key words: Code Hero "undefeated" spirit courage

I. Introduction

Ernest Hemingway (1899—1961) is a novelist and short story writer, who has become one of the best-known American authors of his century. He is famous for his romantic experience and unique artistic style all over the world. Most of Hemingway's works come from his experiences and personality. Although the characters in his works are different in age, sex and profession, they have a common ground to some extent. That's the image of the Code Hero, including anti-war soldiers, bullfighters, anti-fascist warriors and fisherman etc. This is the glamour and most outstanding feature of his works.

The Code Hero is a man's man (the typical man in the man). The Code Hero represents a code according to which the hero, if he could attain it, would be able to live properly in the world of violence, disorder and misery. The Code Hero, then, offers up and exemplifies certain principles of honor, courage and endurance, which in a life of tension and pain makes a man a man, as we say, and enables him to conduct himself well in the losing battle that is life. He shows in the author's famous phrase for it, "grace under pressure". Hemingway remarked in *A Farewell to Arms*, "The world breaks everyone and afterward many are strong at the broken places." Barnes, Henry, Jordan and Santiago are all wounded in some way. They are the "strong"—the Code Hero, the model of the wounded.

II. Hemingway Perfects the Image of the Code Hero Gradually

Nick, the hero of *In Our Times* (1925), is the embryo of Hemingway's Code Hero. Nick is honest, virile, an outdoor male and has plenty of nerve. When he grows up, he takes part in the war and returns home with wounds and great disappointment. Therefore, we can say that Nick lays a good foundation for the birth of Jack Barnes, who is the hero of Hemingway's first novel — *The Sun Also Rises* (1926). Barnes is emasculated in the war so that he can't marry his girlfriend whom he loves deeply. The more he loves her, the more pain he has. He throws himself into work actively, goes to enjoy beautiful scenery and watches bullfighting. In the end, he finds the true meaning of life. Following these two Code Hero, another character of anti-war and war-weariness comes into being. It is Henry, the hero of *A Farewell to Arms* (1929). Hemingway made considerable success on Henry. In the course of the novel Lt.

*Haiying Zhang (1974-), Bachelor of Arts and lecturer of Hebei University; Address: Department of Foreign Languages Teaching and Research, Hebei University, Baoding, Hebei, 071000; Tel: 0312-5098962, 3396989; E-mail: bd_zhy@126.com

**Wei Qi (1978-), Bachelor of Arts and teaching assistant of Hebei University; Address: Department of Foreign Languages Teaching and Research, Hebei University, Baoding, Hebei, 071000; Tel: 0312-5059339; E-mail: littlepigqw@sina.com

Frederic Henry is wounded in WW I. The wounds reveal the nature and the ruthlessness of the war. Furthermore, it shows the bravery of Henry. However, on seeing a lot of innocent people become cannon fodder and the result of the war will not benefit any participants, he makes "separate peace" (a famous theory produced by Hemingway. It means that since Henry is anti-war, he has every reason to put down his arms, say good-bye to the war and take his own way.) — does not fight for his country, or any other, any more and escapes to Switzerland with his lover, Catherine Barkley, to seek peace. Obviously, Henry is perfect. Henry takes action and escapes after he realizes the war is insignificant. But in a whole, the Code Hero at the early stage is the "lost struggler" and lacks the aim of life. They have the qualities of a hero; however, they are far away from heroism.

At the second stage, the masterpiece is *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1949) which deals with three days in the life of the Code Hero, now named Robert Jordan, who is fighting as an American volunteer in the Spanish Civil War. He is sent to join a guerilla band in the mountains near Segovia to blow up a strategic bridge, thus facilitating a loyalist advance. He spends three days and nights in guerillas' cave, and then successfully destroys the bridge. But Jordan is wounded in the retreat, and is left to die. From this novel we can conclude that Hemingway has a leap in the process of his cognition. He has come to see the wisdom of such a sacrifice, and the book ends without bitterness. The Code Hero's attitude of facing death is that life is worth living and that there are causes worth dying for.

At the third stage Hemingway creates the perfect image of the Code Hero, Santiago, the hero of *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which regained significantly in reputation and won for him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. This novel tells about an old Cuban fisherman named Santiago. After 84 days without a fish, Santiago ventures far out to sea alone and hooks a giant marlin in the Gulf Stream. For two days and two nights the old man holds on. While he is towed farther out to sea, unfortunately, the sharks begin to take his prize away from him. He kills them until he has only his broken tiller to fight with. Then they eat all but the skeleton, and he tows that home, half dead with exhaustion, and makes his way to bed to sleep and dreams of other days.

This story not only extols the fight among human, nature and fate but also indicates that Hemingway's Code Hero gets to its summit. We can appreciate the perfect image of the Code Hero in the last and most important works.

Santiago behaves perfectly-honorably, with great courage and endurance while losing to the sharks the giant fish he has caught. Thus he comes with a message that while man may grow old, and be wholly down on his luck, he can still dare, stick to the rules, persist when he is destroyed, and thus by the manner of his losing win his victory.

"The old man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords. But none of these scars were fresh..."

"Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated."

The three main points — deep wrinkles, brown blotches and deep-creased scars, make us infer the state of mind at once. We realize the old man's much suffering, hard work and present failure. Meanwhile, our attention is also focused on the old man's eyes — "the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated". The few words make the eyes of the old man come to life. We strongly feel the old man's spirit through his eyes — "The beat of a hero in his old age is as stout as ever."

In addition, in the story, Santiago often dreams of the lions, especially in the end.

"The old man was dreaming about the lions."

As we know, the lion is the symbol of bravery and invincibility. This is just the true portrayal of all the Code Hero. Of course, it is also important for us to have a deep understanding about Santiago's famous saying. After he

killed the first shark:

"But man is not made for defeat," he said, "A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

It not only distinctly portrays the old man's character — his endurance, persistence and "undefeated" spirit but also expresses the novel's theme that it is the spirit of the Code Hero and the strength that encourages us to smile in the face of adversity.

III. His Creation Originated from Life, True to Life and Superior to Life

Hemingway creates these characters not from imagination but from real life. As a matter of fact, there is an intimate connection between Hemingway and his Code Hero. What Hemingway did in his life shows that he is worthy to be called the Code Hero: his skull was fractured at least once; he was sustained at least a dozen brain concussions, several of which were serious ones; he was in three serious automobile accidents and two airplane accidents, during which he suffered several internal injuries; when he was blown up in Italy at the age of 18, the doctors removed off the 237 steel fragments. However, there is a question, "Was Hemingway timid and pessimistic so that he committed suicide?" The answer, of course, is "No". Hemingway suffered much illness and injury and he committed suicide finally. But his suicide could not show that he was timid and pessimistic. Instead, he sets up an image of bravery because he regards his illness and injury as his "enemy", just like the sharks. He uses his life as a weapon. In order to get rid of his "enemy", he would rather choose to die. The spirit of Santiago lasts and re-embodies on Hemingway. In fact, Hemingway utilizes his life to show that he is an unconquerable "old lion".

Moreover, Hemingway's creation not only originates from life, but is also superior to life. He sticks to his standard of truth-telling in writing, but he never copies anything mechanically. He is also a master of turning reality into fiction, representing what logically might happen as well as what happened. The characters in his works are all typical ones. He doesn't lay special emphasis on detail description but to express the Code Hero's truthfulness by their inner beauty. Therefore, Jordan and Santiago leave an indelible impression to us. Hemingway once said that *The Old Man and the Sea* could be written in a longer novel about 1,000 pages. In the novel, he could describe many of the other villagers and how they made a living. But he omits all those, only to describe the old man and the process of fishing the marlin and fighting the sharks. Besides, Hemingway not only reflects real life but also expresses himself in his works. Henry says good-bye to the arms and Jordan's American teacher of Spanish goes to the front, both of which show Hemingway's emotional coloring.

IV. Conclusion

It is not difficult to see that Hemingway's own personality and rich life experiences make him create these immortal works. He expresses what to love and what to hate through the Code Hero, who shows human's courage to challenge the nature and great spirit to defeat the nature.

References:

1. 宋寅展、蘇成全. 二十世紀西方文學. 華中師範大學出版社. 1990.
2. Ernest Hemingway. *A Farewell to Arms*. Foreign Language Learning and Research Press. 1990.
3. Philip Young. *Ernest Hemingway*. University of Minnesota Press. 1960.
4. Ernest Hemingway. *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. London: Granada Publishing Limited. 1976.
5. Zhongxiang Wang. *Foreign Literature Studies*. 1980—1985 (all the articles related to Hemingway).
6. Ernest Hemingway. *The Old Man and the Sea*. Beijing: The Commercial Press. 1963.

(Edited by: Hu Libing, Pan Juan and Candy)