

Hemingway and an Unyielding Characteristics Style in His Works

Yan Chen

Feixian Branch, Linyi University
Feixian, Shandong, China, 273400
e-mail: mxh399@126.com

Abstract—The spirit of unyielding characteristics advocated in Hemingway's works and this personality characteristics of himself almost win the popularity among readers throughout the world. However, if we adore this kind of character and imitate it blindly, we will find some traps under the beautiful halo. So it has a profound practical significance to see the unyielding characteristics of Hemingway dialectically and clearly.

Keywords—Hemingway; unyielding characteristics; trap; charm

I. ABOUT THE UNYIELDING CHARACTERISTICS

The life of Hemingway can be regarded as a life pursuing unyielding characteristics, full of braveness, perseverance and legend. His life and the works with a sort of autobiography enhance the beauty of each other, almost letting people cannot distinguish that whether the works are more attractive because of him or he has more charm because of the works. All kinds of adventures and unyielding characteristics of him show different forms in different stages.

When Hemingway was a child, he often followed his father to save the patients and go fishing and hunting. He had a special interest in swimming, fishing, boxing and kicking the ball, at the meantime forming a toned body and unyielding characteristics. When Hemingway was 14 years old, he went into the boxing ring. Even though beaten with a full face of blood, he refused to fall and admit defeat. He stepped into battlefield when he was 19 years old. More than 200 bullet pieces cannot let him fear and yield. After the outbreak of the World War II, Japan attacked the Pearl Harbor sneakingly. And the same day when the United States declared war against Japan, Hemingway joined the navy. He joined battle in his own unique way. He refitted his houseboat and equipped radios, machine gun and hundreds of pounds of explosives. His plan of action was that seeking the German submarines on the north sea of Cuba. And if he found the submarines, he would go forward at full speed, striking ships of enemy and perishing together with them. This plan not only was approved by Mr. Brattain, the U.S. ambassador in Cuba, but also got the approval of the U.S. intelligence staff. Hemingway commanded the seamen to trace the German submarines almost 2 years at sea but he never found the chance to collide. Although the plan seemed

a little vagarious, his courage was very praiseworthy. In January, 1954, Hemingway missed Africa and the hunting life, so he went to Africa to go hunting with his wife. The small plane that they took unfortunately crashed near the source of Nile and both of them got injured. People on another plane saw that Hemingway's plane crashed, so all the people thought that Hemingway and his wife died in this accident. But Hemingway of 55 years old didn't mind and they switched to a different plane to go to the capital of Uganda. Only flying for a moment, the plane fell into a plantation. After a few minutes, the plane exploded, causing a big fire. Hemingway took his wife Mary to climb out of the flames and wreckage of plane and accompanied Mary to go to the hospital. Actually Hemingway's state of injury was the most serious. He saw a long string of name of disease on medical card of himself: synarthrosis, contusion of kidney, liver injury, cerebral concussion, second degree and third degree burn, and the disorder of intestinal tract etc. But he got through these difficulties and tests. The legendary experience in life helped to form the unyielding characteristics of Hemingway consciously or unconsciously. On the other hand, Hemingway's rapid success in creation helped to form the unyielding characteristics of himself as well. During the period of 1920s and the mid-term of 1930s, Hemingway published a new book almost in every one and a half years and every book won high praise. This hard-bitten labor of creation was undoubtedly a manifestation of his unyielding characteristics.

II. ABOUT THE CHARM OF THE UNYIELDING MAN

"A man can be destroyed but can never be defeated", and this sentence is the famous dictum that Hemingway pursues in his lifetime. This is also the quintessence of thought of the "unyielding man" image that he creates. Discussing the growth track of the "unyielding man image" created by Hemingway is also to explore the journey of the writer's mind. Hemingway is a writer of realism and what he follows is the basic writing methods of realism. He shapes the unyielding man image of himself according to the original style of life, and then his real life reappears. So we can see the shadow of himself everywhere in Hemingway's works. In the sketch set of Hemingway, *In Our Time*, the protagonist Nick is rudiment of unyielding man image

created by Hemingway. "Drinking excessively, fickle in love, addicted to hunting large animals, and like bullfight"¹ all of these hobbies reflect the features of Hemingway himself. The matador Mannur in short story *The Defeated*, the protagonist Jordan in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and the old fisherman Santiago in *The Old Man and the Sea*, all of these protagonists obviously have the characters of Hemingway himself. Some people say that the method that Hemingway creates the unyielding man image is simple. That is, he becomes an unyielding man and then writes something about himself. Therefore many people in the works can be regarded as a true reflection of Hemingway's real life.

No matter going to a bullfight tooth and nail, or combating wholeheartedly on the battlefield, or fighting fiercely with sharks in the sea, Hemingway advocates an indomitable character of "unyielding man" all the time in his works. The common features of these characters are: strong, resolute and steadfast, brave and righteous, facing sufferings and death intrepidly. And for the sake of the so-called personality and dignity, no matter how big the difficulty is and how terrible the death is, they will face death unflinchingly.

However, through these stories, Hemingway tries to tell us: in the fight with the powerful forces of the outside world, individuals still cannot escape the fate of failure. We should have the plan of failure in advance. After imaging the worst things, we will think that any difficulty and frustration seem as expected. Meanwhile, we will not be surprised at them or at a loss. Under the circumstances of encountering dangerous situations, unworried people seem more personable and have the charm of personality. The more wicked the environment is, the more tenacious the protagonist will be and the sharp contrast seems more shocking. Maybe what Hemingway pursues is this effect. He intentionally builds this atmosphere in many places of his works.

In reality, what Hemingway advocates is that sacrifice must be heroic and death must be cleanly because this can seem moving and tragic. It is similar to the thought of Chinese proverb "Better a glorious death than a shameful life". Of course, the power destroying the protagonists is often very strong. Maybe these external forces are wars, dark society or forces different from us in the natural world. The protagonists are obviously at a disadvantage when struggling with the power. But the protagonists are at all costs or fearless and struggle doggedly and they will not stop until they reach their goals.

Even though the protagonists in his works fail at last, they still keep personable. Just as the lion he describes in *The Snows of Kilimanjaro*, it still sits on the hill instead of falling after it dies. This is the unyielding characteristic that Hemingway advocates and also a kind of image that he makes every efforts to shape.

What the character of "unyielding man" advocates is strength and braveness, and these are good qualities pursued

by people. These qualities like lighthouses to shine the way for those who haven't these qualities to move forward. So the "unyielding characteristics" of Hemingway have a certain market. It is popular in America because this kind of personal trait that Hemingway advocates caters to American people or it resonates with them and expresses their feelings.

III. ABOUT THE ENDING OF THIS UNYIELDING MAN

There is a misleading appearance of "unyielding man" in Hemingway himself: arrogant, indifferent and cynical and sometimes unreasonable. In his birthday party, when his friend Buck Lanham touched the back side of his head unintentionally, he jumped up immediately just like his friend hit him. He declared angrily that he never allowed anyone to touch his head. Hemingway made friends with the famous English writer James Joyce in Paris when he was very young. This predecessor once described him, "A sensitive person stubbornly pretends to be an unyielding man".²

Hemingway is not only sensitive but also addicted to wine. When he was a teenager and spent summer in Michigan, he began to drink. After he grew up, he drunk heavily all the time and sometimes he could drink 16 glasses of double daiquiri at one night. For years, when he got up in the morning, he began to drink until he went to bed in the evening. Maybe in order to support the unyielding image, Hemingway overdrew his health in advance, so he suffered serious damage physically and mentally. The alcohol caused numerous accidents for him and led to high blood pressure of him as well. He had suffered from liver disease from the end of the 1930s. Normally, those who suffered from liver disease couldn't drink, but Hemingway didn't care about these. His psychology of "unyielding man" made him regardless of anything. If carefully exploring the deep reasons of Hemingway's behavior, we will find that everything he does is because his unique personality or the so-called vanity of "unyielding man". This vanity makes him ignore the meaning and values of life. Maybe Gertrude Stein expresses the essence with one sentence, "He uses brutality as the shield to cover up the amazing timidity and sensitivity of himself".

When creating the autobiographical work of *A Movable Feast*, he was in trouble because electrotherapy resulted in the failure of memory. The loss of talent made Hemingway's life meaningless and he couldn't put up with life any more. At the time of Kennedy's inauguration, because of his reputation, others invited him to write a few words for the assumption of duty of the new president. He spent a few hours and wrote nothing in the end. Later he cried in front of the doctors and said he cannot write any longer.

Hemingway appreciated the view of Nietzsche at an early time, "Die at proper time. People who die at the peaks of happiness are the most glorious."³ "The peaks of happiness" in his heart is the time when a person is the most dignified

¹ Dong Hengxun. *The Research on Hemingway*[M]. China Social Sciences Press, 1998.

² Jeffrey Meyers. *The Biography of Hemingway*[M]. China Zhuoyue Publishing Company, 1990.

³ 3Huo Qile. *Papa Hemingway*[M]. Yilin Press. 1999.

and decent. Once a person cannot keep this dignity and decency, the pressure of being alive will increase immediately. Jung said, "A person cannot throw off the nature and pretend character of hypocrisy without being punished. In general cases, even the willing to behave like that will cause unconscious reactions, such as bad temper, mannerism, phobia, compulsory thoughts, corruption and evil etc." The more will that Hemingway wants to pretend to behave like a hero in life, the more feelings of failure in his heart will be.

"When he thinks he loses the unyielding characteristics that he believes, the desire to end his life will become increasingly strong." So he thinks about death and he wants to use the way of suicide to keep his "dignity" of man, that is, "A man can be destroyed but can never be defeated". In July, 1961, because Hemingway could not endure the pains that the losing of creativeness and the torment of disease bring for him, he used the way of suicide to fight with the pains and kept his "dignity" of an unyielding man, that is, "A man can be destroyed but can never be defeated". Maybe he wanted to let the way of death become the evidence that he was an unyielding man.

So he put the shotgun into his mouth and then pulled the trigger. Here, Hemingway regarded the shotgun as a symbol of the life-style and life value of a "man". Therefore, the suicide of Hemingway shocked people. At the same time, it seemed to be in expectation. Maybe in the opinions of some people, this is a way of suicide that has the "unyielding characteristics".

IV. ABOUT THE THOUGHT ON THE UNYIELDING CHARACTERISTICS

We can say the "unyielding characteristics" help Hemingway as well as ruin Hemingway. The "unyielding characteristic" is a kind of perfect character and it is the goal of the idealist. Often there is a certain distance between ideal and reality. If a person suicides easily in order to pursue this perfection, it equals a kind of indifference towards life. There is no fault to pursue perfection, but when it fails, we need to treat it with a usual mind. Life is beautiful, but if one suicides because he is afraid of being defeated, it is obviously a selfish manner.

The main reason why Hemingway's death makes American people in deep sorrow is that the "unyielding characteristics" advocated by him conform to the spirit of America at that time. "Unyielding characteristics" make Hemingway's image great enough in the mind of American people, just like a towering tree.

The great poet Frost made appropriate description on the day after Hemingway's suicide, "He is firm and tenacious and doesn't cherish life as well as himself. ... Fortunately, he gives himself enough time to show his greatness." The "unyielding characteristics" of Hemingway indeed stimulated a whole generation of the American. In the country where even the president died, not every people in America would feel the anguish of sorrow, why Hemingway's death could let all the people in America "immerse in sorrow?" We can find the reason in his unique

works and the unyielding characteristics! Hemingway himself and the characters wrote by him had profound influence on the whole generation of the American people. People imitated him and the characters in his works emulatively.

Therefore it's necessary to view the unyielding characteristics dialectically. We can take it for granted to praise and worship the "unyielding man" image. Because "unyielding man" image usually uses amazing willpower and strong energy to fight fiercely with the hostile world. No matter how serious the situation is and how big the difficulties are, they won't lose the human dignity, courage and determination. They show the strong, resolute and steadfast, brave and righteous traits of character and personable behavior of fearlessness in front of danger. These characters are moving and full of fascination.

REFERENCES

- [1] Dong Hengxun. The Research on Hemingway[M]. China Social Sciences Press, 1998.
- [2] Jeffrey Meyers. The Biography of Hemingway[M]. China Zhuoyue Publishing Company, 1990.
- [3] Baker. The Biography of Hemingway. Translated by Lin Jihai[M]. Hunan Literature and Art Press, 1992.
- [4] Rollo May. The Theory of Death[M]. Guangzhou Culture Press. 1988.
- [5] MeriRisa McDaniel. The Biography of Hemingway[M]. World Affairs Press. 1998
- [6] Li Wenjun. The Biography of Faulkner[M]. New World Press. 2003.
- [7] Kurt Syngé. The Biography of Hemingway[M]. Zhejiang Literature and Art Press. 1983.
- [8] Huo Qile. Papa Hemingway[M]. Yilin Press. 1999.