

Contrasting Pairs in Hemingway's "A Day's Wait"

Fuhua Liu

School of Foreign Languages, Dalian Jiaotong University, Dalian, Liaoning 116028, China.

Abstract

The present paper is an analysis of contrasting pairs in Hemingway's "A Day's Wait". Three major contrasting pairs of Schatz's outer grace and inner fears, Schatz's world and that of his father's and the writer's simple language and complicated thoughts and powerful emotions are analyzed in detail respectively. Through the analysis, readers get more insights into the short story.

Keywords

Contrasting pairs, Hemingway, "A Day's Wait".

1. Introduction

Ernest Hemingway, a Nobel Prize winner, excels in portraying true heroes showing grace under pressure. In his short story "A Day's Wait", the little "hard man" Schatz shows his uttermost calmness and courageousness in the face of death. Readers are most likely to experience difficulty in getting insights into the essence of the story if they cannot guess out the other "seven-eighths of the iceberg underwater" based on the one-eighth of the information provided in the story. Therefore, to help readers enhance their comprehension and appreciation of Hemingway's "A Day's Wait", this paper tries to analyze three major contrasting pairs involved in the story: 1.the contrasting pair of Schatz's outer grace and inner fears, 2.the contrasting pair of Schatz's world and that of his father's 3.the contrasting pair of the writer's simplicity in language and complexity in thoughts and emotions.

2. Body

2.1. Contrasting Pair 1: Schatz's Outer Grace and Inner Fears

To wait for death is not something trivial. Rather, it is a life-or-death matter. To be afraid of dying is an essential part of human nature. Like any other kids, the nine-year-old boy also fears death as can be shown in the boy's keeping "looking at the foot of the bed". Inwardly, Schatz anxiously waits for the coming of death. In Schatz's mind, as this is the "first" time that he is going to die, he does not know how he will feel upon embracing the arrival of death. For him, his death is doomed, but the process of waiting is truly painful. The uncertainty during the waiting is what troubles him.

The very unique aspect about the little hero is that he does not want to show his fears out. Instead of sharing his fears with others, especially family members with blood ties, he chooses to combat his fears all by himself. That is how little Schatz displays "grace under pressure". On the one hand, Schatz is very considerate and sacrificial. By saying that "You don't have to stay in here with me, Papa, if it bothers you.", Schatz shows his reluctance to bother his father or let his father suffer in any sense. And by "refusing to let anyone come into the room", the little boy shows his very concern about people around him that he loves. On the other, he wants to die in a respectable true-man manner. As a rule, an average boy would probably cry out, pouring his utmost fears and sensitiveness out. But Schatz chooses to be a true hero by restraining his human emotions. Here Hemingway intends to convey the message that self-control and grace in the face of death is something more memorable and immortal than life.

At the end of the story, after realizing the terrible mistake he has made, Schatz lightens up with his inner fears fading away. The pressure has gone according. "The next day it was very slack and he cried very easily at little things that were of no importance". The little hero thus becomes once again the ordinary kid that still lives in him. Hemingway seems to define his heroism this way: A true hero does not ask for trouble in his daily life. But in extreme conditions, a true hero can always stand up and stand out by acting heroically.

2.2. Contrasting Pair 2: Schatz's World and That of His Father's

Although the father himself is a "hard man" and definitely sets a good example for his son, in the short story the two seem to have lived in two vastly different worlds. The father knows that his son will soon recover from the flu, so he does not worry too much about his son's health. Actually while taking good care of his son, he enjoys his day as usual. The father is not characterized as a talkative person, but he does speak and do much more than his son in the story. He is generally more active, as he "reads aloud from Howard Pyle's Book of Pirates" goes out hunting. By contrast, the son appears half-silent, motionless and passive externally despite his ups and downs in his inner world. He locks himself in his own bedroom, leaving himself all alone in bed awake. In a sense, the calmer the little boy appears, the more complicated his inner world becomes.

The father "went out for a while", hunting for the quail. The father is actively and aggressively involved in his outdoor shooting with his "young Irish setter". He is now the conqueror of nature, believing that mankind at the top of the biological chain is capable of dominating everything on this planet. He "killed two and missed five" and expected his next hunting, without sympathizing with the little animals. Before he pinned down the prey, he had encountered tiny setbacks, as he "fell twice, hard, once dropping my gun and having it slide away over the ice". The funny description indicates the father's calmness in character and take-it-for-granted attitude towards the harshness in everyday life. Meanwhile, for the little boy in bed at home, it is a critical time of life and death. Unlike his father, he is by no means "pleased" or "happy". He looks passive physically, but determined and brave spiritually inside. For Schatz, his doomed death, a merciless incarnation of the natural force, is approaching him. His inner activity surges as he courageously combat death.

"Hemingway believes that death and destruction in the world are unavoidable and are part of the law of nature." [1] By contrasting the different worlds of Schatz and his father through objective description and indication, Hemingway seems to claim that life will go on even if a human being perishes from this planet. Only the person involved can feel his own pain and has to resolve his own problems. Also, in Hemingway's view, a true hero is one who sacrifices for his beloved and keeps the pains and fears all to himself in order to give himself dignity and grace and others before-sacrifice tranquility and after-sacrifice shock and appreciation.

2.3. Contrasting Pair 3: Simple Language and Complicated Thoughts and Emotions

One of Ernest Hemingway's famous literary creation theories is the "iceberg principle" which goes as follows. "If it is any use to know it, I always try to write on the principle of the iceberg. There is seven-eighths of it underwater for every part that shows. Anything you know you can eliminate and it only strengthens your iceberg. It is the part that doesn't show. If a writer omits something because he does not know it then there is a hole in the story." [3] Hemingway's short story "A Day's Wait" also embodies the iceberg principle by using less words, simpler language and objective description to convey rich and thought-provoking ideas and powerful emotions. Readers at first may be startled at the conciseness of the short story which contains only 105 lines. No rhetorical devices are employed in the story, no are there useless modifiers, complicated sentence structures. Reluctant to give an explanation, the writer gives no

psychological analysis or the opportunity to let the speakers explain their moods or actions. Despite the absence of common literary aids used by his contemporaries, Hemingway still manages to convey profound meanings and subtle emotions through the characters' simple, colloquial expressions and actions. Look at the following dialogues between the father and the little boy.

"What is it?"

"Something like a hundred," I said. It was one hundred and two and four tenths.

"It was a hundred and two," he said.

"Who said so?"

"The doctor."

"Your temperature is all right," I said. "It's nothing to worry about."

"I don't worry," he said, "but I can't keep from thinking."

"Don't think," I said. "Just take it easy."

"I'm taking it easy," he said and looked straight ahead. He was evidently holding tight onto himself about something.

"Hemingway's concise and everyday language accurately expresses out the grace of Schatz's fearlessness in solitude and his magic 'little hard man' spirit." [2] The above dialogue seems as if it is really happening in reality, and it shows that the father and the boy are in two totally different worlds. The boy can bear his temperature "one hundred and two" in mind and may keep thinking about his temperature while running a fever. Obviously, the doctor's casual reply to the father has been sealed permanently in the boy's mind. For him, the temperature is what all that matters and the cause of his approaching death. If readers read the story a second time, they will understand that when the father says, "It's nothing to worry about.", the boy misinterprets his father's words as "to die is not so awesome a thing". The words "I'm taking it easy," from the boy actually make up the climax of his own inner world of the battlefield. He is facing death courageously with all his might by "holding tight onto himself about something". The "hard man" image of Schatz is revealed to the readers just by the simple dialogues and a focused behavior.

3. Conclusion

To help readers better comprehend and appreciate Hemingway's "A Day's Wait", the paper analyzes three major contrasting pairs in the short story. The first contrasting pair is Schatz's outer grace and inner fears. To fear death is human, and the nine-year-old Schatz is no exception. What is heroic about the little boy is his ability to restrain his fears and his option to appear graceful in the face of death all by himself. By choosing this path of death, Schatz gains respect for himself and tranquility for others. The second contrasting pair is Schatz's world and that of his father's. The son is externally half-silent, motionless and passive, while the father appears relatively talkative and active. The description of the father's hunting shows the contrasting moods and attitudes between the father and the son, with the former "happy" and "take-it-for-granted" and the latter "mixed" but "determined". The third contrasting pair is the writer's simplicity in language and complexity in thoughts and emotions based on his "iceberg principle" under which less words, simpler language and objective description can convey rich and thought-provoking ideas and powerful emotions. Through the analysis of the three major contrasting pairs, readers are sure to better comprehend and appreciate Hemingway's short story "A Day's Wait".

References

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