

Characterization of Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's "The Old Man and the Sea"

Fuhua Liu

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

Abstract

The present paper focuses on the characterization of the hero Santiago in Ernest Hemingway's novel "The Old Man and the Sea". Santiago's character is analyzed from his respective interaction with Manolin, the marlin and the sharks. Through the analysis, a better understanding about Santiago and his creator Hemingway can be gained.

Keywords

Characterization, Santiago, Ernest Hemingway, The Old Man and the Sea.

1. Introduction

Hemingway is awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his masterpiece "The Old Man and the Sea". Hemingway appreciates a lot the philosophy of "less is more", so behind the concise words and simple style of the novel emerge the writer's complex thoughts and deep emotions. To get insights into Hemingway's rich yet complicated inner world represented by the hero Santiago he has created, the present paper intends to focus on the characterization of "the old man" Santiago by analyzing his interaction with Manolin, the marlin and the sharks respectively.

2. Body

2.1. Characterization of Santiago from the Perspective of his Interaction with Manolin

A boy, Manolin is forced to leave Santiago by his parents. In his parents' eyes, Santiago the fisherman is the unluckiest man in the world who has not caught a fish for over eighty days. But Manolin remains loyal to Santiago, offering him food, bait and spiritual comfort. The young boy shows his very concern about Santiago's safety at the end of the novel and feels relieved upon seeing Santiago lying in bed sound and safe back from the sea. When fighting alone at sea against the giant marlin, Santiago often murmurs to himself about the boy, imagining his presence with him.

Based on the summarization in the previous paragraph, we can see that Santiago and Manolin are definitely quite intimate friends despite their great gap in age. Manolin considers Santiago his lifelong teacher from whom he can always learn a lot. Unlike other town people, the admirer believes in Santiago that he will make a hit one day though he is experiencing bad luck now. The presence of the character Manolin actually enhances the old man Santiago's loneliness at sea and most probably Hemingway's yearning for spiritual company in reality. Huang Ming believes that Hemingway's works are filled with deep-level heroic loneliness.[1] Indeed, Hemingway in reality may be for most of the time in solitude, without the constant company of a little boy like Manoli. So the friendship established in the novel is what he truly cherishes in reality. At sea, when Santiago alone combats the marlin, in his mind's eye he sighs that how great it would be if the boy were on boat with him. There is no point of Santiago's fighting for himself. He has to fight for someone, so the source of faith and courage to win the battles is not only from within but also from others Santiago loves. To a certain degree, Santiago is inspired by the little boy to

reach the far sea to try his luck. They sail in two different directions, keeping in mind that they will be finally united. And probably it is the old man's keen eagerness to return to join in their reunion that sustains him back to shore.

In the novel, Santiago is described as "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated".[2] That is, the old man remains spiritually young and strong. Manoli in some sense is the younger version of the old man himself. By befriending and interacting with the past self Manoli, Santiago reminds himself of his own spectacular young days when he manages to defeat any of his rivals. And he expects Manoli, an idealized follower of him, to inherit his undefeatable character so that the spiritual wealth can be passed down to the next generation.

2.2. Characterization of Santiago from the Perspective of His Interaction with the Marlin

The marlin, a symbol of the natural force, is the target the hero Santiago is about to conquer. Santiago has developed mixed attitudes towards the marlin. After being pulled towards the northwest by the giant marlin at sea, Santiago begins to appreciate the marlin for the dignity it presents, believing that nobody deserves to consume it. Santiago even considers the marlin as his brother, a brother that he must kill to fulfill the responsibility of a fisherman. With his unbelievable perseverance and expertise, he finally defeats the marlin after two days and nights of fighting. For Santiago, the most valuable thing is definitely not life itself, but the dignity, courage and determination a living creature possesses and shows. In other words, what he concerns is something spiritual rather than something physical. "One can be destroyed, but never be defeated." [2]

Some may pick up the merciless aspect in Santiago's human nature. But life is such. There are always the conquerors and those being conquered. The writer Hemingway who has experienced so many life-and-death moments, intentionally creates such complicated relationships. For Hemingway, nature is born to be conquered by humans, but some of the conquered deserve respect. On the one hand, his hero will mercilessly swallow raw fish or bait the sardines, as human beings have to depend on these lower animals for survival. On the other, the hero will show his admiration for the creatures that fight fiercely back, as they present the same unconquerable spirit as human beings.

The marlin may also be explained as the "enemies" in wars in the real world. It is quite natural for Hemingway to adore his enemy or enemies and thus develop a friendship. The cruelty of a war is that soldiers involved must kill their enemies, be they their friends or brothers. However they worship their enemies, they must fulfill their responsibilities as soldiers. Exploited by the governments, both sides are the victims of a greater force in some sense. In "The Old Man and the Sea", the old man and the marlin are unfortunately exploited by a school of sharks so that Santiago's efforts and the death of marlin end in vain.

2.3. Characterization of Santiago from the Perspective of his Interaction with the Sharks

On his way back home, Santiago inevitably meets with a school of sharks. Attracted by the blood of Santiago's trophy, the greedy sharks seize Santiago's fruits of victory by launching their fiercest attacks and devouring the carcass of the old man's the giant marlin. Santiago's determination to defend his victory and dignity can be obviously seen here. He alone fights against batches of sharks at sea even at the cost of his life. In spite of the realization of the possibility of failure, he does his uttermost and fights to the end. Here readers can see the cruelty of the biological chain. It is a matter of life and death for both the sharks and Santiago. All creatures want to survive, and humans like Santiago are no exception. If Santiago ends the life of a sardine or a jelly fish, readers will not make a fuss. However, a giant marlin or shark has

acquired some features of human beings, and the killing of such animals tends to scare most common folks out of their wits. As a professional and experienced fisherman, Santiago never withdraws like a coward. Instead as a responsible man, he well fulfills his role. Hemingway's "cruelty" is not an indicator of his unkindness and aloofness, as he is kind to and considerate of the town people and often dreams about his dead wife. His kindness can be summarized as "male kindness", supporting the law of the jungle on the one hand and benevolence on the other. Santiago's tragedy is doomed. "All's well that ends well" is not something that will give readers shocks and opportunities for thinking. So instead of letting his hero Santiago triumph back with unprecedented success, Hemingway lets him back with the core of the human spirit---a skeleton consisting mostly of the backbone, tail and head of the marlin. The skeleton of the marlin best illustrates Hemingway's belief of an undefeatable spirit. The physical body of the marlin fades away, but the skeleton remains a reminder of what has happened to Santiago and an undefeatable spirit the hero is representing.

3. Conclusion

Santiago's rich yet complicated inner world can be well analyzed from his interaction with Manolin, the marlin and the sharks respectively. As to Santiago's relationship with Manolin, the presence of the character Manolin enhances the old man Santiago's loneliness at sea and most probably Hemingway's yearning for spiritual company in reality. To a certain degree, as the possible younger version of the old man himself, Santiago is inspired by the little boy to reach the far sea to try his luck. As to Santiago's relationship with the marlin, Santiago has developed mixed attitudes towards it, considering the marlin his enemy as well as his brother. Hemingway intentionally creates such complicated relationships to indicate what may truly happen in real world wars. As to Santiago's relationship with the sharks, Santiago's kindness can be summarized as "male kindness", supporting the law of the jungle on the one hand and benevolence on the other. By gaining nothing but the skeleton in the end, Hemingway shows his philosophy of upholding an undefeatable human spirit. Through the analysis of the characterization of Santiago from the above three perspectives, readers can get a better understanding of the hero in the novel and his creator Hemingway.

References

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