Suicide Lurks Over The Horizon Essay, Research Paper

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Many people say that Ernest Hemingway?s stature within the view of the public has only increased since his death, proving that his work has endured the test of time. In many minds of Americans who are familiar with Hemingway, he was a man of contrast and contradictions. Simply put, Americans have this theory of Hemingway because he stood for rugged individualism through his manly, brutish nature yet he committed suicide. However, in all honesty this notion is false. At first, agreeance with the majority was easy because it seemed logical but after reanalyzing Hemingway?s works, it?s definitive that Hemingway conversed with the world through his characters. Hemingway was trapped within the image he created for himself. He talked through his writing but he wasn?t being heard nor understood. The foreshadowing of Hemingway?s suicide was submerged throughout his writing but nobody could dive so deep in order to hear what he was saying until it was too late.

Hemingway is clearly thought to be a higher and more prominent figure proceeding his death than he was as a tangible, animated person on Earth. During his prime years Hemingway created a ?mythic persona? yet certain stature for himself (Nagel 1). He ?defined manliness? but not solely through what he wrote, what he said, and what he expressed, but also through what he did: fishing for elusive gamefish from trout to tarpon and marlin, hunting to life threatening extremes for highly prized game, watching bullfights with a ?discerning eye?, being a women?s man, dominating his nemeses, and pursuing all wars for the benefit of his nation (Valiunas 77). However, this claim to fame personality of Hemingway is what drove him six feet under. He built up such a recollected and admirable prestige to himself that there was no backing down. ?Without the man who wanted to feel every thrilling sensation he could, the writer who sought immortality would have been utterly a loss? (77). Basically, he was a fake, a phony, a false identity. Hemingway trapped himself into an unwanted status amongst the public through the means of the media. It?s as if Hemingway was grabbed and thrown into an air tight cell where there was no way out but

through the taking of his own life.

Within just seven years of earning one of the most well known and prestigious awards within the field of literature, Hemingway took his own life (Gerard 254). He was portrayed as a man who desired immortality but later realized that he must go head to head, or gun to head is a better description, with the lack of eternity each day (254). It was ?a suicide interpreted as the culmination of his belief in taking responsibility for his own life, even the termination of it? (Nagel 1). Hemingway suffered from severe depression and physical decline. His memory was depleted through electric shock therapy that he endured after hospitalization in the Mayo Clinic. On July 2, 1961, at the age of sixty two, Hemingway took his favorite shotgun, put the barrel of the gun to his head, and proceeded to pull the trigger (Gerard 254).

From that dreary day in history to present day, Hemingway has grown in the eyes and minds of people across the world. Hemingway?s ?life certified the value of his art. But his art also proved the value of his life? (Valiunas 77). His simplistic and precise writing style, pathway to literature freedom, and hard core devotion to the humanities has left a permanent incision on the world of literature. In his works, Hemingway was immensely influential because of the aspects of modern life that he wrote about. ?Hemingway?s reputation and influence will forever rest on an uneasy blending of the myth of his personal adventures with the artistic merit of his best fiction? (Nagel 2). Many of his novels and short stories depict a universe that is engulfed of insensitivity, violence, and corruption. His main characters are all scarred both ?physically and psychologically? by trying to find guidance within their lives (1). This is one of the main reasons that Hemingway?s devotion to literature is still appreciated as some of the best literary work ever produced. Almost any person alive can relate and cope with at least one of Hemingway?s character?s predicaments and struggles that they face. It?s the parallelism of the reader?s life to the character?s life that leaves people intrigued by Hemingway?s writing.

However, it?s not just the correlation between the reader and the protagonist that makes Hemingway so famous. It?s also the vivid reality in which Hemingway writes. He can write in such a dramatic, perceptive form because he has lived through or was living through exactly what he was writing about. The life of Hemingway was translated through his writing. It may not have been clearly, directly, or simply put even though this was the way

Hemingway wrote, but it was buried beneath his words. To really hear Hemingway it?s ?as if it were one of those annoying 3-D posters that you can?t see until you make a concerted effort not to try to see, it?s simple once you know what not to look for? (Kwan 1).

Hemingway is recognized as the icon of the theme of rugged individualism amongst his readers. In combination with his suicide and the themes he wrote and pursued, Hemingway has been branded a contradiction with the majority of people who are educated about him. His fans were not aware of his clashing mentality until he took his own life. People are said to either love Hemingway or hate him. The latter think he is a ?pompous bullying braggart who made up tall stories to inflate his own reputation, whose writing is a mannered, chest-thumping parody of itself? (Gerard 254). During his life Hemingway was a connoisseur of celebrity and drooled for immortality but throughout his career he ran away from broadcasters, refused to do interviews, and gave the cold shoulder to biographers. He flew to far away places where he desired a private life without all of the hype from the media (254).

In contrast, what people see as a contradiction, few others may see as a cry for help. Hemingway was caught up in an act that he couldn?t escape. For Hemingway, it was like being caught in a riptide. He tried to swim against it and only got pulled further in. Literature was the means for Hemingway to plead for help but not in a direct sense. Throughout his literature Hemingway wrote in a natural, plain, but thrilling fashion. He didn?t use excessive words, extravagant language, or deep metaphors, but there was a lot more behind Hemingway?s words that were never heard (Nagel 1). His writing was so compelling because he primarily personalized his characters through the needs and wants of himself. In all basicity, Hemingway wrote one large suicide note with the compilement of all of his works.

In On the Road by Jack Kerouac, he writes:

And for just a moment I had reached the point of ecstasy that I always wanted to reach, which was the complete step across chronological time into timeless shadows…the potent and inconceivable radiances shinning in bring Mind Essence…I felt sweet, swinging bliss, like a big shot of heroin in the mainline vein…I thought I was going to die the very next moment. (Kwan 4)

This passage amazingly describes exactly what Hemingway went through and tried to say.

The fame was so thrilling for Hemingway that he got addicted to it, just like Heroin, he couldn?t quit. Until the fact that he saw it ruining his life that he decided to end it himself.

In almost everyone of Hemingway?s books he mentions death through puting his characters under the endless emotions that he had endured in real life. In For Whom the Bell Tolls, Hemingway practically writes a clear cut suicide note. He writes, ?The world is a fine place and worth the fighting for and I hate very much to leave it. And you had a lot of luck, he told himself, to have had such a good life. You?ve had just as good a life as grandfather?s though not as long? (qtd. in Valiunas, 77). Hemingway is literally saying that he?s had a wonderful life up until now but there?s nothing left in it for him. It?s all about the image that he is engulfed in and not about his inner self. It?s about a life that must be ended early. In True at First Light Hemingway writes ?He?s wonderful and he is intelligent and I don?t have to tell you why I have to kill him? (qtd. in 77). Hemingway is writing about himself here even though it appears to simply be the murder of one of his characters. He is wonderful, he is intelligent, but he must die. Hemingway gives his readers an inkling about his planned death that is soon to come if no one lends a very much needed hand. In Death in the Afternoon Hemingway truly expresses his deep and inner thoughts. He writes, ?Once you accept the rule of death though shalt not kill is an easily and a naturally obeyed commandment. But when a man is still in rebellion against death he has pleasure in taking to himself one of the Godlike attributes; that of giving it? (qtd. in 77). This man who is in rebellion is Hemingway. He can?t accept death which was lucidly expressed through the emphasis on being immortal in his own life. ?Hemingway was a man of parts, an impressive piece of work, but for the work that he wanted to secure his immortality, the necessary parts were simply not there? (77). Hemingway was blatantly insecure with death and his self-made image. He knew the image that he trapped himself into wasn?t real. He had no place to go but to give death to himself.

In Cross Country Snow, Hemingway?s character Nick has to give up Switzerland in order to move back to California, a move he doesn?t want. He describes the mountain as ?too rocky, it?s too far away, and there?s too much timber? (qtd. in Brenner, 1). This is Hemingway writing about his life, a life he doesn?t want to be a part of, but is forced to. The theme of entrapment is filled throughout this story. Hemingway describes his life through

this story as an ?…empty bottle and empty glasses.? Hemingway is trying to express that his life is nothing because he doesn?t enjoy it, it?s not the real him, it?s a fake, it?s empty. ?It?s hell, isn?t it?…that?s the way it is everywhere I?ve been (qtd. in 2). Again, Hemingway complains about how depressing his life is through the use of his characters. The image in which he brought the entrapment upon himself has deteriorated Hemingway both emotionally and physically. He feels as if he is living in hell, the only way to escape is to die.

In The Sun Also Rises, Hemingway foreshadows his disturbance with life and hints to his suicide. Throughout the novel Hemingway doesn?t refer the speakers by saying ?he said? or ?she said?, but makes the reader figure out who is speaking from the context. This relates to Hemingway?s trouble with communication. He isn?t being heard by his readers so this vague and confusing way of writing is another attempt by Hemingway to express that he isn?t being understood. The novel is like a ?conversation that you?re hearing at a nearby table in a restaurant?, it is a more indirect way of writing that Hemingway facilitates (Kwan 1). The Sun Also Rises ?was an immediate success and almost instantly became a bible for many disillusioned individuals…fully captured the feelings of moral decay and social alienation? (2). Hemingway writes this novel from the basis of his problem through the theme of the book, moral decay and social alienation.

Hemingway?s most literal scream for help before suicide was buried amongst The Old Man and the Sea, the last novel he wrote before his suicide. Within this novel there is a lot of symbolism that can be taken as a foreshadowing to his planned death. In general, the entire struggle of Santiago with the giant blue marlin resembles Hemingway?s struggle with life and his depression. Santiago is also portrayed as a loner who fishes far away from the fleet that has been catching marlin consistently. This is also shown to go along with Hemingway?s nature because he wished to live in private, he wasn?t a people?s person. In the novel, it states, ?the hundred-fathom line suddenly dips sharply? (Hemingway 28). This is in reference to Hemingway?s life. What once was full of glamor, he realized was the opposite, and his health turned against him. During Santiago?s fight with the marlin a small bird lands on his line that is tired and needs a rest but shortly after the bird?s landing the marlin surged and forced the bird to keep flying (54-5). This bird also resembled Hemingway. Hemingway needed a break, he needed an escape route from the world he

was trapped in. However, no one read into his life and works deep enough to realize this

and so he was made to keep his act up whether he liked it or not. As the marlin surges, Santiago is cut from the line (56). Hemingway is trying to say that he is scarred for life from what he and his readers have drove him into. Santiago says ?ten Hail Marys and Ten Our Fathers? in efforts to help land the fish even though he claims not to be religious. This shows that Hemingway is an act (64-5). An act that he is too inundated with that he can?t get out, so he fakes to be something that he really isn?t just like Santiago faked to be religious. Once Santiago is able to bring the fish boat side, ?he plunges the harpoon into the fish?s heart. The fish makes its death leap, and it is all over. Blood colors the water? (94-5). The harpoon resembles the shotgun that Hemingway committed suicide with. With on quick plunge, one quick pull, it was over, Hemingway took his life with his own hands. Later in the novel, two tourists mistake the giant carcass of the marlin for a shark (126-7). This wrapped up and clearly proved Hemingway?s use of foreshadowing. He is saying that people are misunderstanding him completely. They all think he is a rugged individualist who could never need a lending hand but they are all wrong. Hemingway is slowly deteriorating both mentally and physically because of the predicament he brought upon himself that he can?t get out of because of the public. He is asking for help in The Old Man and the Sea but since no one can hear him he feels forced to commit suicide just like he felt forced to maintain his image.

In conclusion, Hemingway is neither the man nor the image that most people make him out to be. He was a man who fell into a ditch and couldn?t climb out. In other words, he built up an image that wasn?t himself to the point of no return. He cried like a baby whose bottle had just been taken away. This cry was beneath his pages of words. If he simply cried to the public his image would have been chewed up and spit out by his readers so Hemingway had his characters do the crying for him. However, no one heard nor understood Hemingway because his writing was so simple and direct that no one would possibly ponder the thought that he wasn?t actually saying what he was writing. In the end though, all of the physical and emotional stresses that his characters endured were simply what he was enduring. With a feeling of entrapment, Hemingway ended his life of hell on Earth for a life of hell down under.

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