

Life Elements in the Fictions of Ernest Hemingway

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Abstract

Ernest Hemingway is widely regarded as one of the greatest American writers of the 20th century. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1952 and the Nobel Prize in literature in 1954. Despite his literary success, Hemingway remains a controversial figure, with some critics arguing that his narrow focus on violence and machismo, and his limited range of characters, make his fiction shallow and insensitive. Others see a complex and fully realized world beneath the deceptively simple surface of his writing.

Hemingway's characterizations evolved over time, reflecting both his personal struggles and his changing literary style. His male characters initially suffered from low self-esteem, inner conflict, and an inability to connect with others. However, his later heroes were more self-assured, formed meaningful relationships, and were driven by an idealistic code of conduct. Hemingway's early female characters were criticized for lacking depth and agency, but he later developed more complex and sophisticated female characters who expressed independent thought and will. Although Hemingway's female characters were initially divided into "nurturing" and "destructive" types, his later works challenged these simplistic categorizations, and included characters who defied gender norms and expressed free thought.

Key Words: Ernest Hemingway, fiction, novels, chronological study, characterization, male characters, female characters, life elements.

Introduction

Ernest Hemingway, an acclaimed American writer of the 20th century, is well-known for his understated prose style. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in May 1952 (Meyers, 1985) and later the Nobel Prize in English literature. Despite his literary achievements, Hemingway's novels and short stories have been subject to extensive critical commentary due to his narrow range of characters and thematic focus on violence and machismo (Witalec, 2004). Some critics view his fiction as shallow and insensitive, while others argue that there is a complex and fully realized fictional world beneath the surface (Baker, 2005)

Evolution of Characters

Hemingway's works exhibit a unique approach to character development. He portrays his heroes through minor details and sketches, allowing the reader to draw their conclusions without ready-made judgments (Madina, 2010). This paper aims to explore the characters in Hemingway's fiction and examine the development of characterization chronologically in the context of his life to draw conclusions. Hemingway's male heroes range from the frivolous Scripps and Yogi to the serious Jake and Frederic, with Robert Jordan and Santiago as the universal heroes.

Early Novels

The characters of Hemingway's first novel have puzzled dialogue delivery, loose in some places, and confused and bewildered presence. Yogi Johnson is a lovable character with an unresolved trauma that is sorted out at the end, while Scripps O'Neill deliberately upsets his life by running around with women and has low self-esteem. Scripps exhibits manipulative and dependent behavior, while Yogi displays a delightful child-like behavior that sometimes enters into a parent-protecting stage with the Wood Indians. The characters exhibit contrasting attitudes in the plot, with Scripps displaying inferior feelings and a lack of self-esteem, while Yogi poses superiority over others.

Hemingway's first novel is a parody itself, with no place for serious fiction, but his idea to float satire and target Sherwood Anderson is achieved. The heroines in *The Torrents of Spring*, Diana, and Mandy, are less expressive than the heroes, with Diana being a thin, gray, and aging character who clings to the hero for emotional support. She has average intellect and is jealous of Mandy, who lures Scripps away from her. Mandy is a bubbly, effervescent heroine with manipulative skills to lure men. Psychologically, Diana and Mandy cannot be placed in exact ego states, with Diana mostly in a parent state and Mandy in a child ego state, but both manipulate Scripps from their ends. The hero is feeble, drifted by their attempts and charms, as he is not a steady character.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake, the protagonist, is a pure Hemingway hero with a genuine code. He is a newspaper man who mingles with other characters that seem lost and driven by their trauma or weaknesses. Jake has a phallic wound but takes it in stride. He is watchful of his words and actions, checking himself with a seemingly confident demeanor. Jake is troubled only when he sees Brett, whom he loves and feels vulnerable in her presence. Otherwise, he gets along well with Bill Gordon, Mike Campbell, and Robert Cohn. Different codes operating in the fiction bring versatility to the plot, but the characters are jaded due to their lost hopes.

Jake is emotionally stable except for his soft spot for Lady Brett. He temporarily loses his composure when he helps her be with Romero. Otherwise, he keeps his emotions under control in the company of others. Bill is the only character who does not fall for Brett's seductive ways. He genuinely cares for his friends, except for Robert Cohn. Cohn's broken marriage, going out with Brett, following her to Pamplona, and yet not leaving others' company, all indicate his imbalanced emotional state. Mike is a rough and risky character who puts his emotions at stake. He feels hurt when Brett leaves him for Romero but puts on a pretentious devil-may-care attitude for all. His emotional outbursts often come out during drinking sessions.

Robert Cohn seems indifferent to emotional upheavals. He persistently trails people without feeling insulted and boasts about his accomplishments with superiority. This suggests that he is tough or pretends to be to cover up inner feelings. He only shows dejection once in the plot and hits Jake for sending Brett to Romero, but later regrets and cries over his folly. He addresses Jake as a 'pimp' which is a downright derogatory term (Hemingway, 2004). Romero is a perfectly balanced individual whose emotional stability lends him grace, skill, and a superior presence in the plot. He exhibits vulnerability when he falls in love with Brett and tries to be possessive towards her, but she resists.

Reflection of Life Elements

In the plot, Jake acts in a parent ego state with Brett when he checks her moves, and in an adult state with his other friends. His behaviour is sensible with a constraint. Bill is a sensible adult, while Mike is a manipulative child-like character who, along with Robert Cohn, manipulates people and circumstances. Cohn operates from the parent state, reflecting superiority from his being but inwardly insecure about being a Jew and feeling like an odd man out. Romero, like Bill, is in a balanced adult state that helps him make the right decisions regarding his profession. His stability unnerves Brett, who finds Mike more understanding.

On the temperamental stage, Jake is intelligent with negative shades, Bill is a sharp positive individual, Robert Cohn is average with negative tones, Mike is a little dull, reckless character, and Romero is a sensible positive one. The post-war generation of lustful, drunkard people who are disappointed with values and hope seem to bundle together, shifting from country to country and bottle to bottle, in search of love and peace. Hemingway has attempted to highlight relationship complexities through the female character, Lady Brett Ashley.

Brett is a charming and dominant individual who possesses the ability to seduce men. Her emotions fluctuate often due to her sensitive heart, which fancies one man after the other. She confides her guilt and changing affection to Jake, whom she is amiable with. Her psychological complexity is showcased as she portrays a child who wants everything in life from luxury to men. Brett maneuvers charmingly and can sway people with her approach. She has a sharp understanding of the traits of people, and her approach can be both confident and naïve, depending on the situation. Brett's relationships develop and break easily due to her erratic mood swings and behavior. Although she appears to be well-behaved and compliant outwardly, her inner mindset is disturbed. She does not evolve from her weaknesses, but at the end, she shows some positive aspects of her personality by leaving Pedro. Hemingway's personal experiences at Pamplona and a brief affair with Lady Tyson appear to be reflected in the story (Nagel, 1996). He married Hadley Richardson and took her to Pamplona with a couple of friends. Hemingway's genuineness in his diverse writing of fiction gave him instant success in 'The Sun Also Rises.' The author established himself as a fiction writer with this novel as he was the most successful in capturing the time and place in it. (Aldridge, 1990)

Next in line was 'A Farewell to Arms' (FTA), in which Frederic Henry, the male character, is treated by Hemingway as himself, depicting his experiences in Italy as an ambulance driver. Frederic is a serious hero who simply tries to clear up doubts regarding the war and his future in it. Although he is to be decorated with medals for his bravery on the war front, he is not eager about the entire thing. He loves Catherine Barkley and tries to establish a separate peace within himself by escaping from the Italian Army. The code hero, Frederic, is a questioning hero whose thoughts indicate constant dilemma as if to decide about the future. Even at the end, he is helpless about the future with Catherine passing away in childbirth. Hemingway does not describe Frederic and Rinaldi's physical features. The hero, Frederic, faces emotional upheavals and trauma of indecision throughout the plot. His condition is more vulnerable when in love with Catherine. To stay and fight as an Italian soldier or to quit the army, to marry or not to marry Catherine, is a source of concern. His confusions, weak decisions, dwindling professional and moral ethics, put a question to his emotional bearing.

Upon psychological analysis, one finds Frederic Henry in an obedient child ego state firmly under the supervision of parent and nurse, Catherine Barkley. At one instance, readers may find Catherine very submissive and complying, mistaking her to be a weak female guided by the male, Frederic. On close study, it becomes apparent that Catherine is manipulating Frederic and governing his life. He is cut off from friends and leads a hideous life of just survival under her supervision. The intelligence of Frederic is subdued due to blinded confusion and negativity infused in him due to war circumstances and his illicit relationship with Catherine. He is unable to plan, execute, and remain in command of the profession and relationship. When the decorations are to be bestowed on him due to valor, he quits the army. He flees with Catherine and lives a life of seclusion from society. The attitude of this character goes from bad to worse when he is left without Catherine at the end.

The author skillfully crafted Frederic and Catherine's characters in a unique way that distinguishes them from the mixed masculine and feminine traits portrayed in his posthumous novel, *Garden Of Eden*. However, Frederic's character seems to be controlled as a puppet by Catherine, causing him to become withdrawn, hopeless, and secluded from society after her death. Catherine, on the other hand, is a beautiful heroine with tawny skin and grey eyes who loves wholeheartedly with complete surrender, exhibiting genuine feelings and a sacrificing temperament. Although she is a complex character still stuck in the past, some critics argue that she undergoes change towards the end of the plot. (www.Studymode.Com)

Hemingway's motivation for writing this novel remains unclear; he may have been reflecting on his marital conflicts or attempting to depict his parents' stifled relationship. He had divorced Hadley and married Pauline before writing this novel but could not sustain this relationship after its release. Faulkner's comment that "For every new novel, Hemingway would require a new woman" seems to hold some truth. (Timeless Hemingway, 2009) Hemingway, tired of war and its after-effects, turned his attention to the fishermen and war veterans of Key West, realizing that people can sustain their livelihoods through means other than war. Thus, he wrote *To Have and Have Not*, focusing on the privileged and underprivileged sections of society.

The protagonist, Harry Morgan, initially a fair fisherman, turns to illegal activity after being cheated by an unfair customer. He becomes a hard-core planner, tough smuggler, and tries his best to get money from Chinese dealers and Cuban revolutionaries cum bank robbers to provide for his family. Although he has a tough exterior, he is soft on the inside and is never seen in an emotional dilemma except when thinking of his wife and family. Psychologically, he seems to be a mature adult who prioritizes his family's well-being. His uncanny ability to scheme and attack his opponents unnerves readers. Despite being a lone man, his sharp intellect, strong physique, and family bonding are his strengths that make him unique. His attitude is positive and down-to-earth, with shades of cynicism and depression at times. However, Hemingway worked on a different concept after *THHN*, recognizing that Morgan could not achieve his goals alone.

In "For Whom the Bell Tolls," Hemingway created the universal hero Robert Jordan who has resolved his inner conflicts and views his mission with confidence. Jordan loves Maria without mingling his personal and professional lives, and he trains his guerrilla band like a professional. The author also created the character of Anselmo, an old man who embodies genuine hope and discipline despite the corrupt system of values.

Physically, Jordan is stocky with sun-streaked hair and a sunburnt face, and emotionally stable. His psychology is that of an adult, and he conducts his mission to blow up a bridge with a clear and sensible strategy. He is unafraid of his enemies and impending death and has a sharp intellect, especially after falling in love with Maria.

Hemingway also shaped female characters in Pilar and Maria, who have distinctive features and are supportive of each other. Pilar is a masculine woman who is supportive of tribe members while Maria is more feminine and compliant with orders. Hemingway reached a zenith in character sketching with his distinctive characters and iceberg theory of writing.

In "Across the River and Into the Trees," Hemingway crafted the character of Colonel Cantwell, a lovable old man who is charming and bold. He spends quality time with his young lover Renata in Venice, reminiscing about his war experiences and looking for something enjoyable in his remaining life. (Meyers, 1985). The plot gently brings out the condition of Venice and its residents after WWI. Cantwell is unlike other old men in Hemingway's works as he is physically and emotionally weak but maintains a stoic facade. Renata is a decisive and enduring young girl who never wavers in her emotional support for Cantwell.

In Hemingway's masterpiece, *The Old Man and the Sea*, Santiago embodies the quintessential code hero. Hemingway artfully depicts Santiago's character development as a symbol of his own post-war journey towards healing. Despite being unable to catch fish for 84 days, enduring ridicule from young fishermen, and confronting fierce natural forces, Santiago remains steadfast in his pursuit. He bravely battles sharks to save the giant marlin he catches, ultimately succumbing to defeat. Yet, his humility and unwavering spirit remain unbroken as he returns to shore, never boasting of his heroic feat. Physically frail, with deep creased scars, Santiago's admirable endurance and undefeated, sea-colored eyes are a testament to his emotional stability and connection to nature. Unaffected by jeering and adversity, Santiago's peaceful heart and temperate demeanor ensure that he is never defeated.

Santiago's parent ego state, child ego state with Manolin, and occasional healthy adult interaction level demonstrate his well-rounded temperament. His awe of nature and strong communion with it bring out his childlike wonder, yet his peace and balance within help him overcome external challenges with ease. Hemingway alludes to Christ-like qualities in Santiago's humility, simplicity, and contentment (Brenner, 1991). Manolin serves as Santiago's soulmate, providing comfort and assistance. Santiago's limited supplies are met with a positive outlook towards life.

Hemingway's own personal conflicts, such as troubled childhood, marital discord, lack of esteem, war, unrequited love, disappointment, criticism, injuries, and diseases, are either resolved or accepted with calm resignation. Santiago is only spiritually connected to God when he speaks of the Seven Commandments and Mary, otherwise he finds solace in nature and its objects. Santiago's struggle with glory is so wonderful that readers rejoice in it. The novel's dictum, "Man can be destroyed but never defeated," (Hemingway, 2004) is beautifully embodied by Santiago's character and philosophy, which he imparts to the young Manolin.

Hemingway's protagonists share certain common traits, but the author has skillfully diversified these characteristics in a unique and loving way (Madina). These traits encompass their psychological, physical, temperamental, and emotional makeup. In the present paper, the author explores Hemingway's vision of his characters displaying different ego states in the 19th century,

using Transactional Analysis (Muriel and Dorothy, 1971) as a tool. Through his fiction, Hemingway depicts everyday people in Europe during that time period. For instance, *The Torrents Of Spring* offers a glimpse into the extravagant lifestyle of the roaring twenties, initially starting as a playful parody of Sherwood Anderson's depictions of mechanized folks. Hemingway's work also includes portrayals of Indians, club life, waitresses, bartenders, telegraph operators, and factory workers. The dark humor of Hemingway's writing, characterized by its eerie chapter endings, is cleverly conveyed in a distinctive voice that captivates and amuses readers.

Transformation in Characterization

If we trace the characters chronologically through Hemingway's life, two phenomena become apparent. First, as expected, the author's style of characterization improves over time. Second, Hemingway's wounded and ailing spirit, torn by war, slowly recovers and gains strength to overcome the forces of nature.

In earlier fiction, male characters were portrayed as complex and often had low self-esteem. Their dialogues were muddled, their thoughts lacked development, and their trauma hindered their personal growth. Characters like Scripps, Jake, and Frederic suffered from inner turmoil, lacked substance, and struggled to find harmony in their lives. They often feared and resented society and sought refuge in nature and work, running away from civilization (Madina). Some characters made peace with their lives but pursued materialistic gains and sensuous pleasure, projecting inflated egos with little regard for women.

Over time, Hemingway's heroes became simpler, more resolved, and had greater self-esteem. Their dialogues were clearer and more precise, and they developed relationships with people from various backgrounds more willingly. Hemingway shifted his focus from a hedonistic code of conduct to an idealistic one, promoting the idea that evil can be defeated by targeting society's problems (Bryant, 1981). Characters like Harry Morgan, Robert Jordan, Cantwell, and Santiago were more mature and had resolved thoughts. They drew energy from nature and possessed the power to change the world. These characters exhibited more value systems, corrected moral conduct, and had strength of character. They were respectful towards women and had less animosity towards their opponents. The transformation from chaos, unrest, disorder, and degenerate feelings to general well-being, joy, peace, and contentment was evident in the characters and their stories. The concept of spirituality was hinted at but not fully explored.

Hemingway initially faced significant criticism for his portrayal of female characters, who were often criticized as being one-dimensional and amoeba-like. However, he did not rest at this stage and worked hard to give strength to his female characters, whether dominant or submissive. Despite the criticism, he continued to refine his craft and his female characters became more complex and sophisticated over time, with greater attention paid to their personalities, appearances, and dress.

While some of Hemingway's female characters could be classified as either nurturing or destructive types, such a classification is an over-simplification and does not do justice to the full complexity of these characters. Characters like Diana and Mandy could be seen as mindless, while others like Brett and Catherine Bourne were made bad by their circumstances. Renata and Maria, on the other hand, were loving and trusting females.

Catherine in *A Farewell to Arms* and Maria in *For Whom The Bell Tolls* are peripheral characters who are mirror images of each other, representing Hemingway's idealized version of the perfect lover: submissive, shallow, selfless, and self-effacing. While both characters have deep psychological wounds, they are willing to risk public shame and humiliation to serve their men.

Despite these portrayals, Hemingway's later works, such as *Garden of Eden*, show a shift towards more complex, independent female characters with free thought of expression. Hemingway sympathizes with women in failed relationships, and the woman he values most is one who complicates his life the least. However, such a woman is rare, and a marriage with her often ends unhappily.

The Ultimate Mark of Appreciation

Hemingway's Golden Period is believed to have spanned from "*For Whom the Bell Tolls*" to "*The Old Man and the Sea*," during which he was honored with the Nobel Prize for his last novel. After a lifetime of searching, the author ultimately found peace, contentment, and happiness. He learned to live with his trauma, resolve his thoughts, and come to terms with adverse people and circumstances by developing a deep faith in himself and humanity's creator. However, fate dealt him a cruel blow when he was involved in a plane crash on his way to Africa, causing him to suffer from pain and injury and bringing him back to a troubled physical and mental state (Baker, 1972). Despite his deteriorating health, Hemingway continued to write, producing novels such as "*Islands in the Stream*" and "*Garden of Eden*."

In "*Islands in the Stream*," Hemingway created the character of Thomas Hudson, a professional painter who is sensitive, mature, and close to nature. In the first part of the novel, he spends time with his three sons during their vacation. In the second part, he becomes disillusioned after the death of his sons, and in the last part, he chases smugglers. Unfortunately, the novel fails to create the magic of Hemingway, as it is loosely spun and has broken parts. Perhaps the author's spirit was wilting or had entered unknown territory without recognition.

Similarly, in "*Garden of Eden*," Hemingway introduced David Bourne and Catherine, a honeymoon couple whose relationship becomes complex due to gender transformation and the introduction of another woman. Although the concept was novel, it did not generate the desired response from readers.

In contrast, Hemingway's posthumous heroes, such as Thomas Hudson and David Bourne, have more variations in their personal and professional lives. Thomas Hudson endures trauma from a broken marriage but conceals it by remaining disciplined and committed to his profession. He reflects different characteristics in the three sections of the novel, maintaining a healthy adult ego state for his sons and friends. He buries his thoughts of the past in routine tasks and never manipulates or plans adversely in the first half. In the second half, he becomes a complex and degenerate character, maintaining a neutral philosophy of life and exercising caution in building intimate relationships.

David Bourne possesses a sensitive nature and has the ability to create vivid experiences and emotions. However, he struggles to cope with his wife's sudden gender transformation, initially accepting it without complaint but later breaking off under the strain. When facing his wife Catherine, he often exhibits a child ego state, displaying non-confrontational behavior and a help-

less attitude, indicating his inferior presence before her superior complex personality. The temperament of David and Catherine contrast greatly, with Catherine displaying a destructive parent form that upsets the healthy environment of the family. Hemingway has crafted Catherine's character in all shades, experimenting with her dressing and accessories to attract David and the readers. Although emotionally insecure and sensitive, Catherine wears a mask of rudeness and unconcern that later crumbles when she is unable to cope with her trauma. Her frequent mood swings upset her relationship with David, causing temperamental problems. She has an extremely sharp intellect, which is dulled later when she is unable to cope with her mental and emotional struggles, leading her to attack people with criticism and eventually leave David and Marita to live together.

Hemingway's posthumous works, although regarded as inferior, leave much to be desired. The pattern of his evolution and gradual senility of spirit is evident in his later works after *The Old Man and The Sea*. Hemingway was unable to avoid the two dangers he diagnosed, one being his tendency to deceive and live up to his popular image, and the other being the degeneration of his writing skills in later stages, leading to his corruption and slow yet steady destruction of spirit.

Conclusion

Although Hemingway was an ailing spirit and could not carry on with his deterioration in mental and physical health, he lived life on his own terms, following the ideals of honor, courage, and endurance in a chaotic, stressful, and painful world. Ultimately, his strength could not go on any further, and the forces of nature defeated him. Nevertheless, Hemingway will be remembered forever as the "Father of Characterization" in English literature. Despite his suicide (Reynolds, 2000) and the bulk of unpublished material he left behind, Hemingway's career graph grew and amounted to numerous works across various genres, characterized by his realistic portrayal of live, simple, and distinct characters, reflecting the author's own personality as a Nobel Laureate.

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