

# The Despair in Hemingway's "In Another Country"

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"In Another Country" is a short story written by Ernest Hemingway. There is full of despair in this story. The title and the various symbols show people's great despair to themselves, to others, to love and to the world. People's despair is related to the characters' spiritual personality and the social humanistic environment. The despair in this story, the sources and the solutions of the despair are all worth researching.

*Keywords:* the despair, Ernest Hemingway, "In Another Country"

## Introduction

"In Another Country" was a short story written by Ernest Hemingway, one of the most significant American novelists and short story writers of the 20th century, and he won the Nobel Prize in 1954 for "his powerful style-forming mastery of the art' of writing modern fiction" (CHANG, 2008, p. 228). This story was published in 1927 and attracted many scholars to focus on its narrative technique and the character of the figures, and most of them emphasized that anti-war was the theme of this story. Besides those, full of struggles and desperations, this story also contained Hemingway's potential consciousness about life and the world, such as loss of belief and certainty, countless social problems, alienation, loneliness and a strong sense of despair. Despair is a kind of inherent state for human being and everyone may fall into this kind of state. Hemingway was a master who was good at expressing this kind of feeling through his economy words and "In Another Country" was one of a good example to exhibit the sense of despair.

## The Different Manifestations of the Despair

Firstly, the title is one of the manifestations of the despair. "In Another Country" shows that this is a country not belonging to anyone, neither the narrator nor the readers, and once a person catches a glance at this title, the alienation has formed. In the dictionary, "another" means "an extra thing or person" (Hornby, 2004, p. 59) and in this title it implies not only the distance of geography but also the distance of psychology. The narrator of this story is an American. He left his own country, took part in the army and got injury in the war. The care and warm was his urgent need, but the fact was that he was far away from homeland, and had to stay in Milan for recovering from his wounds. Without the sense of belonging, staying in another country was a kind of despair for him. The soldiers' honor should be achieved on the battlefield, but for these wounded soldiers, they lost their chance to realize the value of a soldier and had to leave their familiar place and come to

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this strange country. It was a kind of despair for the soldiers to stay at the rear place without dream or passion.

Secondly, there are many symbols which can represent the despair. In big cities, the street means a bustling place with the excitement of a seemingly endless stream of people; in small countries, the street is the symbol of peace, harmony and tranquility. However, in this story, the street is one of the manifestations of the despair. At the beginning of this story, Hemingway created a kind of cold, lonely and hopeless feeling by describing the weather and the lifeless objects, and then he used a sharp comparison by "pleasant" street to strengthen the despair. The second appearance of the street was that the narrator went to the Cova with his friends. The afternoon was supposed be with abundant sunshine or at least with light, but in this story, the soldiers were "walking in the dark" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 681) on the street. "The men and women would crowd tighter on the sidewalk" (Hemingway 681), but the narrator and his friends felt held together because they knew that the people disliked them and also "did not understand" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 681) them. Human beings were social animals and they were afraid of loneliness. The crowds' dislike created the feeling of marginalization, and their failure to understand let the solders lose the meaning of their sacrifice. The street became the boundary between these wounded soldiers and the local people. All these were the breeding ground for despair. The third appearance of the street was that the other soldiers knew why the narrator could get his medal and the narrator was shunned by his accompaniers. He was "walking home at night through the empty streets with the cold wind and all the shops closed, trying to keep near the street lights" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 682). This time, Hemingway directly used the word "empty" to describe the street, and it implied that the narrator was abandoned completely by his friends. The street lights became his reliance. Step by step, the symbol of the street showed the process of deepening despair and alienation.

Another symbol which can represent the despair is the animal. In the usual, animals were images of life, energy and vitality, but in this story, animals were the images to deepen the endless despair. The fox was the animal with ingenuity and swiftness, but in the first paragraph, it was the "game" hanging outside the shops. Why the snow could powder in the fur of foxes and the wind could blow their tails? The reason was simple: they were dead, so they couldn't move any more. The "trickiest" fox could not escape from the hand of Death, and how could the common people escape from the war which "was always there" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 680). The birds "blew in the wind and the wind turned their feathers". In the war, everybody were the little birds blew in the wind, and their "wing" and "feathers" were not controlled by themselves but turned by the wind like destiny. Despair was the dark cloud over everyone's head.

The machine was also a symbol of despair. The machines in the war caused the harm to both the soldiers' body and soul but after the hurts they were not able to heal the wounds of body and emotion. In this story, machines were always there, but all the characters knew that these machines were no help for their treatments, and these machines appeared as the hope to fight against the wounds, but in fact, they meant the incapable of action. The machines could change nothing at last, and the despair was inevitable.

The hospital was the place to heal the wounded and rescue the dying and it should be a place to bring back health and hope. However, in this story, the hospital was a place that "there were usually funerals starting from the courtyard" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 680). Receiving treatment in a place which held countless funerals of the accompaniers, this showed the soldiers' opinion about their survival probability. The hospital was the funeral holding place. What was the meaning to get treatment in this place? Dying in this "old" place might be a better

choice. Hospital was the place of death and despair.

"In the literature, focusing on the emotion of anxiety and the thought of doubt, 'despair' as a state of the existence expresses the individual's anxiety after they lose the survival courage" (LIU, 2016, p. 74). Despair was a psychological feeling of the human being, so the analysis of despair should not throw aside its subject: people. In Hemingway's "In Another Country", the objects of the despair could be the character itself, the other people, love, and the whole world.

For the despair to oneself, before the war, the three boys all had their dreams, "one of them was to be a lawyer, and one was to be a painter, and one had intended to be a soldier" (Hemingway, 1999, pp. 680, 681). But after the war, everything had changed. The physical injuries could be cured, but the psychological injuries were difficult to heal. The tall boy who was to be a lawyer "had lived a very long time with death" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 681) and then became detached. He did not know where his future was and what he could do. But So their confusion about the meaning of life led them into a kind of despair to their own life.

For the despair to the others, the relationship between the soldiers and the doctors was one of the example to show people's despair to others. Both the soldiers and the doctors knew that the soldiers were injured so seriously in the war that the doctors did not have the ability to bring them into full recovery, so the soldiers felt despair to the doctors and the doctors lost the hope of the treatment.

For the despair to love, the major was tougher than these young men at first, and what defeated him was the loss of love at last. With a little hand like a baby's in the machine, he played jokes with doctors and corrected the narrator's grammar while they sat in the machine to get their treatments. He was the typical "Code Hero" in this story. Although he didn't believe in the machine, he still came to the hospital regularly. No matter whether there was a chance to get healed or not, he still had humor and hope for a better future. However, the attacks of destiny were endless. He was a considerate man so he wouldn't marry "until he was definitely invalidated" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 683). He was afraid that the war might lead his wife to be a widow. But the illness could also take a person away. Before the major recuperated, his wife died of pneumonia., and this was the straw that broken the major's hope for life. He argued about marriage rudely with narrator, "shouted", bitted "his lower lip", "choked" and "cried", because he lost the confidence of life and became despairing. He "said angrily, 'If he is to lose everything, he should not place himself in a position to lose that'" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 682) and he emphasized more than once at last "He'll lose it" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 682). The major might be the one who could be destroyed but not defeated and he might recover from his psychological injuries one day. But at the ending of story, his deep despair could be felt and his hopelessness could be perceived by readers.

If a person had no hope for himself, no hope for others and no hope for the love, then "the world would be absurd, the life would be painful, and the destiny would be fickle" (HU, 2012, pp. 98-99). The feeling of disillusioned could lead people into the nothingness of life and then the despair to the world was inevitable.

### **The Causes of the Despair**

In this story, the despair scattered everywhere. On the surface, it was the very war that disrupted the life pace of people and made these detached people and caused the various kinds of despair. After digging the other seven-eighths of the iceberg, it was clear that the war was just a flashpoint and there were some hidden reasons of

the despair.

The first one was the individual's spiritual personality. Where did the despair come from? According to the existentialist philosopher, Søren Aabye Kierkegaard, the despair came from one's own, if a person could not manage the synthetic relation of himself and his surroundings properly, he would fall into the despair (Kierkegaard, 1997, p. 12). One person was hopeless because he failed to become what he wanted to be and could not achieve the goal that he desired and was not able to become his ideal self. In this story, the narrator failed to become a football player, the three boys could not have their dreams come true, "one of them was to be a lawyer, and one was to be a painter, and one had intended to be a soldier" (Hemingway, 1999, pp. 680, 681), and the major was not able to bring his beloved wife back to life. Their existential anxiety and self-inability was one of the source of the endless despair.

The second reason of the despair was social humanistic environment. At the ending of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, science and technology had a rapid development. The invention of various machines brought unlimited material possibilities, but at the same time, it also raised the infinite fear of the negative effects of these machines. The social humanistic environment had a great change. Before the age of science, people kept the veneration for the unknown things, for example, God was their faith. When they were in despair, they could pray to comfort themselves. But in this story, when people was at the loss about life and the future, it was difficult to find the trace of the religion. God became nada. The development of science and technology let the material civilization reach a new level, and people became independent, rational and impersonal. So in the story, the alienation between people, such as the narrator and his friends, the soldiers and the crowd, was understandable and there was few trust, such as the doctors and the patients, was acceptable. The new order had not yet formed and the old one was collapsing, that was the social reason of the widespread despair.

So the war caused the physical wounds, such as narrator's broken leg, the boy's vacant nose, and the major's little hand; seeing from the philosophic, the individual's spiritual personality of the characters led to the deepening of despair, and a loss about life and the future came from their existential anxiety and self-inability; and exploring from sociologic, the upheaval of society let people lose the former emotional support and expanded the scope of the despair, so the town residents hated the soldiers, and soldiers had no confidence in doctors, and detachment was everywhere.

### **The Methods of Dealing with Despair**

In this story, facing the pervasive despair, the characters had the different approaches to deal with the despair. The first one was to escape with decadence. Forgetting the dream of being a lawyer or a painter, the boys "met every afternoon" and walked to "the Cova, where it was rich and warm and not too brightly, and noisy and smoky at certain hours" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 681) to pass their time. Having nothing to do with the broken leg or vacant nose, "Carpe diem" was their self-abandoned way to cover their sense of despair. "The war was always there" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 680), what had the common people done? They indulged in the wine and when the soldiers passed, they "would call out 'A basso gliufficiali!'" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 681) to vent their frustration and resentment. These soldiers, commons and café girls chose to make a compromise with the fate, and then escape with decadence from the despair.

At first, the narrator was one of the followers of the first way to deal with despair, but after the boys'

invisible exclusion, he began to think about his life at night by himself. Thus, he chose another way to deal with the despair. He learnt Italian from the typical "Code Hero" in this story, the major, and he became the "Hemingway Hero". He did not know what to do, but he began to wonder about the future, so putting himself at the edge of confusion was also an attempt to conquer the despair.

The last method to eliminate the despair need to get through a suffering psychological process. That was to struggle and fight despairingly. At the end of the story, Hemingway wrote about his "Code Hero", the major, like this "The photographs did not make much difference to the major because he only looked out of the window" (Hemingway, 1999, p. 683). Out of the window, what was he looking at? There was no answer, but hope would always stay together with despair, and it was worth to struggling hard and fighting bravely no matter how faint the light of hope was. Reinventing the spiritual faith and struggling constantly in action, and "to act was the only action that could bring hope to human" (Sartre, 2005, p. 20).

"Hemingway's compelling inspiration was war, both as a personal and symbolic experience and as a continuing condition of humankind" (Perkins, 1999, p. 1582), and "In Another Country" was a short story about the postwar experience. There was no complex plot or esoteric language, but it represented the complicated social conditions of that time and human's profound psychology. Without describing the brutal scenes in the war, he created a more powerful and impressive sense than the war scene. That was the sense of despair. There were many different manifestations of the despair, the sources of the despair were not haploid and the methods to deal with the despair were various and requisite. The limited stretches could not surpass the great value of Hemingway's short story, so this story deserved further exploration and the discussion.

### Conclusion

Despair is a subtle emotional experience of human being. Ernest Hemingway represented it by the precise words and vivid descriptions to show the damages caused by the war. For the despair, people can choose to escape with decadence or to struggle and fight against it with great courage. Hemingway showed the different manifestations and causes of despair and provided the methods of dealing with despair to readers in this story and it is hard to say whether his last choice is a kind of recall of his creation of this short story or not. But he let readers know the suffering of life and experience despair in his short story in order to encourage people to rethink about life through "In Another Country".

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