

The Call of the Wild —— An Eco-critical Reading of *The Old Man and the Sea*

L'APPEL DE LA WILD —— UNE LECTURE ÉCO- CRITIQUE SUR LE VIEIL HOMME ET LA MER

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Abstract: Under the circumstances of the severe ecological crisis, ecocriticism has become a hot topic. In recent years, the natural world in Hemingway's works has come into the view of the ecocritics. This paper is, according to the theory of ecocriticism, to interpret Hemingway's masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of anti-ecology, which is often neglected by traditional literary critics. Through thorough analysis of the text, the author claims that the novella has presented the protagonist, Santiago's anti-ecological-consciousness. At the same time, it further reflects the ambivalent attitude of Hemingway himself towards nature: reverence for nature and desire to conquer nature.

Key words: Anti-ecological-consciousness; Ecocriticism; Ernest Hemingway

Résumé Dans les circonstances d'une grave crise écologique, l'écocriticisme est devenu un sujet brûlant. Ces dernières années, le monde naturel dans les oeuvres d'Hemingway est entré dans la vue de l'écocritiques. Cet article est, selon la théorie de l'écocriticisme, d'interpréter le chef d'oeuvre de Hemingway "Le Vieil Homme et la mer" du point de vue anti-écologique, qui est souvent négligé par les critiques littéraires traditionnels. Grâce à une analyse approfondie du texte, l'auteur affirme que le roman a présenté la conscience anti-écologique du protagoniste, Santiago. En même temps, il reflète en outre l'attitude ambivalente de Hemingway lui-même envers la nature: le respect de la nature et le désir de conquérir la nature.

Mots clés: Conscience anti-écologique; Écocritisme; Ernest Hemingway

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INTRODUCTION

There is no doubt that Ernest Hemingway is one of the writers who make great contribution to and have the most significant influence on the 20th century's American literature. His famous work *The Old Man and the Sea* was published in 1952 on *Life* magazine and turned out to be a great success. Hemingway was awarded with the Pulitzer in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954 for his unique writing style, especially the "iceberg principle". It has attracted numerous readers and has been highly praised since it came out. Even Hemingway himself thought it was his "best work that he can write in his all life".² In half a century, a great deal of experts and scholars at home and abroad have analyzed and studied on it from different perspectives.

On the whole, although critics have spent much academic energy on *The Old Man and the Sea*, the focuses of the previous comments are concentrated on Hemingway's spirit of "tough guy", Santiago's tragic meaning, "code hero" and the novella's symbolic style, which have lagged behind the times. However, a great work has the ability and potential to give people different aspirations in different times.

As is known to all, with the rapid development of science and technology, the course of modernization has brought human beings dramatic changes when the new era comes: tropical forests have been shrinking, deserts have been expanding, rivers' capacity of holding lives has been weakened, resources have been exhausted, ozone layer has been

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² Quoted in Dong Hengxun from his book *Hemmingway Talks about Writing*.

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destroyed and many endangered species are facing extinction. In short, series of ecological problems have appeared and human beings are facing unprecedented ecological crisis. Under this circumstances, many literary critics with strong sense of responsibility have paid close attention to the newly-appeared theory of literary criticism—ecocriticism.

As a celebrated writer, Hemingway naturally aroused the interest of the ecocritics. In recent years, interpreting Hemingway's works with ecocriticism has become a trend. More and more people have already found Hemingway's profound thinking about the relationship between human and nature in his masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea*. However, so far in academic circle, critics have paid great attention to the ecological consciousness reflected in this book, but few person, almost nobody have analyzed its anti-ecological-consciousness. In view of this current situation, the author tries to reexamine this famous work on a textual level to probe into the anti-ecological-consciousness reflected in it. The author tries to help people understand Hemingway's work in a broader and more comprehensive way, to arouse the readers' attention to the environmental crisis and to evoke modern people's ecological consciousness of protecting the nature to bravely assume the responsibility of reconstructing the balance of ecology.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ernest Hemingway is a world-famous writer who remains an interesting figure in the field of literary criticism for half a century. Numerous experts and scholars have spent considerable efforts on his writings, exploring his iceberg principle, "tough guy" spirit, tragic meaning, symbolic style, male-power culture and feminist sensibility etc, from different perspectives such as cultural anthropology, modern semantics, functional stylistics, transitivity system, stylistics, reception-aesthetic and psychoanalysis. And some criticism on his masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea* will be reviewed in the following part.

First of all, it is worthwhile and necessary to mention the background and publication of *The Old Man and the Sea* before looking at the relevant criticism. It is believed that the years from 1940, in which *For Whom the Bell Tolls* was published, to 1952 were the gloomiest time for Ernest Hemingway, thus he badly needed a win. His novel *Across the River and into the Trees*, published in 1950, was a great disaster. It was almost unanimously disparaged by critics and was called the worst thing Hemingway had ever written. Many readers claimed it like a parody of Hemingway. The control and precision of his earlier prose seemed to be lost beyond recovery. Therefore, the huge success of *The Old Man and the Sea* was a much-needed vindication and it restored many readers' confidence in Hemingway's capability as an author. It was initially received with much popularity.

Its publisher, Scribner, on an early dust jacket, called the novella a "new classic", and many critics favorably compared it with such works as William Faulkner's *The Bear* and Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick*.³

Early book reviews responded quickly and well to the work and spared no effort to give it favorable comments. In *Atlantic Review*, Edward Weeks summed up the readers' opinions with the title of "Hemingway at His Best" (72). In the *New York Times Book Review*, the novella was praised as "a tale superbly told" and was surprised by its ability to imply "a human continuity that far transcends an individual relationship" (Robert Gorham Davis, 1). In the *San Francisco Chronicle*, Joseph Henry Jackson clearly stated that it is a "miracle-play of Man against Fate" and it is "as perfect a piece of work as Hemingway has ever done" (22).

Following such acclaim, however, a school of critics emerged that interpreted the novella as a disappointing minor work. For example, critic Philip Young provided an admiring review in 1952, just following *The Old Man and the Sea*'s publication, in which he stated that it was the book "in which Hemingway said the finest single thing he ever had to say as well as he could ever hope to say it." However, in 1966, Young claimed that the "failed novel" too often "went way out". These self-contradictory views show that critical reaction ranged from adoration of the book's mythical, pseudo-religious intonations to flippant dismissal as pure fakery.⁴ Robert P. Weeks is one of the most outspoken critics of *The Old Man and the Sea*. His 1962 piece "Fakery in *The Old Man and the Sea*" detected the discrepancies between Hemingway's fictional and nonfictional accounts of Cuban fishermen and their feats of fishing for marlin in the Gulf of Mexico. He claimed that the novella is "in fact more nearly fakery against fakery: a make-believe super-fish duelling a make-believe super-fisherman..."(qtd. in Patricia Dunlavy Valenti, 45).⁵ Orville Prescott in the *New York Times* objected that Santiago was more a symbolic attitude toward life than a man, a character who's poetically rendered thoughts border on artificiality. Delmore Schwartz tolerated the novella as a "virtuoso performance", ... [but he criticized it for] having "a margin of

³ See also the content of *The Old Man and the Sea* from Spark Notes. Retrieved on April 2, 2009, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.sparknotes.com/lit/oldman/context.html>.

⁴ Basic knowledge about *The Old Man and The Sea* on Wikipedia. Retrieved on March 9, 2009, from the World Wide Web: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Old_Man_and_the_Sea.

⁵ Other detailed information can be seen in Robert P. Weeks's "Fakery in *The Old Man and the Sea*" in *College English* 24, 1962 or in Patricia Dunlavy Valenti's *Understanding The Old Man and the Sea: A Student Casebook to Issue, Source, and Historical Documents*, 2007.

self-consciousness and a mannerism of assertion” (72). According to Butcher, a handful of out-and-out detractors called *The Old Man and the Sea* “the poor man’s *Moby Dick*” (qtd. in FAN Qun, 9).

Despite its detractors, *The Old Man and the Sea* led to numerous accolades for Hemingway, including the 1953 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction. He also earned the Award of Merit Medal for the Novel from the American Academy of Letters that same year. Most prestigiously, the Nobel Prize for Literature came in 1954, “for his mastery of the art of narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style.”⁶

When it comes to Hemingway’s artistic creation, critics have paid much attention to his “tough guys” (Roberts, 53), especially his male characters with “grace under pressure”, and his “iceberg theory”. The style of the novella, together with the simplicity and the concreteness of its description, provides a rich opportunity for symbolic interpretations. Hemingway once emphasized that: “No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in. ... I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things.”⁷

Thematic analysis goes almost unanimously to Santiago’s tough-guy spirit. Through the use of the outstanding theme: “A man can be destroyed, but not defeated”, *The Old Man and the Sea* strives to teach important life lessons to the readers. According to FAN Qun, Santiago’s tough image that a man is never to be defeated indicated Hemingway’s vision of heroism about triumph over crushing adversity with grace.

Psychoanalysis goes deeply to reveal the deep causes behind the old man’s strong yearning for victory despite all sorts of difficulties ahead. And feminist critics try to demonstrate their views about Hemingway’s outlook on women by analyzing the absence of heroine in the novella and the depiction of the gentle sea.

From the above statements, it is clear that Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea* has been researched into by literary critics from different perspectives. Nevertheless, still very little academic energy has been dedicated to the study of the work under the theory of ecocriticism and even less focus has been put on the anti-ecological aspect of it. In view of the deteriorating situation of ecocrisis in the present era, it is of great significance to reexamine *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of ecocriticism.

2. ECOCRITICISM

2.1 The Definition and Characteristics of Ecocriticism

The terminology “ecocriticism” was first set forth by William Rueckert in his paper *Literature and Ecology: An Experiment in Ecocriticism* in 1978. Ecocriticism, which originated from the United States in 1970s and became a significant school of literary theories in 1990s, arises out of the severe ecocrisis which poses great threat not only to life on the planet, but to the very life of the planet. According to Feng Fen, the theoretical starting-point and foundation of ecocriticism is the ecological philosophy, and the aim of it is to treat of the relationship between literature and natural environment. Ecocriticism probes into such complicated problems as modern human beings’ theology, culture and civilization through examining the ecological out-of-balance between the natural environment and the cultural environment in present world (46).

The primary advocator and initiator of American ecocriticism Cheryl Glotfelty defined ecocriticism as “the study of the relationship between literature and the natural environment” (124). Later, in the Western Literature Association Meeting (Salt Lake City, Utah), she pointed out that:

Simply defined, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies. (138)

However, most critics hold that although Glotfelty’s definition is rational, it cannot accurately summarize the academic connotation of an academic criticism or an academic research (XUE Lei, 8). By contrast the definition put forward by Lawrence Buell, the current Powell M. Cabot Professor of American Literature at Harvard University, is more accurate: ecocriticism is “the study of the relationship between literature and environment under the spirit of supporting the practice of environmentalism” (430).

As ecological crisis going from bad to worse, ecocriticism is presenting its tremendous theoretic energy and vitality due to its strong concern about nature and human beings. And Chinese Academy of Literature and Art begin to pay

⁶ Quoted in *The Nobel Prize in Literature 1954*. The Nobel Foundation.

⁷ For details about the comments, refer to “An American Storyteller”, *Time*, July 7, 1999.

attention to and engage in the study of ecocriticism. In his book *Ecological Literature of Europe and America*, WANG Nuo, a scholar of China, states that ecological literature is a kind of literature which is based on the ecological holism thought. It sets the whole profit of ecological system as the highest value, and demonstrates the human' relationship with nature and traces the social root of ecological crisis. The prominent characteristics of ecocriticism are ecological responsibility, civilization criticism, ecological theology and ecological pre-warning (11).

From the above three definitions of ecocriticism, it is clear that ecocriticism has some different characteristics from the general literary criticism. Xue Lei notes that three characteristics deserve mentioning. Firstly, the main stream of ecocriticism is the cultural criticism concerning environmental issue. Some ecocritics who have made in-depth study and has great impact on ecocriticism, such as Lawrence Buell, Jonathan Bate, usually regard the literary works in traditional sense as their objects of textual analysis. Secondly, ecocriticism examines the texts from the perspective of earth-centrism rather than anthropocentrism. Finally, ecocriticism has significant interdisciplinary features. It draws lessons not only from the knowledge of ecocritical science, but the knowledge and theory of other relevant disciplines, such as geography, psychology, philosophy and history, which displays a broader horizon than the traditional literary study.

2.2 The Theoretical Basis and Primary Task of Ecocriticism

It seems that ecocriticism, in literal sense, combines ecology and literature together, just like psychoanalysis and archetypal criticism. In fact, that is not true. Although some ecocritics did cite a number of ecological research results and environmental research data, the component of natural science is not prominent when judging from the overall ecocriticism. What ecocritics mainly absorb is not the specific research results but the basic ideas of ecology, or precisely, the ecological philosophy, of which the utmost important theory are environmental ethics and deep ecology (WANG Nuo, 48).

Environmental ethics emphasize that ethical care should be given to all living things in ecosphere, and human beings are seen as one of the numerous species. In *The Basic Concept of Environmental Ethics*, Yang Tongjin gathered four different ethical concepts. It is worth mentioning one of the concepts of environmental ethics, namely animal liberation/rights theory, which pays special attention to supply adequate reasons for human's conduct of protecting animals. The animal liberation theory, represented by P. Singer, starts from the utilitarian ethics and insists that we should apply the ethical principle of "concerning the interests of all parties equally" to animals. It holds that if an act brings pains, then the act is evil. Animals can also feel pain too, so we are obligated to stop those acts which will bring pains to animals. The animal rights theory, represented by T. Regan, starts from Kant's ethics, holding that the reason why we need to protect animals is that animals have the equally inviolable rights as human beings. The animal rights theory states that the whole nature and the component parts of nature have intrinsic value or inherent worth. As part of it, animals are no exception. Animals also have respectful inherent value. And just because of such value they are endowed with a kind of moral rights, that is, the rights to be respected. These rights determine that animals cannot be treated as tools to promote human beings' welfare and they deserve the same manner as given to human beings (7).

Deep ecology pays more attention to the basic relationship between human and non-human world, it stresses that human beings and nature are mutually dependent on each other in emotion, ethic and biology. As human beings grow mature, they will be able to share weal and woe with other living things. The founder of deep ecology Arne Naess suggests that the experience of self-mature require undergoing three stages: from ego to social self (lowercase), and then to metaphysical Self (uppercase), and the metaphysical Self is actually the ecological self. Only in the interactive relation with human community and earth community can this self come true. During this process, human beings will recognize that human is just a part of nature, rather than a separate individual from nature, and the demonstration of humanity is determined by human beings' relationship to other people and other creatures in nature (qtd. in LEI Yi, 47).

Regarding the primary task of ecocriticism, Wang Nuo points out that:

As a kind of literary and civilization criticism, ecocriticism has the primary task which can demonstrates its intrinsic trait and peculiar value, that is, reexamining the culture of human to carry on cultural criticism, namely, probing into the problem of how did human theology, culture and the code of social development influence, even determine human being's attitude and behavior toward nature, and how did they bring about the deterioration of environment and the crisis of ecology. (48)

In short, the ecocriticism, with its academic study of literary works, explores the literary theme of the relationship between human and nature, answers such questions as what human beings should do to deal with the living beings in nature, what role human beings are playing in the whole ecological system, what punishment man will receive if they mistreat the physical world and so on.

This paper interprets *The Old Man and the Sea* from the perspective of ecocriticism and it holds that a kind of anti-ecological-consciousness is reflected in this work when the writer depicts Santiago's "tough guy" spirit. The author tires to explore a kind of new way of thinking so as to evoke human's ecological consciousness under the practical background of the severe ecological crisis.

3. THE ANTI-ECOLOGICAL-CONSCIOUSNESS IN *THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA*

After we have comprehensively studied the emergence and development of ecocriticism, and seriously considered the current situation of ecological environment, the author thinks that the anti-ecology is contrary to the basic principle of ecology and damaging to the harmony, stability, and beauty of biological community. Therefore, if the description in a book reflects the nature of anti-ecology, one can say that the book presents a kind of anti-ecological-consciousness to a certain degree. According to this criterion, this paper, closely associated with the text of *The Old Man and the Sea*, probes into and analyzes Santiago's anti-ecological-consciousness from the following three different aspects on the basis of thorough study.

3.1 Neglecting the Intrinsic Value of Nature

When fishing on the big ocean alone, the old man "did not remember when he had first started to talk aloud when he was by himself" (29)⁸. From this description, the readers can feel how lonely the old man was. Fortunately, nature helps him alleviate the sense of loneliness:

He looked across the sea and knew how alone he was now. But he could see the prisms in the deep dark water and the stretching ahead and the strange undulation of the calm. The clouds were building up now for the traded wind and he looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, then blurring, then etching again and he knew no man was ever alone on the sea. (49-50)

The above description forcefully demonstrates the aesthetic value and mentally therapeutic value of nature. However, these values are based on the nature's usefulness to human. In fact, nature does not "exist for human" (Aristotle), it has rich intrinsic value. During the period of renaissance, humanist Chesapilno clearly advocated respecting nature, he believed there is no creature in nature that should be cast aside because even the most insignificant creature has its own sacred value (WANG Nuo, 52). However, human beings always see nature's usefulness to man and neglect its intrinsic value.

To a certain degree, the description of nature in *The Old Man and the Sea* can reflect nature's value. However, such value always partakes of subjectivity and utilitarianism of human beings. Proof of this point can be found everywhere in the novella: "he ate the white [turtle] eggs to give himself strength" (27) and "also drank a cup of shark liver oil each day" (27), because "it was very good against all colds and gripes and it was good for the eyes" (27). Ocean is the very source of Santiago's livelihood and he has his own opinions about different kinds of peculiar ocean creatures. In his eyes, the man-of-war bird "is a great help" (29), because such bird is often attracted by large abundance of fish. "He (the man-of-war bird) is got something. He's not just looking" (23), in this sense, the man-of-war bird can serve as a guide to catch fish. Santiago "was happy to see so much plankton because it meant fish" (25). However, when he saw the auga mala, he cursed it "You whore" (26) and believed "they were the falsest thing in the sea" (26). The reason why Santiago is so disgusted with auga mala was just because it could make the fisherman "have welts and sores" (26) and the "poisonings from the auga mala came quickly and struck like a whiplash" (26). As a result, "the old man loved to see the big sea turtles eating them" (26).

Later, the old man killed the big marlin with great effort after three days' fighting. Although he thought "there is no one worthy of eating him from the manner of his behavior and his dignity" (63), he still computes in his mind: "he's over fifteen hundred pounds the way he is" (82). "...Maybe much more, if he dresses out two-thirds of that at thirty cents a pound?" (83) In addition, the old man took advantage of the light the sun made in the sea and "the shape of the clouds over the land" (25) to judge the weather condition, and he could tell course and direction "from watching the stars" (36). All these clearly prove the human's utilization of nature. Here, human's feeling about nature does not go beyond their own need, therefore, it is impossible to realize and pay due attention to nature's intrinsic value.

3.2 Dealing with Animals Cruelly

The ecologists emphasize that human should know nature and respect nature. The Germany philosopher Nietzsche once pointed out that human beings "are not the highest of all living things, and each creature is put at the same perfect stage as human beings" (qtd. in WANG Nuo, 52). This indicates that human is not superior to other creatures but a part of the intricate web of life. In the whole ecological system, human has equal place as other species and should live in harmony with each other. However, readers could not count how many innocent lives have been killed by the protagonist Santiago in his whole life. The cruelty and mercilessness of human being to nature can be seen from the description in this novella.

⁸ Page references are to the Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* translated by Wu Lao (Beijing: China Literature Press, 2007).

3.2.1 Separating the marlin couple

When fighting with the big marlin, the old man “remembered the time he had hooked one of a pair of marlin” (39). He killed the female fish without sparing a thought for the male fish and mercilessly separated the once happy marlin couple. If the readers were in the marlins’ shoes, they would truly feel the old man’s cruelty to the marlin couple and human’s abused violence to nature:

The male fish always let the female fish feed first and the hooked fish, the female, made a wild, panic-stricken, despairing fight that soon exhausted her, and all the time the male had stayed with her, crossing the line and circling with her on the surface. When the old man had gaffed her and clubbed her, holding the rapier bill with its sandpaper edge and clubbing her across the top of her head until her color turned to a color almost like the backing of mirrors, and then, with the boy’s aid, hoisted her abroad, the male fish had stayed by the side of the boat. Then, while the old man was clearing the lines and preparing the harpoon, the male fish jumped high into the air beside the boat to see where the female was and then went down deep, his lavender wings, that were his pectoral fins, spread wide and all his wide lavender stripes showing. He was beautiful, the old man remembered, and he had stayed. (39)

Every reader would get shocked at this scene because it is so horrible and merciless. Actually, the brutal and violent hunting reflects the way in which Santiago, even Hemingway, values the natural world and humans’ place in it. In human world, animal and nature are easily labeled as “the other”. Therefore, they are crowded out of humans’ moral consideration, which goes against the basic spirit of environmental ethics.

Here, it is worthwhile to mention something. When describing the old man’s shack at the beginning of this novella, Hemingway stated that “once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt” (7). This short sentence reflected the old man’s deep love to his wife and his loneliness when lived alone.

Although it was the same sincere and ardent love between couple, the old man could not feel it between the marlin couple. “All the time the male had stayed with her” (39), watching this, how could the old man kill the female fish? Imagine what a different effect would come out if the narrative point of view shifts to the marlin or the description of the marlin’s psychological movement! Although the old man thought “that was the saddest thing I ever saw with them” (39), and “he begged her (the female fish) pardon” (39), he “butchered her promptly” (39). From Santiago’s self-contradictory speech and action, Hemingway and humans’ cold-bloodedness and hypocrisy are apparent and appalling.

3.2.2 Killing dolphin

When Santiago was at a stalemate with the big marlin, a dolphin was hooked and killed by him to “keep strong” (37). The detailed and vivid description would no doubt make the readers obtain a clear picture of his very deliberate method of fishing, but his cruelty and ferocity to the so-called “brother” as well:

The stars were bright now and he saw the dolphin clearly and he pushed the blade of his knife into his head and drew him out from under the stern. He put one of his feet on the fish and slit him quickly from the vent up to the tip of his lower jaw. Then he put his knife down and gutted him with his right hand, scooping him clean and pulling the gills clear. He felt the maw heavy and slippery in his hands and he slit it open. There were two flying fish inside. They were fresh and hard and he laid them side by side and dropped the guts and the gills over the stern. They sank leaving a trail of phosphorescence in the water. The dolphin was cold and a leprous gray-white now in the starlight and the old man skinned one side of him while he held his right foot on the fish’s head. Then he turned him over and skinned the other side and cut each side off from the head down to the tail. (66)

To the hunter, this is a happy moment to enjoy his fruit of victory. However, it is undoubtedly evil and unfair to the hunted dolphin. Small as the dolphin is, it is also a kind of sea creature and should have lived a happy life in the huge ocean, its home. But we could not get such feeling from the above description. The whole paragraph, almost the whole novella, is narrated in Santiago’s point of view and the dolphin’s voice is covered or deprived. The dolphin even has no chance to appeal for itself. This point is enough to prove that humans who boast himself as “the beauty of the world, the paragon of animals”⁹ have filthy souls to take delight in killing other species.

3.2.3 Fighting with big marlin and the sharks

The main body of *The Old Man and the Sea* was Santiago’s fighting against a big marlin and many fierce sharks successively. Through the description of Santiago’s catching the big marlin and defeating the savage sharks, Hemmingway created an image of a tough fisherman who was optimistic, indestructible and unyielding when facing

⁹ Quoted in William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*. Act 2, Se. 2, lines 306-310.

difficulty and failure. Relying on this kind of spirit, the old man realized his value and proved his ability. Numerous readers were shocked by Santiago's toughness. However, few people have realized the irreversible damage to nature, which just results from his never-giving-up spirit.

First, let us have a look at the marlin before it was killed by Santiago:

He was bright in the sun and his head and neck were dark purple and in the sun the stripes on his side showed wide and a light lavender. His sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and he rose his full length from the water and then reentered it, smoothly, like a diver and the old man saw the great scytheblade of his tail go under and the line commenced to race out. (51-52)

This is the direct description of the big marlin after it came out from the ocean. From it readers can clearly see the vitality, energy, beauty and greatness of the big marlin, and even Santiago who has fished on the sea in all his life could not help praising "they are more noble and more able" (52) than us human and "never have I seen a greater or more beautiful or a calmer or noble thing than you, brother" (79). These words are Santiago's sincere admiration for the big marlin, which denotes his respect for nature. However, at the meantime he has a lifelong zeal of conquering nature, which can be illustrated by his mental activity and actual deeds. He said to himself that "I'll kill him though, in all his greatness and his glory" (55), and relying on his rich experience, great determination and the help of various weapons, he killed the big marlin eventually.

In fact, the description of Santiago's ambivalent attitude towards the big marlin actually reflects parts of Hemingway's paradoxical attitude towards animals (or nature). On the one hand, Hemingway loves and praises nature, showing great concern over all the living creatures in nature. This kind of ecological consciousness is well connected with his early experience in childhood, and his father has exerted much influence upon him. His father, Dr. Clarence Edmonds Hemingway, is a highly-respected physician and unusually keen amateur naturalist who devoted to hunting and fishing. Through him, Hemingway was taught not only a love of hunting but a reverence and respect for the hunted. On the other hand, aiming to conquer nature, Hemingway is fond of killing animals to experience excitement and realize self-value. According to Paul P. Reuben, "in the summer of 1933 ... Hemingway spent three months hunting on the Dark Continent (a place in Africa)".¹⁰ And in his work *Green Hills of Africa*, Hemingway once clearly expressed such idea that he didn't care killing anything and any animal as long as the process of hunting was done neatly, for they would die sooner or later.

Then, let us see the sharks described in the novella. In traditional literary criticism, the sharks "symbolize the vicious force in the world and symbolize despicability and greediness", they "prevent human beings from reaching the ideal place."¹¹ However, the whole nature is an organic unity, and it has its own rule of evolution. All living creatures such as animals, plants, and microorganisms etc. are all indispensable parts of this community. They exist reasonably. As a kind of sea creature, the sharks do nothing wrong. The same as human beings, they have to fight for existence and they did not violate any law of nature. After all, it is human beings who break into the place they live and destroy their rule of life. The old man regarded the dead marlin as his own property. In order to safeguard his fruit of victory he would "fight them until I die" (100). Therefore, he used all kinds of tools he could use, such as harpoon, rope, knife, oar, tiller and short club, and "have killed many sharks" (99). During describing the process of killing many sharks, Hemingway does not show any emotional color, it seems that the old man should and must do it under such condition. However, the author could not neglect the cruel way of treating animals and human's savage and violence is fully presented in the old man's speech and action.

The ecocritic Rachel Carson believes that: "Nature is a close system. Each creature has a kind of close relationship with other particular creatures, and with the whole ecological system. This relationship cannot be hindered or cut off by any human being." So, if human beings continue to deal with nature cruelly, they will only destroy this relationship and "go farther and farther on the road of destroying themselves and the whole world".¹²

3.3 Hero as Conqueror of the Nature

The story itself can be called a hymn to heroism. The writer chose an old man as the protagonist and chose a big marlin and many brutal sharks as the old man's opponent, which threw the old man into an impossible environment. However, even facing such an adversity, the old man was rich in determination and perseverance, and he refused to succumb to a streak of bad luck. He cheered himself on all the times, he said: "I am a strange old man" (6), "pain does not matter to a man" (71) and "I will show him (the big marlin) what a man can do and what a man endures" (55). After the dentuso took about forty pounds meat of the big marlin, the old man said: "...man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but

¹⁰ Other detailed information can be seen in Paul P. Reuben's *PAL: Perspectives in American Literature—A Research and Reference Guide*. Retrieved on April 19, 2009, from the World Wide Web: <http://www.csustan.edu/english/reuben/pal/chap7/hemingway.html>.

¹¹ Quoted from Xin Ruijuan's *The Classic of Text Iceberg Theory—Study on Symbolic Art of "The Old Man and the Sea"*.

¹² For details refer to *The House of Life: Rachel Carson at Work* written by Paul Brooks, Houghton Mifflin, 1972, Boston.

not defeated” (89). This sentence reveals the theme of *The Old Man and the Sea* and highlights the nature of the old man’s spirit.

What the sentence—“A man can be destroyed but not defeated”—advocate is a kind of heroic spirit of never-giving-up, which is praised and imitated by enormous critics and readers. This spirit does have positive meaning in human society. However, the thinking of proving human’s power and value by conquering and defeating nature needs to be further investigated. The application of the “tough guy” spirit to the treatment of the relationship between human and nature will push nature, which maintains the existence and development of human, to the opposite of human. From the perspective of ecocriticism, it is this conceit consciousness that has caused the present ecological crisis. Engels once mentioned in his *Dialectics of Nature* that “Let us not, however, flatter ourselves overmuch on account of our human victories over nature. For each such victory nature takes its revenge on us” (qtd. in WANG Nuo, 53). The old man’s experience is the best illustration of Engels’ statement when it comes to *The Old Man and the Sea*.

When the novella opens, Hemmingway states the adversity of the old man: “he had gone eighty-four days without taking a fish” (1), he “was now definitely and finally salao, which is the worst form of unlucky” (1). Having read the whole story, readers can deeply feel the old man’s proficient fishing-kill and considerable experience of fishing. To such a professional fisherman, catching some fish to maintain his existence was not a difficult thing, but why did he catch no fish in eighty-four days? Maybe that was nature’s warning for his wrong deeds in the past. However, he did not understand the voice of nature but thought highly of heroism, “for pride” (91) he went deep into the sea and did the thing that he thought he was born for. Therefore, nature punished him harshly and let him know “he was beaten now finally and without remedy” (103). In the end, Santiago said “I went out too far” (95, 99, 100, 104) for four times and realized his folly when he rethought his experience. Until now, it is safe to say that Santiago deserves his failure. Therefore, praising highly of hero as conqueror of nature is also an anti-ecological thought and behavior, and the absurdity and harmfulness of this idea is obvious.

CONCLUSION

In Hemmingway’s literary career, nature is always the major theme of his artistic creation. Most critics have agreed on the point that Hemmingway is a writer of ecological consciousness. In fact, he does write many great works which can reflect his thinking about the relationship between human and nature, but this relationship is too complicated to be generalized.

The analysis mentioned above has led the author to the conclusion that *The Old Man and the Sea* does reflect Santiago’s profound anti-ecological-consciousness. Here, human beings take priority over animals and all other living things are placed in the position of objectivity, with no speech right, no thought, and no morality. More strikingly, even the only criterion of their existence value and the greatness of such value is human beings’ need. Through the old fisherman Santiago’s eyes, Hemmingway’s love toward nature can be seen. However, this kind of love is badly influenced by the thought of anthropocentrism. The nature in Hemmingway’s works has already become the product which is filtered by human senses. It serves as an object to be appreciated, but not a living creature having equal rights as human beings. And Hemmingway, representative of humans, proclaims himself the superior and omnipotent aesthetic subject who has all say. Meanwhile, nature has become a place to satisfy humans’ desire to conquer. On the sea, the old fisherman tried to prove his courage and dignity and realize his self-value. Nevertheless, such ways of proving and realization is at the cost of the animals’ lives. When the huge marlin was eventually killed by Santiago, it seemed that Hemmingway was conveying a mistaken feeling that the tougher the object to be conquered, the more fun and gloriousness would be brought to human beings. As a result, heroism was further exaggerated and reinforced.

Of course, this kind of complicated and paradoxical ecological consciousness has much to do with the social background of the author. As the spokesman of “The Lost Generation”, Hemmingway paid much attention to the spiritual condition and did not put enough emphasis on the ecological problems, but this does not mean to deny the great value of *The Old Man and the Sea*. The famous ecologist Donald Worster once pointed out that: “what account for the global ecological crisis which we must face today is not the ecological system but our cultural system. (qtd. in WANG Nuo, 71) Therefore, the study of ecological literature should deeply and comprehensively interpret our literary system, then, besides the part showing ecological consciousness in a literary work, the part reflecting anti-ecological-consciousness is also worthwhile to be studied. According to this point, this paper probes into and analyzes Santiago’s anti-ecological-consciousness reflected in *The Old Man and the Sea* from the following three perspectives: neglecting the intrinsic value of nature, dealing with animals cruelly and hero as conqueror of nature.

Through the above analysis, the author holds that Santiago’s anti-ecological-consciousness actually reflects Hemmingway’s ambivalent ecological thought to a certain degree. That is, reverence for nature and desire to conquer nature. It is his love and respect for nature that Hemmingway presents the beauty of sea and sea animals in the novella and it is his zeal for conquering nature that Hemmingway describes Santiago as a hero with mental triumph.

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