

ANXIOUS MASCULINITY AND FATHERHOOD: A STUDY OF HEMINGWAY'S- 'MY OLD MAN' AND 'INDIAN CAMP'

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ABSTRACT

Critics have devised the concept of Code Hero from the works of Ernest Hemingway. His realistic portrayal of the interwar period through his generic fiction has given him a prominent position in world and American literature. The heroism presented in his works is imbued with the concepts of masculinity and strength. The popular culture studies Hemingway's work in the light of the American dream, love, war, and pride and Hemingway has drenched his male characters in stoicism which nullifies any scope of flexibility in the analysis of his protagonists. But with the ever-widening field of men and masculinities, and the emergence of new theories, this paper attempts to study the characterization of fatherhood and anxious masculinity in Hemingway's short stories which form a symbolic representation of manhood and fatherhood.

Keywords: Hemingway, Anxious Masculinity, Fatherhood, 'My Old Man', 'Indian Camp', Gender Roles, Paternal Anxiety, Literary Analysis.

Ernest Hemingway is one of the most celebrated writers in American literary history. Hemingway paved the path for modern classics to be treated as a subverted manual or survival guide of a man. He was always in favour of man being his superhero. John Hemingway, (Hemingway's grandson) says- "when people think of Ernest Hemingway what comes to mind for most is the idea that he was a 'man's man,' a true macho who loved in equal parts drinking, hunting, war, and womanizing" (424). This notion is freely depicted in his characters' settings and also seems to be biographical in nature. Hemingway has largely based his literature on his adventurous lifestyle and seamless choices, which has led many critics and scholars to have the opinion that all male characters and heroes come from one single lining of masculinist tropes. The common archetypes of Hemingway include 'the hunter', 'the drunkard', and 'dominant father', all of them being absorbed in the self-righteousness of, what we call today- 'toxic masculinity'.

This paper would particularly look into the build of the fatherhood model and the development of anxious masculinity in the short stories- 'My Old Man' and 'Indian Camp'. These stories have a father figure, an innocent son, and a lesson to be learnt. The structure of the stories have very different plots but carry a stereotype of the fatherly sentiment which is confused in nature and mildly toxic in the mind. Hemingway's considerations about the intricacies of the psychological inclination of the sons' minds towards their fathers show only a natural course of action for a human. The pattern of tact and assertiveness of the fathers in Hemingway's works depict a subtle reality of a father's concern for his son, even though the father might not be morally affluent or in a convincing position to guide his son on a true path. When looking closely at the models of fathers or characters, it is imperative that we see the fathers have a stereotypical manliness which is necessarily reinforced from time to time to keep the dominance in check. In Hemingway's work, the son looks

up to his father for inspiration to be a 'MAN'. they learn the lessons of adulthood and impersonate the father's personality to learn better. This lays the foundation of a son's adult life in the society. Fathers are a direct influence on the masculinity of their sons. According to Social Identity Theory, people's self-identity is based on the closest social interactions they have. (Tajfel and Turner, 1979). In the case of Hemingway, these stories have sons whose first social interaction is with their fathers. They base their personalities and behaviour as per the father's involvement in their lives. But the characters of fathers in these stories start with the father being confused, yet guiding the son with what little of intellect and wisdom they have. It is this from where anxious masculinity takes its roots. The pressure to be and raise an ideal man, who never fails and bows, and always fights with his destiny to overcome the tragedy, is the trademark of a Hemingway Hero. Hemingway has always written his men to be strong, and mentally enduring. They suffer and rebuild their personalities from the difficult times. Teodora Domotor has critically researched the relationships between Hemingway's heroes' masculinity and emotional diffusibility giving birth to the term- Anxious Masculinity. She explains that these heroes or characters over-perform their masculine roles by constantly pushing themselves to prove themselves men in societal norms. Dominating other genders and subduing the genders in the lower hierarchical levels to achieve and maintain their societal title of manhood/manliness is the primary feature. Domotor's concept can be applied to fathers in the given Hemingway's works because these fathers try to provide for their sons, by forming an impression on them and taking them to a workplace, to meet with work people and to teach them the art of the profession they are into. They eventually know where they stand on the morality scale, but they are anxious to teach their sons the art of being a real man, with the survival skill set that helps them to sail through life. They take pride in their work and want their child to be impressed and learn from them. The emotional attachment and the internal struggle to keep the son safe and learned is what fills the fathers with anxiety which unnerves them from time to time. The psychological depth of the father-son relationship is very intriguing in Hemingway's works. He keeps his men complicated and creates a rich physical plot to heighten the stress or crisis of these fathers.

Indian Camp is a short story which was first published in 1924, in the Ford Madox Ford's literary magazine *Transatlantic Review* in Paris and republished by Boni & Liveright in Hemingway's first American volume of short stories *In Our Time* in 1925. It is stated that Hemingway wrote this story shortly after the birth of his son from his first wife, Hadley. Critics believe that Hadley's Childbirth was the inspiration for this story. Hemingway was on a train while Hadley went into labour. Hemingway was terrified at the idea of not being with Hadley during the birth of their child and that he was of no help to Hadley. Hemingway was also in trouble thinking that Hadley must be in great pain and he could not assist in any way to ease it. Ernest Hemingway's biographer, Kenneth Lynn believes this sentiment of fear and the incident became the plotline of the story- Indian Camp. The story is set in the early hours or dawn of the day. We are introduced to the character - Nick Adams, accompanying his father Dr. Adams and Uncle George in a boat. Nick's father is a doctor and he is going to treat a sick Native American woman who was in labour for two days. The woman is pinned down by several other men on the lower bunk bed while her husband is lying on the top bunk bed with an injured foot, cut by an axe, nevertheless, he was smoking a cigar. Nick is a little uncomfortable at the painful sight and the crying of the woman. Nick seemed very uncomfortable and concerned for the woman. He is explained by his father that the woman's body is trying to expel the baby out of the woman's body. Nick grows anxious and asks Dr Adams if there is something that could be given to ease the pain of the women. Dr. Adams is trying to

educate Nick about the situation and the medical emergency, but again the lack of sensitivity that comes with it is astonishing.

'This lady is going to have a baby, Nick,' he said.

'I know,' said Nick.

'You don't know,' said his father. 'Listen to me. What she is going through is called being in labour. The baby wants to be born and she wants it to be born. All her muscles are trying to get the baby born. That is what is happening when she screams.'

'I see,' Nick said.

Just then the woman cried out.

'Oh, Daddy, can't you give her something to make her stop screaming?' asked Nick.

'No. I haven't any anesthetic,' his father said. 'But her screams are not important. I don't hear them because they are not important.'

Dr Adams very calmly informs Nick of the things going around and assigns him a task to hold the wash basin for his hand wash. Nick is seemingly a lot from the surroundings. Dr.Adams takes help from the Native Indian women and operates on the woman. He performs a caesarean procedure to deliver the baby because the head of the baby is turned around in the womb. Before leaving, Dr Adam checks on the father of the child, only to find out that his throat is slit from ear to ear and he is bled to death. Dr.Adam immediately asked Uncle George to take Nick out of the shanty but it was late, Nick already saw the body. Nick becomes curious after this incident. He doesn't understand why the man died and Dr.Adams replies that it's because he could not stand the pain.

'Do ladies always have such a hard time having babies?' Nick asked.

'No, that was very, very exceptional.'

'Why did he kill himself, Daddy?'

I don't know, Nick. He couldn't stand things, I guess.

'Do many men kill themselves, Daddy?'

'Not very many, Nick.'

'Do many women?'

'Hardly ever.'

'Don't they ever?'

'Oh, yes. They do sometimes.'

'Daddy?'

'Yes.'

'Where did Uncle George go?'

'He'll turn up all right.'

'Is dying hard, Daddy?'

'No, I think it's pretty easy, Nick. It all depends.'

Nick has suddenly got questions about life and death and pain. Dr.Adams took Nick to his job so that he could educate him like a responsible father and impress him with his medical abilities as a doctor. but now he is answering his questions like an anxious man. Nick is not scared of death, but of pain and his mind wanders of thinking of it. Dr.Adams compromises on his son's comfort to push his son's interest in medicine, only to present him with a suicide scene. Dr Adam's actions here fail to provide any comfort or justification to Nick. Dr

Adams's portrayal as a confused father who just wants to show off his medical competence fails on fatherly grounds due to his lack of sensitivity, emotional intellect and masculine attempt to 'man up' his son by teaching him medicine. He lacks the basic sympathy to feel for his son and read his current requirements. Nick was introduced to the concept of life and death, and Dr.Adams abandoned his child's curiosity to understand these concepts. Dr Adams wants to be the masculine, impressive father to his son when Nick needs more of a subtle fatherhood to help him navigate this experience of pain and death that he witnessed recently. Dr.Adams could explain to Nick about the superficial things in life, but could not educate him about the inevitable truth of life.

My Old Man was first published in the collection of *Three Stories and Ten Poems* in 1923 by Robert McAlmons 'Contact Publishing'. The interesting story that follows with this private publishing is that of the 'great suitcase debacle' wherein Hemingway's suitcase containing manuscripts of his works, was stolen from the Paris Railway Station. My Old Man was the only one that survived because it was already posted by then to the editors. As the title suggests, we already see warmth in it. The diffused love but evident love that a son has for his father. The narrator in this story is the son, Joe who is fond of his father, Butler and loves seeing him riding a horse and is impressed by his father's health, even though he knew he was meant to be a fat guy. Butler was a steeplechase jockey and was a genius in that. The races kept him physically fit and mentally active. The memory of Joe where he regularly went for a run with his father is one of his fondest memories. He describes the run with much enthusiasm and for readers, it feels like this was the bonding activity of Joe with Butler. More than a physical activity, it was crucial for the relationship ties of Joe and Butler. He was particularly in awe when he saw his father skip rope.

"I'd come back and sit down beside him and he'd pull a rope out of his pocket and start skipping rope out in the sun with the sweat pouring off his face and him skipping rope out in the white dust with the rope going cloppetty cloppety clop clop clop and the sun hotter and him working harder up and down a patch of the road. Say it was a treat to see my old man skip rope too. He could whirr it fast or lop it slow and fancy. Say you ought to have seen wops look at us sometimes when they'd come by going into town walking along with big white steers hauling the cart. They sure looked as though they thought the old man was nuts. He'd start the rope whirring till they'd stop dead still and watch him, then give the steers a cluck and a poke with the goad and get going again." (Hemingway, 192)

Joe had high regard for his father because he was an example of a hard worker for him. Seeing his father do so much to keep down the weight and constantly supporting Joe to follow up creates an image of healthy fatherhood. Besides that, Joe was deeply interested and fascinated by these races. Butler engages Joe into this world of jockeys and horses and this is his first introduction into the manly world or a 'man's world'. Joe participates in this world more than he does in the normal world where the common activities for a boy at that age do not include jockeying. Butler introduces Joe to his world to initiate the formation of a masculine identity in Joe. Butler wants Joe to enjoy his manly world of workspace without knowing the unruly complications that lie beyond it. And this turn of events, Joe on several occasions, talks to his father in a serious tone with mumblings he never understood. At a table in Galleria, Butler sent Joe to get a Sportsman while he was in a discrete talk with two men and Holbrook when Joe heard an abusive phrase- ' Son of a bitch'. Joe was taken aback at this. He couldn't imagine someone abusing his father and not getting punished for it. He was still questioning the audacity of those two men. It was later when Butler came up to him and gave him fatherly advice- " You got to take a lot of things in this world, Joe". The sheer determination and patience that Butler had confronting Joe displays a fatherly affection, even though Joe could see him sweating and getting pale. Joe

stood strong for his father and Butler protected his son from any ill feelings. The anxiety that comes with the feeling of being a strong man for his son but also getting threatened in front of him is depreciating his masculinity and respect. Butler does not want Joe to be a part of or witness any such situations because he depletes his image of a strong, hard-working father who is providing and living for his son. Joe recalls an incident when he first saw Kzar, he describes Kzar as a big, yellow and the most beautiful horse that he had ever seen. It was lean and had a build just meant for running. But Joe knew something was up when he heard George say that Kircubbin would win. Joe did not understand as George was Kzar's jockey and Butler put money on Kircubbin. Joe suspected foul play but he was too naive to understand the deeper mechanisms and politics behind this. Butler won a lot of money that day betting on Kzar. Joe wanted Kzar to win so badly that his excitement strutted when Kircubbin won instead. He was pacified by his father telling him that George was a good jockey but it took a great jockey to keep Kzar from winning. Joe's idea of fair game and play just got a reality check. And it took out any excitement that he left for the race. After this race, their visit to Paris became frequent. They would sit at Cafe de la Paix. They had deep conversations about jockeying, about travelling the world, all over Europe and Egypt, about Butler's youth and his days in Kentucky and sending Joe back to school in the States. Butler bought a horse after a while, named Gilford, he raced with and the first time he raced, he got in third position. Butler was ready to work out and increase his physical endurance again for the races. The race took a drastic turn when Gilford collapsed on Butler in the second race and Butler died. Joe was devastated when he heard a gunshot that killed Gilford as well. In a minute, Joe lost his father and his horse, and now he stands with two irreparable losses. He cried and cried and narrated to the readers that he loved his old man so much. He was then patted by a couple of guys who walked in and talked incessantly about his father, saying he had it coming.

"George and I went out to the gate and I was trying to stop bawling and George wiped off my face with his handkerchief and we were standing back a little ways while the crowd was going out of the gate and a couple of guys stopped near us while we were waiting for the crowd to get through the gate and one of them was counting a bunch of mutuel tickets and he said, "Well Butler got his all right."

The other guy said, "I don't give a good goddam if he did, the crook. He had it coming to him on the stuff he's pulled."

And George Gardner looked at me to see if I'd heard and I had all right and he said, "Don't you listen to what those bums said, Joe. Your old man was one swell guy." (Hemingway, 205)

Suddenly, everything that Joe knew about his father came shattering down, he did not know his father very well. He died being a good protective father to him. The world says otherwise now, George consoles Joe and negates everything that the other men said. He tries to reaffirm Joe's faith in his father so that he never loses the love that Butler created for Joe all these years. It seems all the things that Butler readily did for Joe, changing places, moving to different race courses, all the time spent exercising and learning the depths of horses and jockeying and stalls, all went in vain. He shielded from Joe, an entire business based on fraudulence and Joe has no idea there was another world in which Butler was not as honest and hard-working as he seemed to Joe.

In both stories, we see a pattern of fatherhood that is similar in execution as well. The fathers are inducing manliness by acting omniscient in front of their sons. Dr. Adams and Butler take their respective sons, Nick and Joe to their workplace and try to incorporate an interest in their sons for their professions. Nick and Joe primarily take a lot of interest only to learn at the end that there is so much beyond the knowledge and

appearance of their fathers. Even though these fathers have not fully complied with the unsaid rules of fatherhood, they still are their sons' heroes. The main attributes of these Hemingway fathers - having a professional life away from the familial life, being tactful in their jobs and workplaces, paying attention to the son's needs and engaging them in their lives and having a large group of friends or reaching out to a community which values or recognises their contribution. Understanding the psyche of the fathers, it is found that these men are not all toxic or dominant, but they are under stress to play the role of a father perfectly, so they hide their imperfections, secrets and negligence towards greater things in life. Their anxiety to play their fatherly role to the best of their ability is striking. Differentiating from the parental side and the human side, Dr. Adams and Butler have not juggled much in shifting the roles, which is why in the end, we see a faulting along the lines of their personalities. Both fathers carry affection for their sons but also want to hide the complications of their work life. Both the sons Nick and Joe are readily involved in their father's life and want to be an eternal part but they stand a little disappointed when they get to see the true nature of work and ethics that their fathers have. For a son who is growing up under the wings of his father, he picks up a lot of personality traits and lessons from his father. He emotionally develops attaching his feelings of pride, honour, discipline, love, morality and honesty to his father. The moments they share, the memories and the constant touch of familiarity and hope that a son attaches to his father, make this essence of fatherhood an important guiding principle for life. And amidst this, when the vision becomes clearer, the sons see their father's failed attempts in life, they realise this is not the perfect example of masculinity or heroism. They now see the father's default structure of decision-making skills and sensitivity and a human tendency to fail, they see them as less perfect examples of a masculine entity. Dr Adams proves himself an insensitive man when implies that a woman's pain does not matter and men usually suffer more in these situations.

Nick is taken aback by these statements. Joe has been broken by his father when he wins by cheating in the sports that Joe loves. He further tells Joe that these races are rigged at times. Joe is disappointed by his father. These are some serious failures on the part of Dr. Adams and Butler because they might be caring fathers but they failed as good men in the eyes of their sons.

Hemingway's works have always been described as works filled with machismo and stoicism where the males never get defeated. These stories have complicated father-son narratives where both of them are learning. The father learns from the world and the son learns from the father. The fathers have the opportunity to shape their sons' world. Hemingway's heroes are characters of the sons, who grow into self-centred, aggressive adults with a troubled past, who are emotionally distant because their fathers let them down. The cult of anxious masculinity stems from emotional distance and a loss of an ideal fatherhood. For these sons, masculinity is not about honesty anymore, it is about hiding their emotional vulnerability and mental agony. They remain rough on the outside. These stories presented from the perspective of the sons carry the same emotional burden along with the lifting of the disillusionment from the minds. They strive to embody every quality they thought their fathers had. And if destiny allowed, they could achieve the lost glory which they identified themselves with, when they were father's little apprentice, in medicine, in sports and ultimately in Life.

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