



A Toll the War Leaves on Soldiers: Analysis of “Soldier’s Home”

Student’s Name

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A major consequence of war is its ability to demolish traditional values and introduce drastic changes in the perceptions of the world among those who experience the horror and devastation that define war. For military personnel, assuming a normal life after war is a form of torture because visualizing society from an optimistic perspective is difficult after everything they had to go through. Hemmingway uses this story to reminisce about his life after participating in the First World War. It was from his experience in the war as a driver for the Italian Army that he developed depression and he experienced multiple injuries. When he returned home as a wounded soldier, he found it relatively difficult to balance the needs of society that seemed not to change with his new understanding of the world.

The war broadened his view of society and the way the world operated, which was different from what his society understood. The life challenges of a returning soldier and terminal illnesses led Hemmingway to commit suicide in 1962. A soldier who comes back from war can find his feelings and views to be incompatible with the dominant traditional patterns of life (Lynn, 2002). These dramatic situations describe Ernest Hemmingway’s short story, “Soldier’s Home.” Through it, the character of Harold Krebs emerges as a tragic hero who is opposing the traditional world that the characters depicted as average citizens represent.

When unfolding the character of Krebs, Hemmingway employs a plethora of approaches in the story “Soldier’s Home.” One of the aspects is the ability of Krebs’ character to open up through his reactions, thoughts, and actions to his environment. This is evident from the beginning of the story, where the reader is exposed to a series of monotonous reiterations which are reflecting a dull, mechanical, and relatively objective state of Harold’s mind. This is evident in the use of multiple repetitions of phrases such as, “There is a picture...”, “He did not want...”,



“He liked...”, it was simply not worth it” (Hemmingway, 2007). Through these phrases, the reader is provided with a reflection of the emotional death and indifference that defines Krebs’ state of mind, which are possibly from the horrific experiences that he had during the First World War.

From the characterization and the experiences of Krebs, it is possible to argue that war was not the only source of his apathy. This is because, in his community, there is evidence of estrangement in his community among the people who wanted to be told embellished tales about the war that were far from the reality of his experience. The author says, “His town had heard too many atrocity stories to be thrilled by actualities. Krebs found that to be listened to at all, he had to lie. After he had done this twice, he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it” (Hemmingway, 2007). He revolts against the necessity of telling the lies, and he reacts by withdrawing from daily activities that define life in society. By engaging in activities such as unregulated sleeping, playing pool, and reading books without any productive results, Krebs emerges as an individual who is explicitly opposed to the traditional norms of society through his deeds and words.

Krebs’ surname also plays a significant role in communicating the isolation that he experiences in society following his return from the war. He borrowed his surname from one of his friends, who married an old woman (Lynn, 2002). This is symbolic of the importance that the author places on the dramatic conflict between Krebs’ perspective of society and that of his mother. Through this conflict, the author provides the reader with an improved understanding of the level of incompatibility that existed between Krebs and his environment.

The foil character of Krebs’s mother also sets off his lack of determination and objectivity in life. His mother attempts to assert the essence of traditional values in his life when she tries to



convince him that he needs to settle down and find a job as a way of being a productive member of society. His mother says, “All work is honorable as he says. But you’ve got to make a start at something” (Hemingway, 2007). The character of his mother depicts her as an individual who upholds the conventional lifestyle. This makes Krebs more repulsive, considering that he does not find meaning in embracing the conventional life that society requires of him. To his mother, Krebs’ relaxed life is meaningless, and this explains why she attempts to place him in a kingdom where he does not belong. Krebs reacts through a repulsive reaction in which he demonstrates his disinterest and blunt confession that he does not love anybody. This is effective in disclosing the abyss that he had with the conventional society. In his view, he can only survive in society by unwillingly giving up on his demands and saying farewell to his ambition of living a smooth and uncomplicated life that the social conventions necessitate.

In Hemingway’s short story “Soldier’s Home,” Harold Krebs emerges as a tragic character whose experience in the war leads to devastating experiences when he comes back home and tries to live a normal life. He faces difficulties in coping with the prevailing demands of society because he does not seem to have any hope or agitation of engaging in such an activity. Throughout the story, Hemingway depicts Krebs as an individual who has lost everything, and when he comes back from the war, he does not see meaning or the reason for engaging in any productive activities. Krebs returns home a year after the war, and it is too late to be accepted as a hero. These circumstances ruin his vision of uncomplicated life, and he has to become an individual who lives according to the demands imposed on him by society which does not seem to accept his uniqueness.



References

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Lynn, Kenneth S. *Hemingway*. Harvard University Press, 2002.

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