Ernest Hemingway's Concealment and Discovery of the Male Self: The Influence of His Romantic Relationship with Agnes von Kurowsky on His Early Fiction

Dennis B. Ledden
Indiana University of Pennsylvania

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ERNEST HEMINGWAY’S CONCEALMENT AND DISCOVERY OF HIS MALE SELF: THE INFLUENCE OF HIS ROMANTIC RELATIONSHIP WITH AGNES VON KUROWSKY ON HIS EARLY FICTION

A Dissertation
Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies and Research
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy

Dennis B. Ledden
Indiana University of Pennsylvania
December 2013
Indiana University of Pennsylvania  
School of Graduate Studies and Research  
Department of English

We hereby approve the dissertation of

Dennis B. Ledden

Candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

________________________
________________________
James M. Cahalan, Ph.D.  
Professor Emeritus of English, Advisor

________________________
Todd N. Thompson, Ph.D.  
Assistant Professor of English

________________________
Lingyan Yang, Ph.D.  
Associate Professor of English

ACCEPTED

________________________
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Timothy P. Mack, Ph.D.  
Dean  
School of Graduate Studies and Research
In this study of Ernest Hemingway’s earlier fiction, informed by masculinity studies and Hemingway scholarship, I argue that his breakup with his World War I nurse, Agnes von Kurowsky, resulted in his discovery of the inner strength of his male self, an inner strength that he would give many of his male protagonists and one that ultimately enabled the author to pursue his own literary career. As I identify the key similarities between Hemingway’s relationship with Agnes and the various elements of his early short stories and novels, I also demonstrate the ways in which the motif of the male self operates in each of these early works—that is, whether the protagonists discover or rediscover and then subsequently employ their inner strength in order to overcome what are often conflicts with their respective lovers. Over the course of three early short stories Nick Adams, Hemingway’s fictional alter-ego, begins to learn the value of the male self’s inner strength. Whereas in a later short story the confidence that a more mature Nick gains from his male self enables him to use women for his pleasure and for writing material, in two additional later stories a more experienced Nick Adams, also named Harold Krebs, struggles to recover from a concealed male self that had been suppressed primarily through his relationship with a wartime lover. The Hemingway-like Scripps O’Neil and Yogi Johnson in The Torrents of Spring, as well as Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn in The Sun Also Rises, allow their romantic illusions to conceal their male selves. On the other hand, Jake’s recovery of his male self—which parallels Hemingway’s recovery of his male-self after his breakup with Agnes and constitutes a
fictional representation of how Hemingwayesque machismo can reassert itself following an identity threat—enables Jake to rescue Brett Ashley following her rejection by Pedro Romero. The Hemingway-like Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* fails to uncover a male self that is concealed by his romance with Agnes-like Catherine Barkley and by the absurdities of modern warfare until he writes this novel about his beloved nurse.