

THE REVIVAL OF THE UNDERSCORED VALUE OF LIFE AND LOST CIVILIZATION IN THE MOST DANGEROUS GAME

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ABSTRACT

Richard Edward Connell was born in Poughkeepsie, New York, on October 17, 1893. From the time that he was a child he started his writing and became an editor volunteer for the newspaper. Later in his life he published lots of novels and short stories that among them "The Most Dangerous Game," which was published in 1924, brought him the prestigious fame. In this short story he deals with the completely negative effects of war that have paralyzed human minds and brought savagery and brutality on human beings. General Zaroff one of the main characters is the symbol of the devastated value of life and lost civilization, in other words, he is a man of violence and brutality who is a hunter that hunts not only animals but human beings is finally hunted by Rainsford who tries to put an end to his violence and finally, he revives the lost civilization for all of the human beings. So the article has to deal with the negative and bloody effects of war which have paralyzed human life and at the same time it deals with the human's endeavor to revive the lost civilization and underscored value of life.

Key words: War, Savagery, Violence, Revival of Lost Civilization and Cultural Value

Introduction

Human history is related to the conflicts they have, however, brutality and violence in the history are the great obstacles toward the advancement of culture and civilization, in other words, it is war which has foreshadowed humanity and morality. It has a destructive power over the human beings and their minds. Richard Edward Connell was one of the writers who fought seriously in war and there is no doubt that it had a negative impact on his life and style of his writing. During his serving in war he was forced to kill other men in order to survive. Upon his return from the war, he started writing his short story “The Most Dangerous Game.” It is apparent that in his writing he not only reflects the disastrous effect of the violence but also vents out this engraved violence in his mind. He believes that no person is left unscathed of the battle as he himself could not.

According to Anirudh Purwar war and violence are man perpetrated acts of violence and its impact may occur as the direct result of physical and visual impact or through the various forms of interpersonal experiences — the wounding and killing of loved ones, the brutal rape and torturing of innocent victims, malnutrition, starvation, disease and emotional contagion, and social disruption and the loss of peer related experiences, routinized family, school and community life(1). War has destroyed the power of civilization, cultural values and given the life an absurd value. In other words war is the enemy of civilization and its negative effects lead to lots of bad consequences for civilization. Civilization per se has existed for a long time but it has been reshaped with cultural values. Although lots of interpretations have been given about the civilization some believe that these two words culture and civilization have the mutual relationships. A.L KROBERA and CLYDE KLUCICHOHN (1952) define that these two terms can be used interchangeably; culture is the advancement in civilization but civilization is a state of social culture (12). In the same way Ruan Wei believes (2011),

A civilization is composed of constituent elements or “cultures” which are interwoven with one another and are in constant interaction with other civilizations and their cultures in the world outside. These elements not only make up a civilization itself but are exactly what distinguishes one civilization from another. Based on a multiplicity of cultures, a civilization provides identity to those who belong to and are committed to it (Globality Studies, 2).

He also continues and stresses that a civilization can disappear and decline but if it can go through the ups and downs of the history, it will be growing rather than stagnant, open-minded rather than close-minded and inclusive rather than limited (2).

In this short story “The Most Dangerous Game,” it has been shown that the afterward effects of war have caused that most human beings remove their internal and external restraints that once they paid respect to and give into their barbaric desires in their societies; to an extent, humans, like animals, break the societal space and enter savagery and brutality. General Zaroff, a post-war freshman, submits himself to barbarism and the destruction of the civilization, enjoys from malice by taking human being’s life, whereas Rainsford who is a hunter himself and has trapped in the luscious island of Zaroff , with no means for escape, preserves carefully his internal and external power imposed by society and civilization on him and although he, at the end of story, kills Zaroff, he welcomes the new civilization as he lets the sailors once more time patrol in the undiscovered and discovered area of the world without the fear of being murdered.

Moreover, for the revival of the lost civilization Rainsford limits the negative side of power and puts an end to brutality, which once General Zaroff used, he also, instead, implants the primitive but advanced cultural values and civilization.

Outline:

The reputed hunter Mr. Rainsford with another hunter Whitney are on a yacht cruising in the Caribbean, a place that many other sailors hate to go and dread it since lots of bad events occur. These two persons are accosted by each other about who is aficionado of big game hunting. They also discuss whether animals are capable of feeling when they are hunted, which quickly Rainsford says, "... Bah! They've no understanding" (Perrine, p.15). After their tough and long discussion, one of them, Whitney, sacks out and sleeps but his friend Rainsford awakes and stays on the deck to draw on his cigarette. He suddenly hears the sound of a gunshot and in an attempt to find it he falls in to the water. He desperately swims till he reaches the rocky shore and he tries to rest. Upon waking up, the next morning he goes to find food and he comes across the corpse of a big animal which was hunted the night before. He is also surprised as he sees that this big animal has been hunted by a small gun. As Rainsford's sense of curiosity goes up, he follows the footprints to the solitary house he finds in the island. Upon arriving at the mansion, he hears the sound of a gigantic and mute man, Ivan, who is armed to shot him, but he is stopped as General Zaroff comes in. Zaroff acts as a politician: behaves his guest well, welcomes him and finally invites him to eat with him. Zaroff is happy as he thinks that he has another victim and he can speak with him about hunting. Not to shock him soon, he later tells him that he does not like to hunt animals but a kind of animal that brings reason. He calls it "Big Game"(Perrine, p. 12).

Rainsford knows that Zaroff has no sense of sympathy and after one night he is told that Rainsford must go to the jungle because he has to be hunted. Rainsford is also petrified when Zaroff continues and says that if his hunt can survive after three days, he gives him an upbeat promise that he sends him to the main land on condition that he does not nag about the hunter to anybody. Rainsford departs and decides to outsmart him. In jungle, where he is supposed to meet Zaroff, he doubles back his footprints because he wants to confound his hunter.

Then he climbs up a tree for rest. When the accomplished hunter Zaroff enters, he stops in front of the tree, puffs at his cigar but he does not look up. When Zaroff comes back home, Rainsford realizes that Zaroff knew that he was resting there but he wanted to play him cat and mouse.

Other days Rainsford also sets up these traps and he succeeds in killing Ivan and one of his prized dogs. He also uses his ability to injure General and dives in to the water to come back to General's Gothic house. Upon his coming, General is irked as he thinks that his prey has escaped. Disappointed, he goes to his bed but he sees that Rainsford is waiting him. He congratulates him on winning but Rainsford does not stop and says that they have yet to play. He kills Zaroff and goes to bed peacefully and safely.

Discussion:

Since the beginning of history of mankind, war has frequently occurred and its destructive power plagues humanity. Individual are also affected by war; some die and some pick up lingering injuries. As Arthur A. Stein and Bruce M. Russett (Chapter10), believe wars do not affect only those who participate directly but its terrible events have so great an impact that the perceptual

predispositions of those who did not participate in the making of the policy will be affected almost as much as those who did (Gurr, 1980, p. 405). If the major wars happen, people surely are aware of its unpleasant effects and impacts, because they are the direct participants who are old enough and remember what destructions they cause. In case that war causes any destructions or not people from war generations suggest that they hate it and somehow they are weary of it and they believe that it is something which stands against human nature and later may lead to more savageries and brutalities.

In this short story the two main characters have the tendency toward committing savagery and brutality but each to his capability and sense of understanding. In other words; the issues of violence and cruelty exist in this story both literary and symbolically. Rainsford is somehow man of sense and wise that he can take decisions consciously which hold him back from embracing the innate hostility and committing the brutality. In other words, Rainsford has come from the world of civilization that respects the value of life and has his domination over his restraints that society has also imposed on him. According to Rena Korb (1997) Rainsford's desire to find safety and civilization is so great that he does not fully comprehend the oddity of the island, including the evidence that a hunter has shot a big animal with a small gun (162) so he proceeds with these societal rules and laws as he knows these rules make him a perfect person far from committing crimes. He is the hunter of some animals just to satisfy his hunger which is the main need of all human beings. He cuts his coat according to his cloth and does not overcome the society's expectations as he thinks it may have bad consequences for him. Even though Rainsford has passed away the period in which he participated for war, he does not forget the morality, the sense of compassionate and he does not go beyond it. He remembers that once before war starts, he abode by the laws and teachings that society offered to him and now after war that he is alive he wants to preserve it.

From another side; General Zaroff has kept his distance from civilization so there is no doubt that he is too far from being civil. He could not go on with the rules of society as he wants to be completely free. But his freedom does not get along well with humanity and kindness but co mixes with his bad nature. As Prof. Camila Alvarez and Hernandez (2014) believe:

Zaroff is a Cossack who was a military force loyal to the Czar when he was overthrown during the Russian civil war by the soviets they were forced to flee. During his service in the military he most likely fought in their civil war, and he learned to live with death and killing as an everyday thing. When he fled, he became a big game hunter hunting the most dangerous animals in the world to satisfy his urge to kill.

Zaroff is so interested in hunting humans and he tries to slaughter and torture brutally. He concludes that he needs more of a challenge while hunting and decides to hunt people instead of animals and that is why he has bought an island with a luxurious house. Zaroff has chosen to live in an island which is much far from human society which according to Purwar and et al [it is] war [which] results in a lot of people to become refugees away from their original place of residence (3). Zaroff may have lost her mom and his father was going to serve in the army thus this separation, according to Purwar, uproots the very first emotional attachments of a child.(4).

Furthermore; this separation at the young age can make him unfriendly or withdrawn from the outer world which lets him be a vampire (4) Zaroff also calls himself a nihilist and he passes judgment about life that it has no meaning since we are born to suffer and then die. This sense of nihilism leads to his sense of hedonism as he thinks that life is nothing but you must find pleasure for it otherwise you are rolled in pains. He finds this pleasure in the big hunting. He even shows off about his new prey and calls it “new collection of heads” (Perrine, p. 20). By this phrase he believes in hunting humans which are all sports to him. From his character it is extrapolated that he is a sadist when he comes to people, especially when he uses a false channel to lure ships into crashing on the rocks near his island. This sense of evilness allows him to restock his island with more men to hunt. According to Rena Korb (1997) Zaroff also demonstrates the predatory trait that will dominate his hunt with Rainsford and go up his sense of sadism: he does not like to kill his prey quickly but instead he wants to dangle him until the last moment. It gives him the pleasure while he lets Rainsford think that he is safe (163). Be that as it may, Zaroff’s turn of the speech and the way he thinks are not compatible with his victory as he underscores his rivals. And according to Rena Korb he sees them only as necessary to enhance his fun, not as something that could cause a prey to actually escape him. Three times Zaroff chooses not to kill Rainsford, but saves him because he wants this play to continue, so taunts him all the while (163).

Zaroff is a man who has come from the war period and has seen lots of people dead in front of himself and it has affected his psych too much that according to Anirudh Purwar [he] looks upon his life as a waste as he grows up and does not hesitate to become a murderer; he is also incapable to show respect to other people’s life which finally makes him so dangerous (5).

Straightforwardly; he also calls himself and his forefathers “sportsmen,” a verbal irony for being murderers, as his generation mixed with bloodthirsty and he has learnt from them to amuse himself with guns and killings. In his skirmish with Rainsford he also wants to scare him with his previous job he had. Ironically he says,

“...God makes some men poets. Some He makes kings, some beggars. Me He made a hunter. My hand was made for the trigger, my father said. He was a very rich man with a quarter of a million acres in the Crimea, and he was an ardent sportsman. When I was only five years old he gave me a little gun, specially made in Moscow for me, to shoot sparrows with. When I shot some of his prize turkeys with it, he did not punish me; he complimented me on my marksmanship. I killed my first bear in the Caucasus when I was ten. My whole life has been one prolonged hunt. I went into the army--it was expected of noblemen's sons--and for a time commanded a division of Cossack cavalry, but my real interest was always the hunt. I have hunted every kind of game in every land. It would be impossible for me to tell you how many animals I have killed” (Perrine, p. 14).

On the whole Zaroff is a man who is always armed to teeth in his territory and it makes excitement for him but he somehow is sick and bored by hunting animals and he wants to tackle with an animal that can bring reasons or use reasons, in other words, he looks for

human beings as they amuse him and he can show them his power. In his rough deal he seals with Rainsford he defends his action by giving his speech accordingly and he says that one time they both served in military and could get human's life easily as if they were doing sports, but when he hears that Rainsford denies it and takes in to account this indecent work as brutality, he, without hesitation, keeps on, "I refuse to believe that so modern and civilized a young man as you seem to be harbors romantic ideas about the value of human life. Surely your experiences in the war..."(Perrine, p.15).

Clearly in the absence of societal rules he is ready to lose both his sense of morality and humanity and instead he tends to implant savagery in his soul. He finds a greater allure to his wild hunting as he kills human beings rather than abides by the polite mannerism which before war was taught to him. The post effect of war has made him a real animal which he has no sympathy toward his people. He downgrades the value of human life and steps forward to commit barbarity. Finally, although Rainsford and Zaroff have similar backgrounds, they have opposite opinions on the value of human life.

Ivan, the assistant of General Zaroff, who is not also sane enough to understand, is the symbol of paralyzed civilization which is controlled by Zaroff. Even Zaroff talks about Ivan to Rainsford and cherishes that he is from his generation as he says, "like all his race, a bit of a savage" (Perrine, p.13). When Rainsford is given a knife to go in to the heart of jungle to prepare himself for the next day, he thinks of running away from Zaroff and his assistant with laws and meetings; however, he changes his mind and stays there to confront Zaroff and Ivan; decides to kill them and end their brutality and lack of civilization in their surroundings. Rainsford knows that these characters try to enact the brutal human tragedy of murdering though they are all capable of creating not utopia but a perfect life for themselves. Fortunately by killing Ivan he has revived half of the lost civilization the conflict and the climax of the story arise between the men with contrasting views of how to come through and run the island. Rainsford the symbol of civilization who was once taught and preserved his ingrained morality first attempts to establish rules in his surrounding and confrontation with Zaroff and his big porter Ivan. In this inhuman meeting Rainsford is scared of being killed as Zaroff finds him lie down on the strong branch of the tree. Zaroff draws on the cigarette and he knows where Rainsford is. His pause before the kill, shows that he wants to restrain the act of savagery and sticks to his humanity but as the story goes on, he cannot put an end to his barbarity and his sense of bloodlust grows stronger and stronger. Thus as the novel progresses, even though Rainsford tries to protect civilization, each one continues with his own opposing thought. Rainsford is chiefly headed by his restraint and focused mind and does not go beyond his hunting which only hunts to satisfy his hunger pangs but Zaroff, the voracious hunter and the symbol of wolf, gives into his cravings to hunt humans instead.

Here in this part Connell points out that the lack of social rules and laws may become a disaster. He, in this short story, also uses some symbols to show how the civilization is corrupted.

Jungle has a special symbolic interpretation. Teeming, wild, and ungovernable, the jungle serves as a powerful symbol of Zaroff's tangled psyche and the chaos within the island. It is also an emblem of restriction and Rainsford's loss of control because it impedes his effort to return to civilization (SparkNotes Editors, 2007). One more; these persons are in the jungle and jungle is

not the place for human beings to live since it has no rules and it makes them to forget that they are human beings. So there is no wonder that each of human beings is threatened and he tries hard to save his life. He may also resorts to his evil energy to kill another. In addition when Rainsford is in the jungle to confront General Zaroff, he constructs a Malay man-catcher intended to impale his newfound enemy. Zaroff retreats quickly as he knows that this time he may be the huntee. Now Rainsford hugs his animalistic behavior and “like some prehistoric beaver, he began to dig”(Perrine, p. 18). His conflict with the jungle by breaking the branches together with making the holes in order to kill Zaroff is to get rid him of lost civilization.

However; later after some deadly traps for Zaroff, unfortunately when he draws blank in killing him, he succeeds in killing one of his dogs and his porter Ivan, but to his misfortune in his last confrontation when Zaroff closes in on him, Rainsford dives out in to the sea, risks all his life. When Rainsford saves himself and he comes back to the river, he shows that once more time he has fled from uncharted brutal region and hugs his civilization. His experience in the jungle has taught him that he has come back to primitive state of manhood who was in threat and always had the tool to stand against the enemies. His dive in to the island is an escape from being brutal to his human kind. In the end since he knows that General Zaroff does not quit killing the people, he comes back sooner to his room by swimming the long island; he pulls down the curtains and Zaroff sees himself in his trap and believes that the game is over. Zaroff quickly plots and says that they can be civilized once again. Rainsford does not feel that this can happen as long as they are both still living. He intends to fight Zaroff to the death. By killing him, Connell shows us that human beings are so capable to make good of their society if they are beset by the restriction of civilization forces.

Finally what is understood from Connell’s intention is that he depicts the modern civilized world which has to go through survival but with a great threat, it tries to reveal people’s evil nature with their boiling sense of destruction and massacre. In other words; the story shows human’s nature in reality and illusion which has to present the symbol of modern society satiated with demoralization, destruction and decay. Connell also gives hope and says that humans can be humans if they sympathize with each other and they help to value the human’s life.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, in this short story humans are shown when they lose their controls and have at least a speck of brutality, however, for some this amount goes up. Additionally, the story is full of fears and frustrations which show that the society in which man rules is directed without rules and laws and it turns out to be the center of savagery, however, as the preserver of civilization, Rainsford is the man of sane and puts importance to human’s life; he wants to revive the devastated hope after the war and invites General Zaroff to give up and forget the savagery he has committed but for General Zaroff who hunts the humans rather than animals it makes the bed of enjoyment in his psych. The revival of civilization and the end to savagery are done when finally Rainsford decides to kill General Zaroff who as if was once deaf as a post and did not listen to Rainsford’s pieces of advice. This short story has a good ending as it points to “every cloud has a silver lining.”

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