Nunu Dong

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CP English 12

Great Virtues

Greatness is defined differently by different countries, different time and different people. All these different opinions about greatness led a flourishing in world literature and even movies. Examples are “From *On Heroes and Hero-Worship*” by Thomas Carlyle, “Heroes and Anti-Heroes” By George Elliott, “*Lincoln*” by Russell Freedman, “The Greatest man in the world” by James Thurber, and *Hero,* the movie by Columbia Tristar*.* Personally, I believe that greatness is all kinds of virtues and morals which are extolled by people, hidden deeply in people’s heart and will never disappear as time goes by.

According to “From *On Heroes and Hero-Worship”*, great men are profitable company and they enlighten the darkness of the world. People love them, praise them and would like to be near them. “… in no time whatever can they entirely eradicate out of living men’s hearts a certain altogether peculiar reverence for Great Men” (Carlyle 239). In addition, people have a natural desire to gain the recognition from family, friends and society. So the long for pursuing greatness or heroism or virtue such as courage, loyalty, wisdom, sympathy, compassion, ambition, genius, grace exists deeply in people’s heart. It is this pursuit for greatness that leads our life by giving us a model to follow and a direction to go, and it also helps keep society in order, like what Carlyle says: “Society is founded on Hero-worship”(Carlyle 237).

Dong 2

Hero-worship builds society by promoting greatness, and heroes are representatives of greatness. They either have some good qualities at the same time, like Lincoln, who was brave, kind, ambitious and intelligent and persisted in unifying the nation and freeing slaves, or have only one excellent quality or skill that no one has, like Jack Smurch, who flies a monoplane all the way around the world without stopping, or like Bernie who saves all people’s life out of the sympathy to the little boy. Bernie and Smurch are great regarding to their courage and creativity which lead to their great achievements, but are they perfect? No. No one is perfect, and they made mistakes as everyone does even having worse qualities. Smurch “once knifed the principal of his high school--- not mortally, to be sure, but he had knifed him; and on other occasion, surprised in the act of stealing an altarcloth from a church, he had bashed the sacristan over the head with a pot of Easter lilie” (Thurber 221). And Bernie steals money and uses people. But people still admire them. This phenomenon happens because they are both representatives of one good quality. Bernie is the symbol of courage and Smurch is the symbol of creativeness.

Some people doubt that they are great because “The hero, under Freud’s probing, turned out to be as vulnerable as are the rest of us” (Elliott 242). What’s more, in the movie *Hero*, when Bernie sees the accident, the first conscious in his mind is to walk away until he notices the crying boy. However, no matter what his motivation is, no matter whether he has strong willing to save people or not, at that moment, he decides to save people and finally the result is that he does save a lot of people. So, he is great because not everyone can brave enough to do

Dong 3

that. The heroism is deeply hidden in his heart and is waiting the right moment to jump out. When that moment comes, the whole world praises him, or more accurately, praises his courage and sympathy, which are great qualities.

Some people also doubt greatness according to Karl Marx’s theory: “History is an economic record, as impersonal as a trend, unfolding independently of any man’s wishes or influence. Economic forces move history through cycles and stages no matter what any individual might do” (Elliott 242). These people think: “If so, where in such a world is there room for heroic acts” (Elliott 242)? I agree with Karl and I think there will always be a man who can meet time’s need. So, everyone is able to be hero. But not everyone can finally become hero. For example, there was a big problem about slavery in the middle of nineteenth century in America. In the south, “Planters had built a cotton kingdom on the shoulders of enslaved blacks” (Freedman 45), but “Slave uprisings and rebellions had resulted in tough measures to control blacks and silence white critics of slavery” (Freedman 45). In the north, “some Northerners wanted to abolish slavery everywhere in the land, but abolitionists were still a small and embattled minority” (Freedman 46). This period of time needed a man to stand up and solve this problem. All the people living in this time period had a chance to meet the need, but finally only Lincoln made it because he was ambitious, diligent, charming, and he insisted on unifying the union and freeing the slaves. He devoted all his life to benefit America and American people. He will be

Dong 4

admired and respected by us forever. So, even though someone is great because of the time, he still should be admired by us because of no one else living at the same time have the same virtues, which is needed to meet time’s need.

So great people are great because they have one virtue or many virtues which make them so respected and admired. I am always amazed by these qualities found in human beings. Darwinism tells us animals compete with each other and only the strongest or the most adapted animals can finally survive. But as humans, we break this rule at some points because we own, understand and pursue greatness. We are not at the time when society uses force and strength to decide who is powerful anymore. Instead, we are lucky enough to live in a time when people admire those who have some great qualities even though they may be disabled. It is this special understanding and pursuit of greatness found in humanity that creates material civilization and spiritual civilization. People need them, our society needs them. These good qualities and virtues--- courage, wisdom, compassion, forbearance, idealism, imagination, originality, genius, and grace will always be here, and will be worshiped by people forever.

Dong 5

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