

# JACK LONDON AND ERNEST HEMINGWAY: THE SIMILARITIES IN BUILDING CHARACTERS' SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS AND SELF-MANAGEMENT IN "TO BUILD A FIRE", "THE LAW OF LIFE", AND "THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO"

Doan Thi Oanh

*VNU University of Languages and International Studies,  
Pham Van Dong, Cau Giay, Ha Noi, Vietnam*

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**Abstract:** Jack London and Ernest Hemingway are among eminent American writers of the twentieth century. With a desire to express the importance of emotional intelligence in literature, this article aims to find out how self-consciousness is expressed in short stories, namely "The law of life", "To build a fire", and "The snows of Kilimanjaro". A qualitative method is undertaken to collect vital data for investigating self-consciousness and conclusions. Findings show that the direct correlation between self-consciousness and self-management impacts the final result of the characters. Moreover, this research figures out the similarities of two authors in using writing techniques to build characters' self-consciousness. As a result, a deeper insight into London's and Hemingway's works and their resemblances concerning character building are provided.

*Keywords:* emotional intelligence in literature, self-consciousness, self-management

## 1. Introduction

According to Goleman (1995), emotional intelligence (EI) is an assemblage of multifaceted components in which each is the basis of others' development. Moreover, there is a general consensus on the paramount importance of emotional intelligence in developing human cognition and competencies: Its principles facilitate a deeper understanding and assessment of the behaviors, attitudes, interpersonal skills, and even the potential of people. Hence, the researcher desires to figure out how emotional intelligence and its dimensions

have been applied in literary works.

Literature is considered the mirror reflecting human life through a system of characters by whom the authors convey their reflections and personal perspectives about social individuals. Moreover, "To build a fire", "The law of life" by Jack London, and "The snows of Kilimanjaro" by Ernest Hemingway are masterpieces which have been appreciated by generations of readers since their release in the early twentieth century. It can be argued that they reach a certain true-to-life level. For that reason, should this research report any EI components in those lifelike stories, it could

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\* Corresponding author.

Email address: [doanoanh9094@gmail.com](mailto:doanoanh9094@gmail.com)

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not only reinforce the impact of emotional intelligence on life but also show the great vision of the two eminent writers regarding the truth of life in EI's perspective. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the main characters to gain insight into self-consciousness and emotional intelligence among fictional characters. Besides, the study is expected to enrich readers' general understanding of the motif of death versus life, and the experience of facing an unexpected death. Last but not least, the researcher aims to figure out the similarities in the art of writing of the two famous writers.

To fulfill the aforementioned objectives, the writer of this thesis attempts to answer the following questions:

1. How are protagonists conscious of themselves?
2. What features make the protagonists self-conscious characters?
3. How is Hemingway's art of writing similar to Jack London's one in creating self-conscious characters?

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Emotional Intelligence

This theory was first introduced by Daniel Goleman. He defined emotional intelligence as the ability to perceive emotions of one's self to appropriately and effectively respond to those feelings. By developing emotional intelligence, individuals could understand more about themselves and be able to sense the emotions of others, moderating conflict; promoting understanding and relationships; and fostering stability, continuity, and harmony that nourish the relationships.

All EI models share a core of four major EI domains: self-consciousness, self-management, social consciousness, and relationship management (Cherniss & Goleman, 2001).

### 2.2. An Overview of Self-Consciousness

Self-consciousness is mainly treated as a construct within EI; however, researchers' opinions diverge on the definition of this terminology. For example, Keenan et al. (2003) considered it the ability to regard the self as an individual. Goleman (1995) perceived self-consciousness as knowledge of one's emotions. This research will define self-consciousness as the ability to be conscious of external or internal stimuli toward oneself. It means that self-consciousness could be recalling one's past (autobiography) and contemplating the future (prospection).

The classification that conceptualizes self-consciousness as comprising two distinct categories: objective and subjective self-consciousness, rests on the attention to one's inner thoughts and feelings. Meanwhile, based on the scale that individuals are concerned about others' consciousness, there are two subcategories of self-focus attention, which are private and public self-consciousness. In particular, when a person becomes the object of his or her consciousness; it is objective self-consciousness. Meanwhile, a state of subjective self-consciousness can be characterized by the perception that a person's self-consciousness appreciates himself or herself as standard. Private self-consciousness is theorized as a general consciousness of the self as an individual whereas public self-consciousness rests on a person's general consciousness as a social individual (Wojslawowicz, 2005).

### 2.3. An Overview of Self-Management

The definition of self-management is conceptualized depending on the context. For example, concerning healthcare field, Barlow et al. (2002) referred to self-management as the ability to manage the symptoms, treatment, physical and psychosocial activity to maintain a

satisfactory quality of life. In terms of psychology, self-management is the ability to effectively take control of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations (Niroula, 2020). It is also the working definition of self-management in this research.

#### **2.4. Jack London and “The Law of Life”, “To Build a Fire”**

Jack London (1876-1916) is a well-known American author in the late 19th century. He held strong perspectives on writing philosophy. London is among naturalist writers who have attempted to record objective and detached depictions of humans' nature without idealism or avoidance of the ugly. He built characters who face troubles and struggle to survive in nature to embody heredity and environmental determinism.

“The law of life” was first published in 1901. It revolves around Koskoosh who used to be a tribe's leader and is now abandoned due to his poor physical condition. Koskoosh concludes valuable lessons based on his circumstances: Death is an unavoidable fact of life, and the fate of any individual is less important than the survival of the species.

“To build a fire” was first released in 1902, but the version published in 1908 gained much popularity. The plot revolves around an unnamed man trekking through Yukon with only a dog. Regardless of warning about the dangers of the cold in this severe land, he goes on his trip and falls victim to the unrelenting and unforgiving power of nature due to his lack of imagination about the severe environment.

#### **2.5. Hemingway and “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”**

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) was a well-known American. Human's attitude toward the presence of death is one of his most concerned

philosophies. His sharp ideas about death are evocated openly and omnipresently behind his works.

“The snows of Kilimanjaro”, written in 1938, reflects several of Hemingway's concerns via the protagonist Harry. It is set in African savanna where a man infects gangrene. He indulges in alcohol abuse, insults his wife by resentment of her money and upbringing. Then, he contemplates his life and admits his decay of talent through his procrastination before he dies.

All three aforementioned stories are masterpieces which have been appreciated by generations of readers. Despite their length, they are still lifelike and are the typical literary works for authors' writing techniques.

### **3. Findings and Discussion**

#### **3.1. The Main Character of “The Law of Life”**

##### **3.1.1. Consciousness of Human Life**

In the story “The law of life”, the protagonist's good self-consciousness about life is a prerequisite for good self-management to display. The accumulation of knowledge regarding human frailty and nature enables relentless Koskoosh to understand and respect the power of nature. That makes every perception, belief, and action in his remaining time worthy esteemed. In other words, the old man's long valuable experience and observation is the root of his good consciousness which is the premise of decent behaviors in every circumstance. Besides, his self-consciousness is a clear example for objective and private self-consciousness because his consciousness regards himself as an individual and focuses on his inner world.

With the objective self-consciousness about each individual's responsibilities towards the community, Koskoosh is fully conscious of his

contribution to the tribe. Via his connection to the past, it is indisputable that he has all missions completed. As a leader, he devotes his youth to the existence and development of the tribe. Moreover, with his strong private self-consciousness, he often reminds himself about the tribe's tradition, so no resentment arises in the heart of the abandoned man. Instead, he behaves in a dignified way: acceptance and encounter. His good self-management expressed by the acceptance of mortality and the connection to the tribe's tradition justifies the dignity of the respected old leader. It can be said that he is a representative of self-conscious characters.

### **3.1.2. Consciousness About Death**

With a keen sense, Koskoosh has objective consciousness of the necessity for the elimination of the weak of the biological law. He is willing to be left behind for the tribe's continuity because death is the final destination of his life journey. It remarks on the complete cessation of his devotion. Hence, calmness and willingness are responses to his good self-management to death. The way he expresses his inner desire for living and succumbs to death reveals his impeccable characteristics. The protagonist's perspectives on his situation and the internal struggle allow further appreciation of his dignity. It is a result of his good self-consciousness and self-management. Koskoosh is physically defeated by the power of nature. Nevertheless, his mental power achieves a glorious victory, because his consciousness, thoughts, and actions are always within his control, no matter how severe the surroundings are. Nature can deprive him of his breath but fails to spoil his self-consciousness. Even though he must die, he is the one who makes the decision to stop futile resentment towards the inevitable and tragic event. It is the death that allows us readers to see how respectable and dignified the man is.

Through the protagonist Koskoosh, London conveys the message that everyone must face death, and each person may have his own way of doing it. Koskoosh is a representative of those who decently take death. Moreover, when a person's time has gone, they can hardly do anything to retrieve it. No individual can be beyond the control of nature physically. As such, death is not something that one can fight against. Besides, Old Koskoosh is a very typical self-conscious character. His strong and keen consciousness of his physical weakness, of his circumstance, and most importantly, of his feelings and inner struggles is surely the focal point of success of Jack London with this short story. This old man has objective and private self-consciousness. Unlike his physical strength, which declines in time, his observation and insight into life gets sharper and more acute than the ages, and reach their peak at the moment of his death: no matter how strong one is compared to other individuals in life, he is powerless and helpless before nature. As a strong individual, Old Koskoosh is wise enough to surrender to the Law of Life.

## **3.2. The Protagonist of "To Build a Fire"**

### **3.2.1. Subjective Self-Consciousness of His Competencies**

Throughout the story, the protagonist's poor consciousness of his own limits and capacities is doomed to a series of hazards, failures, and a bitter ending. The deep-seated pride in his knowledge is the origin of the first mistake - the wrong appraisal of self-position in the relationship with the environment. With his poor and distorted subjective self-consciousness, he regards himself as beyond the impact and power of the weather when he decides to venture a rarely used shortcut unknowingly entering a dangerous area to reach his ultimate destination without taking any hazardous warning signals from the weather

into consideration. His ego and poor subjective self-consciousness blind him to nature's power. Under the delusion of physical strength, he fails to perceive human frailty and helplessness in such extreme circumstances. His strong-willed stubbornness and ignorance side by side with his devaluation of real-life experience shared to him by human fellows gradually cause him to die. Tormented by the severe nature, he admits the utmost power of nature in contrast with his helplessness and irrelevant bookish knowledge. His death put an end to his ignorant arrogance, and it is the price he must pay for his poor self-consciousness. By stressing the protagonist's feelings, London directs the reader's attention to the importance of self-consciousness in life's journey because it is an indirect reason for other mental and physical activities.

### **3.2.2. Private Self-Consciousness of Death**

Despite having a chance to be conscious of the deadly risk he faces in the first time getting wet, he refuses to take it. Only when his body is out of control does he belatedly realize and succumb to death. This is such a tragic and predictable ending of his poor subjective self-consciousness, for he embeds his life in the unreliable "lifebelt" which is his ability to promptly light a fire to keep his body warm. In a world of "the survival of the fittest", the protagonist is defeated and loses his life. That leaves a message about the price of poor self-consciousness: poor management and unpleasant results. He underestimates hiking experience of other gold diggers, the power of nature by his overconfidence. In correspondence to the man's poor self-consciousness, the poor management causes the degenerated state of the man. Particularly, his poor self-management manifests itself as his careless preparation for the journey to the new land.

Consequently, he takes life-risking acceptance to travel alone leading to inhuman behavior in a desperate situation. When the protagonist realizes the things, he bets his life on - his intellect, experience, and judgment - are useless, he dies as the ultimate price of his poor self-consciousness. Poor consciousness, in other words, makes him a loser with his pointless death.

The tragic circumstance of the man has made clear to the readers not only the fundamental principle of life but also the importance of emotional intelligence. The harshness of nature could be fatal in particular situations, which is inevitable. But numerous troubles can be avoided had the man gotten better self-consciousness. Should everything start with the moral consciousness, the result would be positive. Looking back on the nameless man's journey, it can be concluded that his poor subjective self-consciousness is responsible for all troubles and his death. It becomes his primary motivation for the delusive ability to control his destiny and the natural elements. He underestimates hiking experience of other gold diggers and the power of nature by his overconfidence. In correspondence to the man's poor self-consciousness, the poor management causes the degenerated state of the man. Particularly, his poor self-management manifests itself as his careless preparation for the journey to the new land. Consequently, he takes life-risking acceptance to travel alone leading to inhuman behavior in a desperate situation. When the protagonist realizes the things that he bets his life on - his intellect, experience, and judgment - are useless, he is dying as the ultimate price of his poor self-consciousness. Poor consciousness, in other words, makes him a loser with his pointless death.

### **3.3. Character Henry of “The Snows of Kilimanjaro”**

#### **3.3.1. Self-Focused Attention Towards Death**

The protagonist’s private consciousness concerning his death appears during the story as a prediction of his tale. The most obvious implication of death is the severity of his injuries. In response to the presentiments of death, the injured man is filled with tangled emotions. Harry’s death can be considered meaningless, careless, and frivolous, due to ridiculous reasons. Harry has a wealthy life, but ironically, he is dying because of a thorn scratch without medical care. Additionally, the setting of the story is the time that iodine is a common medicine. Thereby, it is unacceptable that his untreated thorn scratch turns into gangrene due to a lack of anti-infective drugs. The absurd cause for such a severe injury makes his death a mockery of life. This pointless death is a failure resulting from his poor self-consciousness and self-management. In particular, poor consciousness leads to careless medical preparation before a trip to a wild area. It also causes his disregard for the niggling injury and soon makes the protagonist cost his life. Moreover, poor management that fails to control medicine and rescue plan directs Harry to a pointless and regrettable death.

#### **3.3.2. Private Consciousness About the Relationship With His Wealthy Wife, Helen**

While waiting to die on the cot, Harry contemplates the relationship with his wealthy wife - Helen. Only when he seriously considers this affair does he frankly admit the connection between them is one-sided love and an unfulfilling relationship. Harry’s injury is the incident that makes the crack in his relationship clearer. This affair should be mutual love and respect, but the truth is contradictory.

While Helen nurtures their marriage with her love, Harry sustains it with his regret and resentment regarding life and career. Additionally, this unfulfilling marriage results from his poor self-consciousness and self-management. First, his consciousness makes mistake as he enters this marriage without careful consideration. Harry quickly puts his life in the palm of fate and lets it manipulate him. By then, his poor private self-consciousness soon causes his poor self-management. It gives him a short-term vision to enter a marital relationship with indulgence and idleness. Therefore, he unjustly treats his wife with a grumpy and insulting attitude. Harry’s immersion in a material life also causes him no long-term plan after the marriage. As a result, his writing talent cannot be flourished despite his desire. Were he not seriously infected, he would continue living his meaningless life.

#### **3.3.3. Self-Consciousness and Torment About His Unfinished Career**

Besides his existence and marriage, the unsatisfactory career is of great concern to Harry. He thinks about the death of his writing career and becomes conscious of his failure to achieve artistic success. Harry’s private self-consciousness and poor self-management cause him to suffer from deep regret for his wasted life and talent. Hemingway unfolds this fact via the dying man’s streams of consciousness about his writing journey. Negative emotions dominate the man's consciousness of his career. The shame stemming from his cruel attitude to his wife, his resentment against the early death of his career, and frustration at wasting his talent bombard the protagonists all the time. Poor self-consciousness deprives Henry of his ability to manage his behaviors properly during the time when he is still healthy and strong. It also deprives him of his dignity in the final moments of his life, in the role of a husband. He cannot liberate himself from a grumpy

and desperate mood and cannot refrain from using cruel and malice words when talking to his wife. His pointless death can be considered both a release from mental torment and punishment for meaningless life without remarkable career dedication.

In a nutshell, negative emotions dominate the man's consciousness of his career. The shame stemming from his cruel attitude to his wife, his resentment against the early death of his career, and frustration at wasting his talent bombard the protagonists all the time. Poor self-consciousness deprives Henry of his ability to manage his behaviors properly during the time when he is still healthy and strong. It also deprives him of his dignity in the final moments of his life, in the role of a husband. He cannot liberate himself from a grumpy and desperate mood and cannot refrain from using cruel and malice words when talking to his wife. His pointless death can be considered both a release from mental torment and a punishment for meaningless life without any career remarkable dedication.

"The snows of Kilimanjaro" is undoubtedly a typical short story that reflects Hemingway's famous writing style. Firstly, the third-person point of view grants readers a privilege to see what happens both outside and inside the character's mind. Moreover, thanks to the stream of consciousness, the protagonist's inner world is divulged. Take Harry's flashback for example, it reveals the truth behind his marriage with his rich wife. Moreover, the foreshadowing technique is successfully employed to create dramatic tension for the death of the protagonist. For instance, those birds of prey waiting around the camp are the first implication of Harry's death. Another literary device that Hemingway used in this short story is the iceberg theory. It embraces minimalistic forms of expression leading to the limitation of writer's direct comments and the intense

involvement of readers' feelings.

#### 4. Conclusion

##### *4.1. Self-Consciousness and Its Effects on the Outcome of the Characters*

Through the last hours of the protagonists, the direct correlation between self-consciousness and self-management has been evidenced. It means that the quality of self-consciousness is associated with that of self-management. For example, a failure to have proper consciousness will mean a failure to respond effectively to the situations. Koskoosh's good self-consciousness leads him to good self-management and a desirable ending. The compilation of observation and experience makes him acutely aware of the law of life. Hence, during his life, he dedicates himself to the tribe and completes the mission that nature gives. Until the last breath, obedience and acceptance remain as his attitudes to nature. Even when death is imminent, the old leader's good consciousness keeps him calm and welcomes it with dignity. In contrast, the unnamed man and Harry soon get bitterness as a result of their lack of consciousness. It turns their seem-to-be-exhilarating experience into a deadly journey. The nameless man's poor consciousness causes his overconfidence and disregard for nature and experienced hikers. Hence, no matter how vigorous his attempt is, the final ending is the tragic freezing death. Similarly, Harry's poor self-consciousness that skips medical preparation before the trip to Africa gets him into trouble with gangrene and drives him to deviant behavior toward his wife. Eventually, just a ridiculous death awaits Harry.

By and large, three characters have the same desperate circumstance of death but different attitudes and emotions toward death. Those differences decide the outcome of the protagonists. The nameless man and Harry are losers not only externally due to

their pointlessly early death but also internally because they cannot control themselves and fail to reach a desirable result. Meanwhile, Koskroosh is an external loser because he must die when reaching ripe old age, yet he is an internal winner thanks to his dignified and wise death. Undeniably, to have good self-management, one needs to gain good self-consciousness first.

#### ***4.2. How are the Author's Arts of Writing Similar?***

Concerning to content motif, both Jack London and Ernest Hemingway put their protagonists in tragic situations. The response of the characters towards the external triggers reveals how well they are conscious of themselves. Keen and acute self-consciousness allows them to keep their mood in control, and thus acts with dignity. In contrast, poor and weak self-consciousness leads to improper actions that are fueled by negative and harmful emotions. Both writers use flashback and symbols as part of the characters' stream of consciousness, which effectively depicting the correlation between the characters' inner world and their response to the outer world.

Regarding the art of writing, there are three artistic continuances between Jack London and Ernest Hemingway. Firstly, their stories were all created with stream of consciousness. This tactic takes advantage of the third-person point of view to paint a transparent mural of the existence of individual consciousness. Hemingway's writing can be regarded as more typical of stream of consciousness, while Jack London's work merely resorts to factors of stream of consciousness. The next similarity between two writers is to envisage the last hours to generalize the whole life of the characters. This technique interweaves the past with the present to look back at the protagonists' life. Besides, death is the utmost dramatic and fierce moment when people have overwhelming fears about their

loss of control, separation, an uncertain future, and suffering. Therefore, people may show their typical characteristics when confronting the end of life. It is why both Jack London and Hemingway place their protagonists in the final stage of life to visualize the picture of their life. The last factor that London's and Hemingway's stories have in common is foreshadowing. They use imagery to allude to future events and build anticipation and dramatic tension in the narrative.

#### ***4.3. Limitations of the Study***

This thesis has several inevitable limitations. Firstly, this research does not cover every similarity between the two authors due to time and data limitations. Secondly, the aspects of self-consciousness and self-management could be more elaborated if more works were included in this research as data.

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## SỰ TƯƠNG ĐỒNG GIỮA HAI TÁC GIẢ JACK LONDON VÀ HEMINGWAY TRONG VIỆC XÂY DỰNG NHÂN VẬT TỰ Ý THỨC TRONG CÁC TRUYỆN “TO BUILD A FIRE”, “THE LAW OF LIFE” VÀ “THE SNOWS OF KILIMANJARO”

Đoàn Thị Oanh

*Trường Đại học Ngoại ngữ, Đại học Quốc gia Hà Nội,  
Phạm Văn Đồng, Cầu Giấy, Hà Nội, Việt Nam*

**Tóm tắt:** Jack London và Ernest Hemingway là hai nhà văn điển hình và nổi tiếng của văn học Mỹ trong thế kỷ XX. Bài báo này thực hiện nghiên cứu về các tác phẩm “The law of life” (Luật đời), “To build a fire” (Nhóm lửa), and “The snows of Kilimanjaro” (Tuyết trên đỉnh Kilimanjaro) của hai tác giả với mục đích khám phá cách sự tự ý thức của nhân vật được thể hiện, qua đó chứng minh sự hiện diện của cảm xúc trí tuệ trong văn học. Phương pháp định tính được sử dụng trong nghiên cứu để thu thập dữ liệu quan trọng dẫn tới những kết luận về sự tự ý thức. Kết quả cho thấy mối tương quan trực tiếp giữa sự tự ý thức và ý thức tự chủ hành vi tác động đến kết cục cuối cùng của các nhân vật. Thêm vào đó, nghiên cứu cũng này chỉ ra những điểm tương đồng của hai tác giả trong việc sử dụng kỹ thuật viết để xây dựng sự tự ý thức của nhân vật. Những thông tin trên được kỳ vọng sẽ mang đến cái nhìn chi tiết sâu sắc hơn về các tác phẩm của London và Hemingway cũng như sự giống nhau của hai tác giả đến việc xây dựng nhân vật tự ý thức.

*Từ khóa:* trí tuệ cảm xúc trong văn học, tự ý thức, tự làm chủ hành vi