CHAPTER VI

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In the preceding chapters, while examining the stories, I have made passing reference to the role of the hero. But the over-all picture that emerges out of the study of the short stories makes it imperative to discuss the hero in this separate chapter so as to account for the sources of Hemingway's enduring appeal. Hemingway radically differs from the literary fashion of his times in the delineation of the hero's character.

With an eagle eye Hemingway captured the hero's moments of passivity amidst the scenes of violence and death, and found that there was real heroism in the efforts of the hero to find his own values in the life of action. The hero is just a common man with all human weaknesses and yet he strictly adheres to his self-imposed code of conduct with a religious zeal. The hero has aesthetic discipline, self-reliance and individualism. The reader finds an echo of his own feelings in Hemingway's hero. Thus the hero in Hemingway's stories means not simply a protagonist but a man who stands for many men.

The female characters have also been examined but, only to the extent as they influence the hero. The hero is his own counsel and physician. The ordeals of life, instead of dampening his spirits, grease his will and refine the taste of victory.
Uniqueness of Hemingway's Heroes

The word 'hero' is associated with someone very important, dignified, and having the power to mould the incidents of life to the calculated benevolent ends, making all the evil forces bow to his knees. When we turn to Hemingway's stories, we are often baffled as to who the hero of the story is as he is neither a big man nor does he undertake exploits of extraordinary courage and fortitude like the heroes of the old times. In the stories such as Indian Camp, The Killers and The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife, the hero is a silent spectator watching the horrors of violence and brutality in our times. However, he is forced to 'think' and comes to the conclusion that a winner wins nothing nor does the loser lose anything provided he has self-honesty, courage, and probity which are summed up in the Spanish word 'pudnor.'

The hero in Hemingway's short stories is not a hero in the conventional sense. He is just an ordinary man with all the limitations of a weak human being. He is just a boy in Indian Camp, assisting his father in delivering an Indian woman of a child through a caesarian operation and witnessing the suicide of the Indian wife's husband. Actually, he plays a passive role. Nick Adams watches the incidents which leave a terrible impression on his sensitive mind and these
impressions become the impressions of all human beings in our time. In *The Doctor and The Doctor's Wife*, Nick Adams witnesses the quarrel scene between his sophisticated father and the physically tough Dick Boulton. Naturally, the Doctor is in a vulnerable position, and leaves the place in an angry mood. Here Nick does not jump to hold his father's adversary by the neck. His conception that his father is like a god is shattered. Moreover, he is irked by the unsympathetic attitude of his christian-scientist mother; and, therefore, refuses to go to her. Instead, he goes with his father to the forest for hunting. Here we get an idea about the hero Nick Adams. He is very sensitive and touchy about the incidents happening around him. He is too weak to fight on behalf of his father, yet he does not hate him. On the other hand, he has all the love and affection for him; while for his mother he has definite disinclination if not repulsion. Hemingway's hero has his own weaknesses and yet he does not succumb to worldly considerations. He prefers suffering to soft life. In *The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife*, Nick Adams is seen sitting against a tree in the woods reading a book. His father conveys a message that Nick is wanted by his mother. He gives up book-reading, and prefers to go to the forest with his father. After all, the bookish knowledge which his mother possesses, has no relevance and utility in real life. Real education is
what man learns in the school of life. Here we find Hemingway-hero's attitude which may appear to be anti-intellectual but, in fact, he is troubled by 'thinking' about the evil rampant in our time. "You need not think" is the advice given to Nick Adams in more than one story. The implication is that we should think over the forces of evil. Thinking is worrying. Worrying leads to nightmare and insomnia. Nick suffers from insomnia. He has recourse to fishing and hunting to overcome the shocks of life.

Nick Adams is bewildered when faced with evil but when he finds others in similar conditions, he cannot reconcile with evil. The story *The Killers* is important in this respect. Nick feels the horror of hooliganism. It is his first discovery of evil, but he is not the man to yield to evil forces. He may not set the gangsters right but, at least, he has the will to oppose the evil and not to budge an inch from the right path, come what may. He does not lie prostrate before the evil forces. Nick goes to Ole Andresen to inform him of the gangsters. He does this at the risk of his own life. On seeing the helplessness of Ole Andresen, he feels the prick of conscience. The police meant to maintain law and order is of no avail. George's advice to him is "...better not think about it."

Ultimately he decides to leave the town rather than to
be a silent spectator to the misdeeds of the evil-doers. This is not the acceptance of defeat. It is, on the other hand, a determination not to be overcome by evil. Nick stands in direct contrast with the negro-cook who has nothing to do with the whole affair. In the story *A Way You'll Never Be*, Nick promises to come back to the front line whenever he has supplies of cigarettes and post-cards for the soldiers. Nick Adams is not an escapist. Of course, like any other human being he tries to overcome the shock by diverting himself in fishing and hunting, but this diversion is meant to prepare him to grapple with the problems with a renewed vigour. Where there is an unidentified narrator, the protagonist can very easily be recognised to be Nick Adams. In the stories where Nick is not there, the basic mental equipment of the protagonist is much akin to that of Nick Adams. Moreover, the growth of Nick from childhood to manhood is his mental growth from innocence to experience. With increase of knowledge, he becomes maturer and maturer till he is able to pass on his experiences to his own son.

Nick Adams is a wounded hero but it is not correct to say that the wound is only physical. The wound is inward. The stories tell us of Nick's education in the ultimate evil. The ultimate evil and the man's role in the universe is beyond scientific explanation; and hence, Hemingway's hero is essentially
philosophical in his approach towards the life. Hemingway's hero, instead of being a dumb animal, is essentially endowed with a philosophical bent of mind. He thinks and thus invites troubles for himself. Hence he can never be a 'mindless worm.' Nick Adams and other protagonists are never from elite class of society but in every respect they are above the average; even on the verge of being a genius. Krebs in Soldier's Home is a supersensitive young man very much akin to Hemingway himself. Had Krebs been a mediocre young man, he would have been satisfied with his lot. He revolts against the old conventional order though he does not know how to replace it with a new one. In this conflict a sensitive man like Krebs is sure to be alienated and aloof. Such isolates react in a way beyond the understanding of an average man. The hero, like its creator, takes pride in doing difficult things well. Harry, the dying writer is definitely above the average young men who waste their energy and talent in life of luxury with rich and beautiful women who become the "caretaker of their talent." Harry's desire to reach an ideal and his regret for having failed to reach the peak of kilimanjaro show the keen desire in the protagonist to attain perfectibility.

There is so much similarity in Hemingway and Nick Adams that it is not difficult to say that Nick
Adams is Hemingway. Of course, Hemingway has drawn heavily on his personal experiences, but, as he has already pointed out, real art lies in what is made up imaginatively and not in factual reporting. "To record for his posterity another chapter in his own fictional biography does not interest him at all." Of course, Hemingway has created his stories on his experiences but Carlos Baker has rightly pointed out:

"The recurrent figure of Nicholas Adams is not of course Hemingway, though the places Nick goes and the events he watches are ordinarily places Hemingway has visited or events about which he had heard on good authority and could assimilate to his own experience of comparable ones."

The hero. Nick Adams does for the twentieth century roughly what Henry Adams did for the nineteenth. His experiences are in no way different from those of almost any middle class American who started at the beginning of the present century.

"The story of Adams is a presented vision of our time. There is every reason why it should arouse in us, to us the phrase of Conrad, "that feeling of unavoidable solidarity" which "binds men to each other and all mankind to the visible world.""

Similarity may be there in Hemingway and Nick Adams, but it is beyond doubt that Hemingway's aim in Nick Adams stories is always the aim of an artist.
Hemingway's hero finds the world full of violence and brutality. "Don't get killed" is the advice given in *A Simple Inquiry* and *Under the Ridge*. In the second Tanganyika letter, Hemingway writes about killing the lion cleanly but the note of caution is "not to be killed." The hero has the will to live and has no tendency to efface himself from the world. The most distinctive features are his virility, courage, stoicism and his almost obsessive esteem for the violent sports. Hemingway probes deep into the problem of values and their relation to experience and behaviour. The Hemingway-hero, like Krebs in *Soldier's Home*, rebels against a society which relies upon traditional moral attitudes and beliefs which are no longer expressive of the true nature of the society. He rejects the finality of conventional values because he can discover in them no relevancy to moral realities. Krebs has a feeling of nausea when his mother talks to him in a sentimental tone. Similarly Peroxide's story in *The Light of the World* smacks of sentimentalism while the story of Alice who is "as big as mountain" sounds true and realistic. She has earned something by giving something in return. The peroxide blonde is a 'dirty liar' while Alice is beautiful though she is big. The boy (who can be easily identified as Nick) feels attraction towards Alice and not towards the peroxide blonde. Thus it is honesty which attracts Hemingway's heroes most. Abstract words
such as glory, courage and honour are hollow and obscene
beside the concrete names of villages, roads, rivers
and regiments.\footnote{6}

The hero sees that the effects of the conventional
Abstractionism as rules of conduct in action are disastrous.
He is cut off from the moral moorings and is in desperate
struggle with the problem of finding a new value for
himself. He rebels against the traditions and seeks new
morality in action. He learns to look honestly upon what
he sees. He must have courage to face what experience
tells him is reality and he should conduct himself
accordingly. Thus skill, courage and knowledge are the
primary essentials for him. In Wine of Wyoming, Mr. Fontan
and Madame Fontan are very skilful in distilling liquor.
They never entertain bad customers. They have their own
code of conduct to which they stick with a religious
zeal. On the other hand, their son has no skill and
knowledge of the business. Moreover, he has no desire
to learn the things in a proper way. He allows himself
to fall victim to the temptations of the soft life. He
does not feel as Nick Adams does in The End of Something
that "love is no more fun." He marries an Indian woman
who just eats and reads books. The boy also simply
wastes his time in reading books and seeing picture
films. Obviously, such an ill-equipped person cannot
be expected to do well in the world. The unidentified
narrator of the story \textit{Wine of Wyoming} feels a strong
liking for Mr. and Mrs. Fontan. For Hemingway-hero, honesty is a value which stands as a bulwark against self-delusion.

In several stories of Hemingway, we find reference to book reading. In Three-Day Blow, the two friends talk about the books but Nick has no liking for the books because the problem he is facing requires not bookish but practical knowledge to make himself fit enough to face the trials and tribulations of life. In  The Wine of Wyoming, Mr. Fontan has been a war-veteran and, being a man with practical experience, he has contempt for those who have acquired knowledge through books only. Of course, he modifies his opinion about those who write books. His son, a good-for-nothing fellow, wastes his time in reading romance-books without developing any original thinking. Such reading, instead of proving useful, proves harmful. In The Cat in the Rain, the husband is reading books without having any real understanding of his wife's psychological problems. In Ten Indians, the Garner family is busy in domestic work after a happy trip. Mr. Garner is milking the cow while Mrs. Garner is cooking food. In contrast, the happy family, Nick's father is alone at home reading a book. In Nobody Ever Dies, Enrique talks about death in a cool impassioned language. Maria tells him, "You talk like a book....Your heart is a book." Enrique pulls up the back; leans over to show
his wound and says, "Maria, look up....that is not from a book."\textsuperscript{7} In God Rest You Merry, Gentlemen, the hardest hit is on those who, without using their common sense, make use of books in a mechanical fashion. The gambler and the nun in the story The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio are the examples of self-honesty and of strict adherence to the self-imposed code of conduct.

The hero in Hemingway's short stories does not suffer from self-pity nor does he parade his troubles before others to win their sympathy. He is neither a weeper nor a wailer. He does not want to suffer only to elicit sympathy from others. The weepers and wailers accept failure rather than endure the challenge. The hero in Hemingway's short stories has no masochistic tendency. Of course, the hero sometimes complains of bad luck but he never gives up his efforts and self-reliance. He finds death and violence all around him but has always the courage to face them with a heroic spirit. He combines in himself the quality of a matador and of a crucified beast exemplified in Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea.

"The matador represents a great force held in check, releasing itself proudly in a controlled yet violent administering of death. The crucified stands for the taking of pain, even unto death, with all of one's courage and endurance so that it becomes a thing of poignancy and nobility."\textsuperscript{8}
Hemingway's hero seeks refuge in hunting and fishing to come over the shocks and disillusionments in our time. Hemingway defies Christianity's condemnation of killing as necessary sin. He presents killing cleanly with honour, pride, and humility as a spiritual experience. The hero, while engaged in hunting and fishing, is not a wanton slaughterer. On the contrary, he gets aesthetic pleasure in outdoor, violent games.

**Hero's Separate Identity**

Hemingway's heroes have no happy married life. Marriage results in involvement which consequently complicates the life. The hero maintains his individuality by not allowing himself to be absorbed in the general mass. The female characters in Hemingway's short stories can be divided into two groups — (1) those who complicate the life of the hero just as Marjorie and Mrs. Macomber, (2) those who do not complicate the life of hero just as Prudie of *Ten Indians*. All Hemingway's heroes establish their individual identity. Love is no more fun for Nick because he is not one to be classified with any other average boy who falls victim to the temptations of an easy love and soft life. On coming in contact with violence and brutality, Nick's whole being is shattered and he makes efforts to rehabilitate him to himself. The wound in the spine affects him mentally and physically. The wound separates him traumatically from all other
beings. Suddenly he is not patriot. He no longer seeks objectivity in the meaningless word "patriotism" nor in an army of ciphers who act as automatons. Violence separates him from the formless lump of humanity. Death teaches him what it means to 'ex-sist' i.e. to stand apart.

Nick Adams does not appear by name in any of Hemingway's novel though he passes through them under some other name. Moreover, we find the continuity of wound in all Hemingway's protagonists. The Hemingway-heroes become authentic individuals when faced with violence and death. They go to the bull ring if they do not go to war. They go to the bull ring but they are not wanton murderers. Moreover, the heroes are also not religious in the conventional sense because they cannot be herded in a mass. Krebs refuses to pray with his mother. The protagonists feel the vestige of religion at night when the mind is not well-lighted and well-ordered. This day-and-night, light-and-darkness symbolism cuts a wide swathe through Hemingway's short stories. Nick disclaims hunting in the darker recesses of the stream. The real bull-fights are in the day-light.

The heroes in Hemingway's short stories can be grouped as exemplar and learner. Nick Adams is a learner while Manuel Garcia comes under the category of
exemplar. In between the two groups we have those characters who adapt themselves to the situations of life. Zurito and Wilson may be grouped in this category. Nick Adams is always a learner and each experience brings about an improvement in him. His process of learning never ends and hence he has no chances of coming to a dead-end. After all, there is fall after reaching the peak. Nick Adams is ascending higher and higher. He becomes a true exemplar for all young boys and girls of our times. Like Krebs, other protagonists also feel the inadequacy of traditional morality. They are without values. They find their own moral codes.

The Hemingway-hero finds the world where the Gods are dead and the new values have not come up. He has an awareness of form. There is for him a correct way to live and a correct way to die. In all Nick Adams's stories, the awareness of form and the strict adherence to it is a vital concern of the hero. In Big Two-Hearted River, Nick demonstrates the right way to fish and to cook on a camp-fire. If there is form there is romance. Existence is equated with form. The old French couple in Wine of Wyoming cannot sell bad wine to bad customers. Nick Adams wets his hands before touching the small trout. The hero in Hemingway's short stories is stylish in everything he does. The word 'clean' is a favourite word of Hemingway's heroes. With no God in heaven, he becomes his own creator giving form to his life.
References


3. Ibid., p.128.

4. Ibid., p.131.


