CHAPTER VII

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Hemingway made the artistic use of irony and symbolism which gave him the "style-making mastery of the art of modern narration." In his early poems, we find Hemingway as an ironist. In his journalistic dispatches such as "War Medals for Sale", Hemingway uses irony to give the fullest impact to the topical allusions. But in his stories, the effective use of irony and symbolism is not an acrobatic feat or mere jugglery of words. The judicious blending of irony and symbolism enabled him to present the predicament of human life in a succinct and powerful manner. The ice-berg principle operative in his stories makes it necessary to have the understanding of the technique of irony and symbolism. Moreover, Hemingway was a true genius to be only an "ironist" or a "symbolist." He leads 'kindly light' for the reader towards the hidden significance in his stories through irony and symbolism.

Artistic Use of Irony

Hemingway, honestly and undauntedly depicts the predicament of the complex and ambiguous human life. He takes upon himself the task of writing the truth in a simple and direct prose. The final killing of bull by the matador is called the "moment of truth." Hemingway's aim as a writer has been to tell the truth
with such a high standard of fidelity that it should
produce truer account than anything factual can be. 3

He tells us in *Death in the Afternoon*:

"... and I found the greatest difficulty, aside from knowing truly what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel, was to put down what really happened in action, what the actual things were which produced the emotions that you experienced...." 4

Hemingway succeeded in obtaining a prose style which proved a tool of precision for laying bare the intricate human problems leading to oversimplified situations of violent deaths. His preoccupations with human predicament and a moral code that might satisfactorily control it, account for the sense of hidden significance.

Hemingway, with his ruthless economy of words, is a highly implicative writer. "The dignity of the movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water." 5 This dignity of ice-berg has been obtained by the narrative technique of irony and symbolism. Irony and symbolism increase the ambiguity which is very much there in life itself. There may be an apparent cause or system responsible for the human sufferings but the complexity of human suffering is such that much bigger problems and issues are involved behind what is an ordinary simple issue of life. Irony as a literary device has singularly suited to the view of life represented by Hemingway. It is used for an under-statement in the nature of dissimulation. Its artistic use reveals inner suggestiveness. Even in the earliest
publication of Ernest's poems, what strikes the reader's attention is the irony of view and method just as it is strikingly there in all the short stories. The poem *Champs d' Honneur* published in 1923 shows Ernest's ironic method and view of life.

Soldiers never do die well;  
CROSSES Mark the places ——
Wooden crosses where they fell,  
Stuck above their faces.  
Soldiers pitch and cough and twitch ——
All the world roars red and black;  
Soldiers smother in a ditch,  
Choking through the whole attack.  

The above lines point out the harsh incongruity between the traditional notion of the soldier's heroic death and the grim reality of life. A tough irony of situation is also the keynote of *In Our Time*. The title has been taken from the Common Prayer Book and the stories in the collection are ironic commentary on "modern civil disruption and violence seen against the timeless background of everyday human cross-purposes." The second collection of stories *Men Without Women* is also of ironic content. Woman symbolises home-concept. The men without the love of woman and the moorings of cultural values are the lost men. As the title suggests, *Winner Take Nothing* is an ironic commentary on the human
vanities, echoing the feelings of King Lear when he says "who is who..." The winner is not winner. The crucified man-god is not defeated. What is an apparent defeat is, in fact, a victory which levels the distinction of the victor and the vanquished. Hemingway has changed some of the titles of his stories with a view to produce sublime effect by the ironic and suggestive meanings. The ironic method adopted by Hemingway has done the artistic justice. In *The Snow of Kilimanjaro*, the dying author Harry's consciousness of the gap between expectation and fulfillment, pretense and fact, intention and action, has been artistically dealt with the device of ironic method. Hemingway who has never used a superfluous word has infused ironic content in the title *A Very Short Story*. Based on personal disillusionment, the story clarifies the irony of human feelings by ironic method of description. In all the stories as also in the 'chapters', the ending is of particular significance. The abrupt ending with an ironic and suggestive remark has outmoded O. Henry's technique of surprise-ending. Hemingway uses the method of irony to soften the violence depicted by him. It does not leave bitterness. On the other hand, it enables the reader to have the full grip over the complexities of human life. The story *A Way You'll Never Be* opens with a scene of debris on the battlefield:

...group postcards showing the machine-gun unit standing in ranked and ruddy cheerfulness as in a football picture for a college
annual; now they were bumped and swollen in the grass;...

(p.500)

He has invented unique style of short and simple sentences loaded with irony and symbolism to give expression to the ambiguity in human life.

Symbolism in Hemingway's Short Stories

'Symbolism' is comparison between the abstract and the concrete with one of the terms of comparison being merely suggested. The suggestiveness is the main characteristic of Hemingway, who with the help of symbolism, tries to penetrate beyond the reality to a world of ideas. All the stories of Hemingway have the hidden quality of suggestiveness resulting out of the artistic use of symbolism to philosophically interpret the ambiguity of life. However, Hemingway's sole aim has been to describe what actually happens. His disciplined mind finds the technique of symbolism to awaken by law of association, certain responses in the reader's mind conducive to the proper understanding of the idea. The underlying use of associations and emotional suggestions is visible through the objectively reported details. The Spanish word 'Sabiduría' comes close to the sense in which Hemingway has made artistic use of symbols. Hemingway, though a past-master in the use of symbols, has not written an allegory. Only
A Good Lion comes nearest to the definition of an allegory. Hemingway depends on the technique of objective epitome to convey the subjective conditions of his characters. Nick Adams, as the name suggests, is the epitome of Adam. The first story is Indian Camp. The habitation of Indians away from the sophisticated habitation of the cultured people symbolises humanity in all its crudity. The birth of a child unites the sophisticated and the unsophisticated. The abnormal condition of the child leads to complications, and the under-equipped doctor has to do a caesarean operation with a kitchen knife. However, the birth of the child is closely associated with the death of the father responsible for giving life to the child. The darkness of night is symbolical of the impending doom and the return journey at the rise of sun is clearly indicative of the dawning of the light of knowledge on Nick Adams. The titles of the stories convey in nutshell what the whole story has to say in detail. The title Hills Like White Elephant is the judicious blend of irony and symbolism. The rising heads of the mountain seen through the beaded curtain in a waiting room are suggestive of the pregnancy which is proving 'white elephant' for the young man. The womb of the mother is the waiting room for the to-be-born child. The pregnancy gives fulfilment to the personality and womanhood of the girl. Their seats, just by the side of the waiting
room, separated by the beaded curtain, cutting them off from the public, show the estrangement and dis­illusionment which have started taking place in both the young man and the girl.

*A Canary for One* is an apt title for its symbolic and ironic significance. The American lady is deaf. She is unable to hear very obvious and clear things. She closes the window of the train cutting herself off from the view of nature. She has eyes but sees nothing. She is afraid of darkness and speed. She has spoiled the prospects of her daughter's happiness by refusing to permit her to marry a Swiss. It is her presumption that "American men make the best husbands." We find the masterstroke of irony when we come to the last sentence. "We were going to Paris to set up separate residences." The sight of the burning house in the beginning of the journey is highly suggestive of the destroyed happiness of the deaf lady's daughter. The fear of accident and the sight of the car-accident coincide with the shattered happiness of the deaf lady. It is to be noted that the cars involved in the accident are three in number. The deaf lady, the American husband and the American wife are also three in number. In the story *A Pursuit Race*, the advance man of the burlesque show is Campbell. (Bells announcing the camping of the burlesque show). The manager is Mr. Turner who is perfectly at ease in being a turncoat. He is 'sliding Billy' because he can
slide as his name Turner suggests. Campbell is tired of the mad pursuit of life, and has attained an individuality of his own by being true to himself. Campbell lies on his bed and talks to Turner through bedsheets. The bedsheets signify shelter/protection which he badly needs. Campbell's drunkenness serves as an outlet for his easily accepted defeat.

"Wall" is a sort of metaphor for all impassable obstacles. Rain is the symbol of disaster. In the evacuation scene which haunted Hemingway's mind all his life "...it rained all through the evacuation." The storm very well coincides with the storm in the mind of the hero in *After the Storm*. After the end of Marjorie affair, there is a storm for three days. After the storm is over, the storm in the mind of Nick is also over. Thus Hemingway has very clearly used one thing which stands for another. Moreover, the artistic balance struck between irony and symbolism has enabled Hemingway to produce vast possibilities of suggestive power. This technique of expression very well expresses the complicated personality of the hero, who, though engaged in simple activity, is much beyond the ordinary standards of measuring the depth of his feelings.

Hemingway's personality has been an enigma for most of the readers. Although possessed with a piano-wire sensitivity, he is often described as a primitive. In anthropological sense, the word 'primitive' very much
suits him. For an ordinary act, the primitive people have rites and ceremonies. Nick's trip in *Big Two-Hearted River* is not merely an escape. It is also an incantation to banish evil spirits. "Thus Hemingway's instinct for legends and symbols helps to explain the power of Hemingway's work and his superiority over his imitators... Most of us are primitives in a sense, for all the machinery that surrounds our lives. We have our primitive rituals, our little superstitions, our symbols and fears and nightmares; and Hemingway reminds us of the hidden worlds in which we live." The story *Big Two-Hearted River* is full of rituals. The whole fishing is conducted according to the ritualistic code of fair play. The grasshopper plays its part in the ritual. Carlos Baker has pointed out: "Down under, in short, the close reader finds a carefully determined order of virtue and simplicity which goes far towards explaining from below the oddly satisfying effect of the surface story." 

"River" is symbol of life. The different widths of river are the different phases of life. The bridge on the river is the favourite image in the stories of Hemingway. In *Under the Ridge*, the French soldier who left the battlefield is shot dead while walking the river — the symbol of life.

"The Frenchman had come walking out of the attack with great dignity and I understood him as a man... and the death he had walked away from had..."
Hemingway has combined irony and symbolism to give us a peep in the inward working of the French soldier's mind. The soldier, for the first time, without caring for the discipline of war, rises above the petty consideration of discipline or patriotism, and comes to attain his real self, and thereby comes nearest to real life.

Hemingway has used long hair as the symbol of feminity. The girl in *Cat in the Rain* is tired of looking like a boy. "I want to pull my hair back tight and smooth and make a big knot at the back that I can feel." Dorothy Carter is of the opinion:

"There is definite pattern and repetition in Hemingway's use of hair as a symbol of feminity or lack of it. We should, therefore, be able to predict his women's feminity or lack of it by knowing how he describes their hair or to predict their hair style from knowing their character. We might say, then that Margaret Macomber could have short hair since she is not a loving, feminine woman, but it would be wrong because he uses the symbol more specifically in showing the kind of person she is. She is very beautiful, with "her dark hair drawn back off her forehead and gathered in a knot on her neck." With this one phrase, the only mention of her hair, he has described her repressed feminity. She has the potential of being feminine but it is held severely in check, just as her long hair is caught and held tight in the knot on her back."
Hemingway has used white colour as a symbol. The natural white colour of snow is the symbol of an ideal. The hills are like 'white' elephants in Hills Like White Elephants. The square top of Kilimanjaro is "unbelievably white in the sun." On the contrary, the whiteness resulting out of the bleaching of the natural colour is symbolic of homosexuality. The cook in The Light of the World has white face and hands. "He puts lemon juice on his hands...Look how white they are." In A Simple Enquiry, around the major's eyes there are two "white circles" where his snow-glasses had protected his face from the sun on the snow.

Through irony, Hemingway lets us discover that something is the opposite of what we have been led to expect. Its effective use adds to the charm and interest of the story. Hemingway uses irony without being an 'ironist' as he uses symbols without being a 'symbolist.' An ironist has hidden contempt or hatred but Hemingway admits that the human life is full of ambiguity. Man is born for trouble. He is notoriously a weak creature. His desires are boundless and most of them are doomed to remain unfulfilled. However, instead of having contempt for the mortal beings, Hemingway leads the reader to the realisation about the huge actualities of life through the use of irony along with the broadening and deepening of its implications through the symbolic suggestions.
References


2. Ernest Hemingway, Death in the Afternoon (New York: Scribner's, 1932), p.68.

3. Ibid., p.2.

4. Ibid., p.4.

5. Ibid., p.192.


7. Ibid.


