CHAPTER IX

THE TECHNIQUE OF SHORT STORY
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For Hemingway technique is not an outward paraphernalia or a mere technical device to fit in the incidents of the stories. The technique is itself an indispensible part of the story which is always an artistic whole. An innovator and an originator as Hemingway always was, his technique was unique as his very concept of the short story was. Hemingway's strict fidelity to truth, the involvement of the reader as a co-sharer in the 'lived experience', the terse reticent style, allusive dialogues and the ice-berg principle - all these taken together constitute the technique of Hemingway's short stories. Hemingway defies all attempts of the readers to confine his technique to a hard and fast set of rules. In this chapter, I have illustrated Hemingway's technique through examples from his short stories.

Lived Experience

"...I wish you'd write something sometime for Our Lady. You could do it. You know you could do it, Mr. Frazer."

"I don't know anything about her that I could write. It's mostly been written already, ...You wouldn't like the way I write...."

(p. 572-573)

The above lines from The Gambler, the Nun and the Radio give us an insight into Hemingway's technique of
writing short stories. The most important factor is his first-hand acquaintance based on his 'lived experience.' He does not want to write on subjects already touched by others. Moreover, his approach towards the subject is such that the people do not like the way he writes. The 'lived experience' involves the author in the very act of experience akin to a mystical one independent of his personal likes and dislikes. After assimilating in himself the experience, the task before him is to express it truly without letting his own preferences and prejudices intrude the matter. Next task is to evoke the similar feelings in the reader to lift him to the heights of the 'lived experience' in which the story was itself written. Thus Ernest's task in the short stories is two-fold. First to raise himself to the sublime heights and then to create empathy in the reader whosoever he may be, not necessarily a high brow. This is a difficult task and has been achieved only by Ernest Hemingway and by none of his imitators. Writing was a hard task for him and a few hours of writing completely exhausted him. Writing was his whole and not merely a part-time job. Once Farrell gave a public tongue-lashing to Jonathan Latimer for putting on literary airs. Ernest Hemingway took Farrell aside, and said:

"Jesus Christ, Jim... don't do that. Those fellows have nothing but their writing. Take that away from them and they will commit suicide."
For Ernest Hemingway, writing is the part of his life which is nothing but first-hand experience. In his stories he pumps out his life-blood. His stories donot contain what we generally call story-element i.e. some fabricated thrilling incidents strung and interwoven together to provide pastime to a leisurely class of people who live smilingly and call life pleasure. Dean Gauss, Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway happened to discuss the story Big Two-Hearted River. The two accused Ernest of having written a story in which 'nothing happened' and hence lacked in "human interest." However, Hemingway defended the story by insisting that they were ordinary book-reviewers and had not taken the trouble to find out what he has been "trying to do." In Our Time set the standard of taste for all people. His stories cannot be read at a glance. There is much more that first meets the eyes of the reader. Dean Gauss also realised that his own return to the story was profitable. Hemingway lifts the reader above the level of the ordinary book-reviewers by developing a taste in him for something that is real and artistic. Here Hemingway has revolutionised the technique of short story writing, making it a literary form capable of rousing thoughts in the minds of the readers. "You better not think" is the advice given to the protagonist though the effect on the reader is that he should think over the complexities of life. Moreover, he places before his readers highly complicated ethical and philosophical problems through a non-intellectual approach.
Ruthless Economy of Words

Most of the short stories of Hemingway have been written before his fortieth birthday. They have been forged on the anvil of war and violence. The vicinity to death brings out our hidden faculties giving immense power of action hitherto unknown to us. It required a genius to handle the subject-matter of war and violence in his short stories, where apparently 'nothing happened.' As if by way of a false start, Ernest Hemingway has started his writing career as a poet. The quality of poetry has been imbued in his short stories. A poem loses its worth and charm if it is paraphrased or retold. The short stories of Hemingway rise to this very level when they cannot be retold or abridged. A slight difference in dialogues makes a lot of difference. There has been much dispute about a single line of dialogue in A Clean, Well-Lighted Place. Warren Bennett found illogical sequence in a dialogue, and insisted on Scribners to make an editorial correction. Accordingly Scribners made a correction in their 1965 edition. All texts from 1933 to 1965 were like this:

"His niece looks after him."
"I know. You said she cut him down."

The 1965 edition and all subsequent printings have the following change:

"His niece looks after him. You said she cut him down."
"I know."
This change passes on the information from the younger waiter to the older waiter and makes a considerable change in the story. It is not of much importance for our purpose whether Scribners were right or not in making the editorial correction. The point of emphasis is that Hemingway's dialogues in the short stories are so well compact and appropriate that a slight change makes a lot of difference and a reader is very much likely to miss the depth of meaning if he simply hurries through the text. Hemingway is a superb craftsman and wants his reader to be alert and careful though he may not be a scholar.

Almost every story can be traced back to his personal experience, and despite the reportorial accuracy of a journalist, Hemingway, the artist knows when, where and how to insert the role of imagination in his stories. Real thing is what is supplied by imagination. He is of the view that a writer should not work too close to life. "You must distill life and then create your own people...." In "Indian Camp," he dropped the original beginning. The reasons may be many, but the most important among them is that he wants to be exact and to the point, working on the maxim "less is more." This is not merely to play hide-and-seek with the reader but to lead him to the inner-most recesses of his lived experience. The surprise-ending gives us a jerk making us pause to think over the situation. In "Ten Indians," Ernest cut off the sentimental meeting with Prudie at night. He ends the
story when Nick feels that his heart has been broken.

In *Green Hills of Africa*, Ernest expresses his opinion about Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*.

"All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called *Huckleberry Finn*. If you read you must stop where the Nigger Jim is stolen from the boys. That is the real end. The rest is just cheating."7

Ernest's technique is to bring about reportorial accuracy in a way as to give timelessness to the fictional situations. Cheating and faking are nowhere to be seen in his stories. What we call "happy ending" and "poetic justice" are conspicuously missing from his stories. He believes:

"There is a fourth and fifth dimension that can be gotten....It is much more difficult than poetry. It is a prose that has never been written. But it can be written without tricks and without cheating. With nothing that will go bad afterwards."8

The ruthless economy of words forms the integral part of his technique of short story-writing. Each word is in its own place.

"One time my son Patrick brought me a story and asked me to edit it for him. I went over it carefully and changed one word. "But Papa," Mousy said, "You've only changed one word." I said, "If it is right word, that's a lot."9

Excepting a few stories, the story-element is almost absent in Hemingway's short stories. If they are abridged they lose their charm. Another important characteristic
of his technique is that his stories when adapted for film or television, have not been able to produce the effect as the original does. The appeal of his stories is to the imagination of the reader. They are too huge for film or television. They can very well produce the desired effect on the fourth or fifth dimension of mind. The happy ending, if given to his stories, defeats the very purpose of happy ending.

Nick Adams appears in several stories but it is not correct to think that Hemingway has written about a progressive hero. A.E.Hotchner asked Hemingway if he subscribed to the theory of a recurring hero in all his stories. Hemingway's reply was:

"Does Yogi Berra have a grooved swing?"

Yogi Berra was one of the most dangerous hitters in baseball, and he was feared by opposing pitchers primarily because he would hit anything, high, low, middle, inside, outside. He did not have what is called "grooved swing." Moreover, every story is artistically complete and independent. Though the general theme is war and violence, he has never written on one aspect of a subject twice. He says about his technique of story-writing:

"...I only write once on any theme, if I don't write it all that one time, then it is not worth saying..., never start out with a plot in mind, and I've never yet set out to write a novel. It's always a short story that moves into being a novel. I always make it prove that it can't be written short...."
Thus it is Hemingway, the short story-writer who paved path for Hemingway, the novelist and the uniqueness of his novel is owing to the fact that the technique of short story-writing has been artistically incorporated in his novel-writing.

Moments of Passivity

Ernest Hemingway revolutionised the technique of short story-writing by taking aesthetic note of the moments of passivity. Hemingway is the first writer to use inactivity - physical or mental - as part of the structure of his stories. By inactivity it is not implied that all activity comes to an end. "What is suggested is a cessation of the action or movement controlled by human will and requiring the individual's conscious participation in it." He has introduced a new concept of "suspended movement." It is a moment of vacuum when nothing is happening. In the story Indian Camp, the active action is over when the husband commits suicide. A minor artist would have given ratiocinative analysis of the impact on Nick Adams. Hemingway has shown the ripening and mellowing effect on Nick Adams through what Chaman Nahal calls "diagnostic action." Ernest's technique becomes clear when we compare Joseph Conrad's The Lagoon with Indian Camp. In the story The Snows of Kilimanjaro, these moments of passivity are interspersed throughout the story making it superior to and structurally more complex than other stories where the active and passive actions
are not interspersed. There is no didactic passage in praise of death when Harry is face to face with it. The purity of the moment is never presented in the form of narrative. The reader is led into the serenity of experience at the aesthetic level alone. In this respect of objective approach to writing, Hemingway is a classicist. He evokes emotional awareness in the reader by a highly selective use of suggestive pictorial detail. The Nobel Prize Citation also emphasises the artistic use of the moments of passivity by Hemingway.

"With masterly skill he produced all the nuances of spoken word, as well as those pauses in which thought stands still, and the nervous mechanism is thrown out of gear. It may sometimes sound like small talk, but it is not trivial when one gets to know his method. He prefers to leave the work of psychological reflection to his readers, and this freedom is of great benefit to him in spontaneous observation."15

The technique of short story-writing bears the impress of the inherent discipline in the life of Hemingway. Hemingway's advice to young boys and girls about the technique of story-writing is:

"...All you need is a perfect ear, absolute pitch, the devotion to your work that the priest of God has for his, the guts of a burglar, no conscience except to writing, and you're in."16
References


2. Ibid., p.358.


8. Ibid., p.27.


