Chapter IX

WINNER TAKE NOTHING

Thomas Hudson, the protagonist in ITS reflects early in the novel:

Everything that a painter did or that a writer wrote was a part of his training and preparation for what he was to do.

(— ITS : 94)

Thomas Hudson, being closest to his creator in that both are artists, projects Hemingway's views on the subject of preparation for art. In Hemingway, as it has been shown earlier, there is no goal beyond life; so a question arises at this point: is art a preparation for art? It sounds paradoxical, if not absurd. Hemingway, it has been commented upon by many a critic, used writing as a vehicle for the exploration of his potentialities and thus of his identity. And this quest is a life-long process for Hemingway has remarked:

Retirement is the filthiest word in the language. Whether by choice or by fate, to retire from what you do—and what you do makes you what you are—is to back up into the grave.1

263
In other words, Hemingway believed that the identity of a person is the end-product of a life-long quest. In the preceding chapters I have tried to trace the progression of the Hemingway hero from one state of being to another. Rollo May affirms that "We can understand another human being only as we see what he is moving toward, what he is becoming...."²

In the West, most people have sought to express themselves in action, rather than in reflection or thought. Hemingway's value hierarchy is patently empirical; therefore, the point need not be laboured farther than that he sought his identity in this world, in encounters, in the "I-Thou" relationships, in the historical epoch in which he was born. Every concrete situation presents man with a number of possibilities and the way he chooses to act is a function of his being and the experience contributes to the evolution of his identity. In every choice, all the previous choices are subsumed and the sum total of all the significant choices (and also of values) made by him outline the identity of the man. William Barrett confirms this viewpoint for he says, "Man does not have a fixed essence that is handed to him ready-made; rather, he makes his own nature out of his freedom and the historical conditions in which he is placed."³

The world-order in which the Hemingway hero has to seek his identity is essentially unintelligible to him; it is full of the contingent. Colonel Contwell ruminates: "I guess the
cards we draw are those we get.... They only deal to you once and then you pick them up and play them" (ART : 140). And a little later, he bitterly adds: "We are hung as we are hung, for better or worse..." (ART : 141). The world-order is certainly not of man's making for men will be emasculated in wars, like Jake; women will die in childbirth, like Catherine; soldiers will become fatally wounded as a result of accidents, like Robert Jordan and Thomas Hudson; sharks will snatch marlins from fishermen, as in TOMS; and if nothing disastrous happens to men in their journey of life death will still triumph in the end, as in the case of Richard Cantwell. In his bitterness Frederic Henry reflects:

Now Catherine would die. That was what you did. You died. You did not know what it was about. You never had time to learn. They threw you in and told you the rules and the first time they caught you off base they killed you. Or they killed you gratuitously like Aymo. Or gave you syphilis like Renaldi. But they killed you in the end. You could count on that. Stay around and they would kill you.

(-- AFTA : 252)

This world is as bleak and bare as in King Lear and man's fate is no better, for

As flies to wanton boys are we to the gods--
They kill us for their sport.

Naturally, if man wishes to survive, and more so if he plans to assert himself so that he may unfold his potentialities, he must not shirk involvement and endless struggle. He must be prepared to make sacrifices. Hemingway recognizes this
basic principle of human existence. The marlin must pull Santiago's skiff until it dies; and so must man struggle until he dies. Struggle gives the Hemingway hero a feeling of life; inaction or surrendering himself to the all-pervading nada is to court psychic death. The more complicated the situation, the greater the need to bring into play the otherwise latent potentialities, the greater the sense of integration and identity. The line that links man and life, according to Hemingway, should remain "taut up to the very edge of the breaking point" (TOMS : 46); and if the "hands begin to bleed" (TOMS : 48) it is only human. Knowing that "Every day is a new and fine illusion" (ART : 180), the Hemingway hero must continue to strive, to find, and never to yield.

The world order in Hemingway is indifferent to human effort or prayer but it is not malignant. As it is inexorable, it most often reasserts its supremacy and the human challenge is unceremoniously brushed aside. Herein lies the tragedy that permeates Hemingway's works. According to Hemingway's weltanschauung, only by challenging the world-order can man achieve manhood and know what he is. In another context when the Old Lady asked Hemingway, "It must be most dangerous then to be a man?" he answered, "It is indeed, madam, and but few survive it" (PITA : 99). And since Hemingway was seeking manhood, his unique identity, he chose to follow the "dangerous"
path. It is true that he restricted the areas in which he conducted his explorations yet his gaze was focused on the elemental problems of nada, the meaning of life and finally of death.

For ordinary mortals mere survival in this harsh world is problematic. Santiago wonders:

Why did they [the powers that be] make birds so delicate and fine as those sea swallows when the ocean can be so cruel? She is kind and very beautiful. But she can be so cruel and it comes so suddenly and such birds that fly, dipping and hunting, with their sad voices are made too delicately for the sea.

(— Toms : 23)

How much more dangerous can the existence of man be who seeks his identity by pitching himself against this world-order, especially if he has already shed the illusions of religious and metaphysical consolations? Hemingway has recorded truthfully and painfully Nick's experiences in this world: he was alienated from the world, in the sense that it was not a pleasant place to live in, and from his self, in the sense that the gap between what he felt and what he had been taught to feel was too wide to be bridged.

If we accept Marx's views on alienation—that man is alienated when "he is not what he potentially is ... that he is not what he ought to be, and that he ought to be that which he could be"—then it is obvious that the Hemingway hero was alienated. Although alienation is a problem not too peculiar...
to Hemingway yet most people overcome it through love, through religion, through art (or creativity), or even through madness. Neurosis is an external sign of an alienated mind's struggle to retain his identity and freedom; whereas madness is a rejection of this world-order and one's place in it, and the creation of a private world in which one is happy. In other words, it is adjustment to the world-order by learning to ignore it.

Gordon asks Spellman, "Have you been crazy long?" and the latter answers, "I think always.... I tell you it's the only way to be happy in times like these" (THAN : 155). But Nick fights back the darkness that threatens to descend on his consciousness because the Hemingway hero is not seeking adjustment. His quest transcends the concept of adjustment.

For a time the Hemingway hero delights in the world of the senses; the stronger the thrill, the better. But the human body has its own logic and it cannot be the fountainhead of endless pleasures. With age the senses become cloyed and man is left with the motion and the act without the emotion. The Hemingway hero learns this painful lesson through experience and he is filled with remorse: "Long time ago good. Now no good" ("Fathers and Sons"). Similarly, the Hemingway hero learns that his identity does not lie in re-establishing animal-like ties with nature, going back to his garden of Eden; he has to force nature to yield up her treasures. Committed as he
becomes to struggle, nature cannot be his guardian angel, philosopher and guide.

Hemingway conducted simultaneous explorations into different areas of human experiences in search of his identity. Love, being one of the major pursuits of the twentieth-century man, occupies a very high place in Hemingway's value hierarchy. Marx tells us:

From this relationship [man-woman relationship] man's whole level of development can be assessed. It follows from the character of this relationship how far man has become, and understood himself as, species-being, a human being. The relation of man to woman is the most natural relation of human being to human being. It indicates, therefore, how far man's natural behavior has become human, and how far his human essence has become a natural essence for him, how far his human nature has become nature for him.5

Love, or "productive love" as Erich Fromm calls it, can liberate man from the oppressive feeling of loneliness. In interpersonal relationships, the otherness of others—a beloved, a friend, a child—can awaken in a person an awareness of his uniqueness but before such an awareness can come to him he should be able to surrender himself to the experience. His pre-occupation with self must not stand in the way of his sense of care and responsibility for the other person. In Hemingway there is a strong tendency to write off every human relationship when the other polarity in the "I-Thou" encounter asserts his or her freedom. The loved person may become a thing as in the case of Frederic Henry: "It was like saying
good-bye to a statue. After a while I went out and left the hospital and walked back to the hotel in the rain" (AFTA : 256).

The haunting refrain in Hemingway is that there is no possibility of a genuine human relationship in this world, and that man is essentially lonely. Love, instead of liberating the Hemingway hero from the oppressive feeling of loneliness, plunges him still deeper in the misery of his isolation. Again, for a long time the Hemingway hero may find causes worthy of his attention and he may go with others to seek mutually acceptable goals and he may give absolute loyalty to the cause but he is, eventually, disillusioned with causes. His love cannot embrace the abstract ideal of the brotherhood of man. After a brief flirtation with society and its problems he returns to his own private world because the collective action cannot be based on his private morality.

The intellectual world was in ferment in the twenties and the thirties. Heisenberg's Principle of Indeterminacy while emphasizing the element of unpredictability in the physical world indirectly underscored the irrational in man and his world. Bohr's claim that an electron could be a particle of a wave according to its context raised doubts about the essential nature of man. When Godel showed that mathematics contains insoluble problems and therefore as a system it is incomplete no wonder people became sceptical about all-embracing human systems, whether religious or psychological or
Einstein's Theory of Relativity deprived man of his belief in the absolutes. Heidegger's *Being and Time* stressed the finitude of man. It is this intellectual climate that left its impact on Hemingway's vision of the world; and he has depicted it as whimsical, wayward and chaotic.

Hemingway's answer to this chaos was man's loyalty to his code. The code is a sort of armour that guards the Hemingway hero's psyche from being torn to pieces by the irrational forces of the universe. With this security within him he progressively loses his fears and learns to face his nightmares like a man because now he knows how to conduct himself. He has learnt how to live in the world (Jake's problem), and thus known what it is all about (one aspect of his personality). Colvert has observed that the ethical attitude of his [Hemingway's] heroes is based on the one hand in profound moral skepticism and on the other in a firm belief in the efficacy of a strictly empirical approach to the problem of value determination.  

Moritz goes on to add:

Hemingway believed that any reform (he would never have used the word) if it was to be achieved, must begin with the reform of the individual and be self-willed and self-generated, not legislated from without by any abstract authority.

Associations and organizations usually cave in but the Hemingway hero, with the security of a self-generated morality within him, stands his ground. Despite the chaotic conditions in
which he has to operate he refuses to surrender individual freedom and initiative. Knowing that death is the end and that defeat is inevitable, he fights to preserve his values, and this freedom to fight in defence of his values gives him dignity. In his refusal to become a thing he has asserted his manhood and gained a partial glimpse of his potentialities. He has risen above his fate and the code is his vehicle to reach this end. Of the various means tried by the Hemingway hero in his quest the evolution of the Hemingway code is his greatest contribution to the twentieth-century life and letters. In Santiago's epic fight against the marlin and sharks we see what human will, purged of the weaknesses of the flesh, can achieve. Royce suggests that

the great adventure of life resides in the search for ultimates, but not the attainment of them.... Our history books are filled with the testimony of what happens to a people when they become convinced they have the truth. They perish.8

The Hemingway code is a sort of secular equivalent of religion because in both there is an attempt to tackle the problem of conduct. If one were to go by the experience of saints and mystics it would be possible to argue that religion may give man a sense of meaning but the Hemingway hero has rejected all other-worldly religions. Jake, for example, who is a Catholic finds no solution to his problems in religion; consequently, he rejects not only his religion but also its value hierarchy. Baker writes in *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story*: 
The substitute [for institutionalized religion] he [Hemingway] proposed was hedonistic and sentimentally humanistic. He and Mary must evolve their own rules of behavior... believing in each other. This would require only the care that a good gardener would give to a garden with good soil. They must try to be considerate and understanding and decent: to fight for what they thought was right, to make good children who would do the same, to write books that would give lasting pleasure to others, to leave the world a better place, and finally to be happy....

In his later works the Hemingway hero raises the concept of duty--doing what one is born to do--to the level of religion. For Thomas Hudson duty is no more than a drug because in his tiredness with life he needs something to sustain him and he clutches at duty. However, for Santiago duty is a genuine sentiment and he lays down his life doing what he believes to be his duty. His actions give him a sense of identity but one cannot forget, even if one wants to, that Santiago's concept of duty is born of a limited reality-image; in other words, it is a human concept and therefore not infallible. It is a limited, all too human, perspective; therefore, the security that man seeks in religion is not available to the Hemingway hero.

Lastly, art or creativity is an important means which enables the artist to impose form upon the chaos of experience. What constitutes the content of this art determines the world-gestalt of the artist, and the linkages he established with the world. If his world-gestalt is limited to a narrow sphere, his quest for identity is doomed to failure. This blockage is an existential crisis which in extreme cases will lead to
acute anxiety and even suicide. As pointed out earlier, 
Hemingway's is a limited world, at least the one portrayed 
in his works. And he dissipated his creative talent in non-
productive work; he shirked his responsibility of writing 
"the books and stories he promised himself." Practically 
every author worth the appellation who has practised his art 
for four decades has much more to his credit than Hemingway. 
Again, much of his output is devoted to depicting human sorrow 
and suffering, while the moments of integration are so few. 
Macomber's life as soon as it becomes happy must be terminated; 
Robert Jordan has found true love and has completed his mission; 
successfully but he must die; Thomas Hudson must be fatally 
wounded no sooner than he is re-united with his first wife; and 
Santiago after his memorable experience on the sea has to die. 
There seems to be some inner compulsion in Hemingway to kill 
the protagonists as soon as they achieve happiness. The 
rhapsodic flights in praise of an integrated life seem hollow; 
the tragedy of life in Hemingway carries conviction. This is 
why, perhaps, most critics find IOT, TSAR and AFTA a much more 
rewarding experience than the later books.

Hemingway would have loved to be happy all his life 
but so few were the happy moments that sorrow outweighed them 
in the final reckoning. His happy moments belong to childhood 
and adolescence when life was not so complicated. He also 
experienced joy in spontaneous work, sports and perfect human.
relationships. According to Yovish, "... Hemingway felt at the end of his life painfully isolated and artistically impotent. He had outlived much of the Lost Generation, but at his own sunset he was still lost." He believed in physical prowess and with old age when the body failed him he was completely deluded. His philosophy, including the code, was the philosophy of youth, and old age made his heroes (and their creator) realize the limitations of such a philosophy. Aldridge suggests that it was too late to turn back and build anew. Art which had pulled him through many depressions before could have sustained him in old age as well but it seems that Hemingway relied more on the fun of a good life than the joy of creativity to give meaning to his life; hence even art failed to brighten up the gloom of his last days. "All the heroes," says Aldridge, "were dead now. There was only himself." In the early works the hero was on the verge of a psychic collapse, in the later works the end was predictable; earlier, the code was being evolved, now it was a habit.

Hemingway had worshipped youth and celebrated its glory all his life; youth implied the power to make love, to drink, to hunt and fish, and to endure when the odds were against him. The marketing orientation of his culture—Erich Fromm’s term—compelled the ageing author to prepare a balance sheet of happiness (integration) and suffering (alienation), as it were; and the balance showed in the red. AIF is, in a manner of speaking, an act of regression to the period when the unlived
life was still before him, his powers were at their peak, and he had almost unlimited confidence in his potentialities. As pointed out earlier, his achievement as a writer has been limited and his meaningful linkages with the world restricted in their scope. The balance-sheet mentally demanded that the company be wound up to cut down future losses. Like a bad sportsman he refused to play the game when it was not to his liking. In his study of suicide Durkheim has failed to include the "balance-sheet" concept of life. Fromm remarks:

Many cases of suicide are caused by the feeling that life has been a failure, that "it is not worth while living any more"; one commits suicide just as a businessman declares his bankruptcy when losses exceed gains, and when there is no more hope of recuperating the losses.\(^1\)

Hemingway's longing for the Nobel Prize is well-known. When it came it boosted his morale for some time but the sense of failure could not be kept at bay for very long. He succumbed to this realization, perhaps. His choice of becoming a writer as a means of ending his alienation was basically sound but then there are so many things that can ruin a writer. That he had achieved so little in the domain of literature, in particular, weighed heavily on his mind. The will to endure and continue to fight, one of the tenets of the Hemingway code, became weak and he decided to end his life. Robert Jordan in the course of his self-analysis observes:
You go along your whole life and they [experiences] seem as though they mean something and they always end up not meaning anything.

(-- FWBT : 162)

A man can know his uniqueness only by going beyond the shallow waters, as Santiago does. "... the Greeks never said that the limit could not be over-stepped. They said it existed and that whoever dared to exceed it was mercilessly struck down."¹⁴ If the potentialities of a man could be compared to the instruments in an orchestra, then as the spirit of the orchestra comes alive when all the instruments are being played well and in harmony, similarly, a man experiences a sense of identity when all his potentialities are functioning at their best and harmoniously. A man who knows his identity is a happy man. In Hemingway, unfortunately, one or two instruments, continuing the metaphor one could say, are better tuned and more dominant; the harmony which is the soul of the orchestra is missing. The discord in life causes anxiety and sorrow. In Hemingway the discord went beyond the point of tolerance and it broke him¹⁵ as it broke Thomas Hudson.

I would like to be as solid as Freddy thinks instead of being human. I think you have more fun as a human being even though it is much more painful.... If you don't think about it [like Sisyphus?] it does not exist. The hell it doesn't.

(-- ITS : 226)

As a matter of fact, characters in Hemingway "just go on" "with nothing"; the feeling of sorrow is too powerful to be ignored:
He thought that ... he [Thomas Hudson] could come to terms with his sorrow, not knowing, yet, that there are no terms to be made with sorrow. It can be cured by death and it can be blunted or anaesthetized by various things. Time is supposed to cure it, too. But if it is cured by anything less than death, the chances are that it was not true sorrow. [Underlining mine.]

--- ITS : 174

In other words Hemingway's means to de-alienate himself proved no more than an anaesthetic. Life remained for him a series of operations without an anaesthetic. Erich Fromm confirms: "The phantasy of suicide is the last hope if all other means have not succeeded in bringing relief from the burden of aloneness."16

In his personal life he failed to live up to the ideal that "nothing is done to oneself that one does not accept" (FWBT : 72). In his last act--suicide--he admitted the failure of his quest because when a man commits suicide he has no respect for himself as a person. Kant's remarks on the subject are highly pertinent:

If he [a person] destroys himself in order to escape from painful circumstances he uses a person merely as a means to maintain a tolerant condition up to the end of life. But a man is not a "thing, that is to say, something which can be used merely as a means, but must in all his actions be always considered as an end in himself.17

That Hemingway failed in his quest is quite obvious but this fact need not obscure our judgement regarding his achievements because the quest he embarked on will always
remain an unattainable ideal. It can hardly be over-emphasized that he came to grips with one of the most vital and fundamental problems of existence. Without relying on the other-worldly resources he confronted the threatening nightmares of life like a man. Despite the failure of his personal quest his books, especially the later ones, are permeated by the spirit that the world can be turned into a clean and well-lighted place. And this is no mean achievement by any standards.