Chapter III

OUR STAY ON EARTH IS NOT FOR LONG

The Hemingway hero who believed that "The world breaks every one and afterwards many are strong at the broken places" (AFTA : 193) must have some inner vitality and resilience. To grow up with "strong ... broken places" in a world in which "things do not grow and bear fruit, but explodes, break, decompose, or are eaten away" means that something has increased the Hemingway hero's desire for life; in other words, his sense of alienation has been mitigated by something that has given him meaning in life. If the world is not as hostile as before he must have forged some ties that have helped him to define his identity to some extent. Two of the earliest discoveries that the Hemingway hero made were the world of Nature, and the enjoyment of the senses.

The Hemingway hero is basically an out-door man whose most memorable experiences are rooted in nature: Nick remembers nostalgically his initiation into the mystery of sex "in daylight in the woods and hemlock needles stuck against your belly"; Robert Jordan feels "the earth move" while lying with Maria on the crushed and bent stalks of heather (FWBT : 154);
Colonel Cantwell assists "at the only mystery he believed in," besides bravery, while lying in a gondola (AMT: 120); the skiing experience in "Cross-Country Snow" is "too swell to talk about"; Macomber comes of age and lives a short but "happy life" in the African jungles; Harry Street realizes the depth of his corruption and goes to regain his artistic integrity and creative powers in Africa; and Bill and Jake experience a sort of religious awe on the banks of the Iratí.

In Hemingway's descriptions of natural scenery and outdoor life the reader perceives the existence of subterranean currents of meaning and implication. Nature in Hemingway's work is seldom merely decorative; it is usually functional in the sense that it evokes a mood in the reader and finally nails it:

With so many trees in the city, you could see the spring coming each day until a night of warm wind would bring it suddenly in one morning. Sometimes the heavy cold rains would beat it back so that it would seem that it would never come and that you were losing a season out of your life.... You expected to be sad in the fall. Part of you died each year when the leaves fell from the trees and their branches were bare against the wind and the cold, wintry light.... When the cold rains kept on and killed the spring, it was as though a young person had died for no reason.²

Hemingway is not interested in describing nature for its own sake; his interest lies in the dialectical interaction between two entities: the self and nature, as only in interaction can the self know itself. It is a genuine love of the mother earth.
and what it has to offer; and it is reminiscent of Father Zossima's advice to Alyosha: "Kiss the earth and love it with an unceasing, consuming love" (The Brothers Karamazov). It is sometimes coloured with a touch of the erotic:

Now, looking out the tunnel of trees over the ravine at the sky with white clouds moving across in the wind, I loved the country so that I was happy as you are after you have been with a woman you really love....

(— GHA : 65)

And sometimes it reflects the reverence of a devotee for his god:

Let no man be ashamed to kneel here in the great out-of-doors. Remember the woods were God's first temples.

(— TSAR : 95)

So great is the Hemingway hero's love for nature that in his reflections on death he invariably thinks of the earth, and seldom of heaven:

For a long time he had been thinking about all the fine places he would like to be buried and what parts of the earth he would like to be a part of.... I could be a part of the ground where children play in the evenings and in the mornings, maybe, they would still be training jumping horses and their hoofs would make the thudding on the turf, and the trout would rise in the pool where there was a hatch fly.

(— ART : 29-30)

In this interaction between man and nature there is a touch of sadness, for the cyclic character of nature being eternal underscores the transitoriness of the unidirectional human
existence. On the front cover of his first novel he quoted the words of Ecclesiastes which, in his opinion, were a befitting reply to Gertrude Stein's accusation that they were "a lost generation." There is a memorable passage in GHA in which Hemingway has emphasized his realization that the Gulf Stream flowed by Cuba before Columbus sighted it and it will continue to flow "after the Indians, after the Spaniards, after the British, after the Americans, and after all the Cubans and all the systems of government, the richness, the poverty, the martyrdom, the sacrifice, and the venality and the cruelty are all gone...." It flows unimpressed by "the palm fronds of our victories, the worn light bulbs of our discoveries and the empty condoms of our great loves" (GHA: 126-127).

In the light of this comment, it is rather difficult to agree with Baker that in Hemingway "the landscape smiles, as healthful and vitalizing as ever the English Lake-district was in Wordsworth." Hemingway is no high priest of nature because as an avowed realist he has observed that nature shows no understanding of human suffering. During the Caporetto retreat Frederic had found the rain to be indifferent to the uprooted humanity. Here is the account of another retreat which took place "in another country":
Minarets stuck up in the rain out of Adrianople across the mud flats. The carts were jammed for thirty miles along the Karagatch road. Water buffalo and cattle were hauling carts through the mud. There was no end and no beginning. Just carts loaded with everything they owned. The old men and women, soaked through, walked along keeping the cattle moving.... The women and children were in the carts, crouched with mattresses, mirrors, sewing machines, bundles. There was a woman having a baby with a young girl holding a blanket over her and crying. Scared sick looking at it. It rained all through the evacuation.

(— IOT : 283)

No amount of human effort could save Catherine from death; she died because she was narrow in the hips. Harry Street had to die because he had failed to put some iodine on his wound. Nature's laws are inexorable. El Sardo was trapped in his hide-out because of the unseasonal snow: nature has no politics--Loyalist or Fascist. Robert Penn Warren is absolutely right in saying that in Hemingway "... the beauty of the physical world is a background for the human predicament and the very relishing of beauty is merely a kind of desperate and momentary compensation possible in the midst of the predicament."  

Notwithstanding these sterner aspects of nature, to which Hemingway was not blind, he always thought of the Wilderness as a source of emotional and creative energy. The natives, he felt, live in harmony with nature, whereas the foreigners by resorting to mechanized farming impoverish
the land. By disregarding the natural process, the greedy profiteers help hasten the process of ageing of countries and continents. "The earth gets tired of being exploited" (GHA : 236). Cities for Hemingway meant human institutions, predetermined roles and role expectations of the society in which he lived; nature, on the other hand, meant reliance on individual resources, which could give man the confidence that he still enjoyed the use of his powers, some importance, and that he was not just a thing. Over-crowding in cities, according to Hemingway, blocked that source. Urban life has to a certain extent been dehumanized by a process of bureaucratization and its pressures sent him to Africa where he felt completely at home:

I loved this country and I felt at home and where a man feels at home, outside of where he's born, is where he's meant to go.

(-- GHA : 235)

Hemingway shows a pagan's preference for those countries and places where nature had not been corrupted by man and he still lived in harmony with nature. "For Hemingway Spain is an elemental symbiosis of man and nature." About Africa he wrote himself:

I would come back to Africa but not to make a living from it.... to really live. Not just to let my life pass.

(-- GHA : 236)
It is quite likely that Hemingway-Philip Rawling-Robert Jordan's siding with the Loyalist cause in Spain was an attempt "to preserve some pockets of frontier conditions." His characters draw their juice from such conditions. Because society stunts the growth of an individual, Hemingway's courage lay in breaking away from its snares and returning to the world of nature, which is lost to the urban man.

Whenever the complexities of life have been too baffling for the Hemingway hero to see the direction of his journey clearly he has retired to the lap of nature to regain his sense of balance and security. But it is at best a temporary withdrawal and he knows that he will have to return to face the problems of life. He performs this therapy on himself: while he is engaged in purely biological functions like eating and sleeping, or in purely ritualistic functions like fishing and hunting, he conserves his psychic energy. The threat of the dissolution of the self is banished from Nick's mind in "Big Two-Hearted River" as he focuses his attention on small tasks like pitching his tent, catching grass hoppers for bait, preparing his food, and fishing. In the process he achieves small successes which restore his lost confidence in self to tackle the more intricate and complex problems from which he had initially retreated. He knows it is a temporary respite and he cannot "fly somewhere else."
to seek a sort of refuge from the burned over country. Nor can he go into the swamp yet because "in the swamp the banks were bare, the big cedars came together overhead, the sun did not come through, except in patches, in the fast deep water, in the half light, the fishing could be tragic" (Big Two-Hearted River).

Similarly, Jake committed certain improprieties, and suffered certain indignities as a consequence, during the fiesta at Pamplona. He had had enough of the fiesta and he did not want to return to Paris because "Paris would have meant more fiesta-ing." So he went to San Sebastian to relax, read and bathe in the sea. He would be there all by himself because the tourist season had not started yet.

There was a fine beach there. There were wonderful trees along the promenade above the beach, and there were many children sent down with their nurses before the season opened. [Underlining mine.]

(-- TSAR : 178)

After he had opened himself to the influence of nature he gained a perspective on what had happened at Pamplona. He had realized his limitations which had made his relations with Brett a disgusting affair, and he need not disgrace himself further. His stay at San Sebastian had proved highly refreshing:

It made me tired, swimming in the trough, and I turned and swam out to the raft. The water was buoyant and cold. It felt as though you could never sink. [Underlining mine.]

(-- TSAR : 182)
Jake had regained his confidence which had been shattered at Pamplona; he would not sink in his own estimation any longer. He was fit enough psychically to go to Madrid, and face Brett and also his own emasculation without self-pity or self-deception.

It is significant that nature does not cure man by itself; the power to establish the ties lies with man, and man alone. A retreat from urban and social problems into the heart of nature is at best a temporary measure. Man by virtue of his existence as man has to break away from nature, cut off the umbilical chord that bound him to nature, and refuse to be passive in his receptivity. On the other hand, he has to assert his uniqueness by understanding the processes of nature, mastering them, and making her bow to his design of life. Only when man opposes nature—his opposition being based on his understanding of nature—nature reveals her treasures to man. In his encounter with nature, when he is stretched to the farthest limit of his endurance and ingenuity, he realizes what he can do and what he is. This is the direction that is discernable in the relationship of the Hemingway hero with nature. Living in harmony with nature like the natives in Africa is one level of existence but Hemingway could not be content with that life. Despite all the paeans sung by Hemingway in praise of Africa he did not return to his favourite country for almost two
decades. There is a hollow ring in his protestations of happiness in Africa; unfortunately, protestation of happiness and real happiness seldom go hand in hand. Happiness is reflected, for example, in Robert Jordan's case: in his hour of death he realizes the value of his effort and sacrifice. His integration with nature is a reflection of the realization of his personal identity. Western civilization with all its ills and drawbacks is not an unmitigated evil because it has opened up new horizons for man to explore. Having known that there are other areas for man to develop his potentialities a retreat into the heart of Africa amounts to a denial of one's privilege of being human. Existence would be poorer for the loss of these horizons. "He [man] cannot go back to the pre-human state of harmony with nature; he must proceed to develop his reason until he becomes the master of nature, and of himself." 8

As the Hemingway hero matures in years and wisdom he learns to understand the mysteries of nature and life, and to shed some of his "old wild-boar truculence." Colonel Cantwell knows that "the moon is our mother and father" (ART : 90), and any losses due to its whims and moods may be regrettable but they are not worth rebelling against. Santiago, similarly, thinks of the sea "as feminine and as something that gave or withheld great favours, and if she did wild and wicked things it was because she could not help them" (TONS : 24). His long years of acquaintance with the sea
make him feel "no man was ever alone on the sea" (TOMS: 52).

On this very sea, with which he is so familiar, he is confronted with one of the biggest challenges of his life. Santiago, the human being, has refused to surrender his freedom to go fishing despite nature's refusal to bestow any favours on him for eighty-four days. He dares to fish in the hurricane months far out of the range of ordinary fishermen. After having found him worthy of her favours, the sea offers him a dream fish:

He came out unendingly and water poured from his sides. He was bright in the sun and his head and back were dark purple and in the sun the stripes on his sides showed wide and a light lavender. His sword was as long as a baseball bat and tapered like a rapier and he rose his full length from the water and then re-entered it, smoothly like a diver and the old man saw the great scythe blade of his tail go under....

(— TOMS: 54)

In nature, sensible opposition to nature is revealed to be the law of human existence, not of mere survival. Only in opposition—based upon understanding and backed by reason—can Santiago know what he can do and what he is. "Nature provides us," says Leo Gurko, "with boundless opportunities for the great experience if we have in us to respond." Nature provides opportunities for human growth only to those who dare challenge her sensibly.

This is a far cry from the early regressions into natural environment for regaining one's balance and experiencing a
sense of security. Nature is the arena in which Santiago realizes his identity at the moment of truth: When the pursuer and the pursued become one. In nature there are endless possibilities for man to unfold his powers but the necessary condition is that man must be prepared to explore them and pay the price of his discoveries. The skeleton of the marlin is a poor picture of the live fish's grandeur which only Santiago has seen. The vision can be seen only in rare moments by real men; it is not meant for tourists or shallow-water fishermen. What counts is the relational event; self-realization is a byproduct. Philip Young has described TOMS as "an epic metaphor for life," and the great thing is the struggle. In Santiago's voyage there is no element of escape from society because he is doing what he is born to do. Success and defeat become paltry issues; the great thing is that man is flexing his muscles while becoming involved in action of his own free will. Nature provides him with suitable challenges and opportunities to actualize his potentialities but he must seek them.

Hemingway, the artist, has drawn on nature very heavily; he found in nature an endless treasure of images and symbols that conveyed his emotions and ideas brilliantly. His "ice-berg" theory of literature is a case in point.
If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them makes hollow places in his writing.

(-- DITA : 182)

A solemn writer is a "bloody owl"; the suffering humanity is a colony of ants on a burning log of wood; Maria and Joquin are young trees on a hillside; Maria's hair is like a field of ripe wheat waving in the breeze; Santiago's dream of white lions on an African beach may stand for his youth; the leopard on the top of Kilimanjaro is a poetic symbol of Harry's artistic integrity; the hyena and the vulture, on the other hand, symbolize his failure and corruption, etc., etc. Man's rapport with nature like Santiago's or Robert Jordan's in the last scene eventually becomes a measure of his dis-alienation:

He was completely integrated now and he took a good long look at everything. Then he looked at the sky. There were big white clouds in it. He touched the palm of his hand against the pine needles where he lay and he touched the bark of the pine trunk that he lay behind.

(-- FWBT : 443)

In one single image Hemingway has fused together the sky, the earth, pine needles and trees, Robert himself and his sacrifice after he has led a full life. Robert's identification with nature is an index of his own self-realization.
II

Writing of his apprenticeship days Hemingway states:

*I was trying to learn to write, commencing with the simplest things and one of the simplest things of all and the most fundamental is violent death.... one of the subjects that a man may write of.*

(--- DITA : 6)

And Jake is obsessed with the problem of living:

*All I wanted to know was how to live in it [the world]. Maybe if you found out how to live in it you learned from that what it was all about.*

(--- TSAR : 114)

As a matter of fact, life and death are two sides of the same coin and it is obvious the Hemingway hero is baffled by the enigma of life that ends in death. Tolstoy's solution to this problem is "selflessness," as implied in his short story, "Death of Ivan Ilytch," which is essentially a Christian virtue, but if an individual is in revolt, against the religious beliefs of his forefathers, Tolstoy's solution is of no avail. For the post-war generation the "utilitarian ethics" of the Old Gang smacked of hypocrisy. The young were no longer prepared to sacrifice the pleasures of the body for "things" and "technical progress." Talking of "Emerson, Hawthorne, Whittier, and Company," Hemingway remarks that one
would never imagine that "they had bodies. They had minds, yes. Nice, dry, clean minds" (GHA 25). The Hemingway hero at this level of his development is not so much interested in heaven, or the countries of the mind, as in living on this earth, and enjoying what it has to offer. "It was Hemingway's main achievement to restore the sense of the body into literature; he has done this even more successfully than D.H. Lawrence who was getting bogged down in his emotions. In Hemingway, especially in the early volumes, there is a sense of physical freshness, a direct, intense experience of natural things that makes the 'troubles and perplexities of intellect' seem nonsense." 12

Man's sense organs, which are his means of receiving outside stimuli, are inherited from nature but it is man who refines and develops his senses; therefore, the glorification of the senses is a purely human trait. Sex, for example. So long as sex is subordinated to reproduction it is animal (as well as human), but it is man who enjoys sex for its own sake and makes a cult of it. Debauchery is entirely a human phenomenon, totally absent in the animal kingdom as is the enjoyment of food and drink. Their value lies in their importance in human life beyond the satisfaction of biological or physiological needs. To the degree an individual refines his senses he projects himself toward the realization of his identity. Appreciation of food and drink, perfumes and aromas, music,
beauty in nature, in human form or painting and sculpture, is characteristically a human trait, and as these senses develop, man achieves a sense of his identity. Since "rational positivism" of the last three hundred years had led the Western civilization to the human butchery of the First World War, a return to a life of the senses was highly reassuring and refreshing. According to Susanne K. Langer,

The senses, long despised and attributed to the interesting but improper domain of the devil, were recognized as man's most valuable servants, and were rescued from their classical disgrace to wait on him in his new venture [of finding a faith].

In its fictional version Frederic Henry expresses the same idea when he says, "I was not made to think. I was made to eat. My God, yes. Eat and drink and sleep with Catherine" (--- AFTA : 191).

Life for the post-war generation in general, and Hemingway in particular, meant "a total immersion in the sensuous experience of living." What they could see and touch and hear and experience was the reality for them in which they could believe. "The mind, treacherous, intricate, and abstract, must accede to the superior reality of the flesh." So great was their faith in the reality of the flesh that they sought deliberately the proximity of death so that the senses could become keener. Malcolm Cowley recognized in Hemingway's description of the physical world and the elevation of the senses to a cult "a special cleanness and freshness ... because death seems
to hover in the air while he is writing." Hemingway tells the Old Lady:

Madam, there is no remedy for anything in life. Death is a sovereign remedy for all misfortunes.... But meantime I would rather dine on suckling pig at Botin's than sit and think of casualties my friends have suffered.

("VITA" : 100)

He seems to be saying, "Isn't it enough that I am alive? Why shouldn't I enjoy the things that life has to offer? If life is short why shouldn't I seek the intensification of my sense experiences that have made life meaningful to me?" Many of us seem to live fully only when we are experiencing some thrill, when some powerful stimulus is being communicated to the cortex. Perhaps, this is what Hemingway meant by the "fifth dimension" in prose, according to Carpenter. The intensity of an emotion or sensation makes up for the lack of duration, because sensation by its very nature cannot be prolonged unduly; NOW becomes eternal. It is, in fact, an attempt to attain immortality.

The cult of the senses manifested itself in other spheres of life as well. For Hemingway, the aim of writing was to create in the reader the same emotion which the writer had experienced:
the real thing, the sequence of notion and fact which made the emotion and which would be as valid in a year or in ten years, or, with luck and if you stated it purely enough, always, was beyond me and I was working very hard to try to get it.

(— PITA * 6)

Literature in order to be good had to pass the kinaesthetic test, as do the last words of Maria's mother: "Viva my husband who was Mayor of this town." Robert Jordan, himself a writer, knew that "it was good because it made a tingle run all over him when he said it to himself" (FWBT : 336-337). As the quality of art depended on the sensation it produced, so did morality become a function of the senses:

I know only that what is moral is what you feel good after and what is immoral is what you feel bad after.19

(— DITA : 6)

It is worth recalling that Brett felt "good deciding not to be a bitch" (TSAR : 188), on coming of age Macomber "felt a drunken elation" ("Macomber"), Santiago "felt the iron go in" (TOMS : 84) the fish while administering the death blow, and Harry Street, like Pilar, could smell the presence of death. In short, aesthetics, morality, manhood and even death are perceived and expressed as sensations and not as thought.

All these sensations seem to register themselves in the same region of the cortex because Hemingway seems to have experienced them as parallel experiences. In "Fathers and Sons" he identifies the experience of shooting with sexual
intercourse; a pleasant stay in a country is like having been in bed with a woman one loves (GHA: 65); and wine becomes as full and lovely as the body of Renata (ART: 93).

But sometime in the mid-thirties, a realization seems to have dawned on him that a life of the senses is not enough. The protagonists, even though they still enjoyed their food and drink and the sex act, became aware of the limitations of the senses. After all, sense organs are subject to the laws of nature and they are bound to decay. The Hemingway protagonists no longer drank to wind themselves up for life or to drug themselves to silence the disquiet or discord within.

Hemingway leaves us in no uncertainty on this point:

The whisky warmed his [Gordon's] tongue and the back of his throat, but it did not change his ideas any, and suddenly, looking at himself in the mirror behind the bar, he knew that drinking was never going to do any good to him now. Whatever he had now he had, and it was from now on, and if he drank himself unconscious when he woke up it would be there.

(-- THAN: 153)

And drink may not be available at a critical hour as, for example, in the case of Robert Jordan. Similarly, sexual intercourse, Nick tells us in "Fathers and Sons," was "long time ago good. Now no good." And in old age, we are told in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place," "a wife would be no good...." Santiago does not dream of his wife or other women. Hunting or fishing is preferable to any of these drugs:
When you have shot one bird flying you have shot all birds flying. They are all different and they fly in different ways but the sensation is the same and the last one is as good as the first. [Underlining mine.]

(-- "Fathers and Sons")

And so is it for Cantwell who can enjoy a duck shoot in the Venetian marshes on the last day of his life.

As his characters grow in age they are more and more convinced of the inadequacy of a life of the senses. Santiago has adapted himself to living on whatever Manolin can provide or procure for him. An occasional bottle of beer is more of food than a drug. During his trial on the sea he lives on raw fish and a bottle of water and still realizes his self, without impairing his faith in the worth of what he has done. ART consists mainly of an ageing colonel's reflections on his life while he is in a shooting blind; and it is there that he realizes the significance of what Renata has done for him.

When man is isolated—far from the world of bath-tubs and automobiles, radios and television sets, women and children and friends, where no one can help him and doing what he is born to do—the capacity to think is born. When Santiago tells himself, "Don't think, old man.... Sail on this course and take it when it comes," he is merely acting out of habit for in the very next instant he realizes, "But I must think.... Because it is all I have left" (TOMS : 93). Sense organs, subject to decay as they
are, will sooner or later let man down. Only when this truth dawns on man does he realize that the meaning of existence lies in some supra-sensory dimension of life. Without the body there is no human existence but when existence becomes denuded of illusions and artificialities, and senses are cleansed of passions, one is ready to reflect on the human predicament. Santiago's reflection that "pain does not matter to a man"—because pain is a sensory phenomenon—acquires significance in the evolution of Hemingway's identity. Defiance of the deterministic limitations is courage in the spirit; so what man can win are victories of the spirit which come not by denying the existence of the body, as the Puritans did, but by transcending it. Nature will eventually win and man will eventually turn to dust but he can carry within him the consolation that he tried his best and that his spirit was uncowed. It is this evolution in Hemingway's thought that makes him a religious writer and at the same time a creature of this world. It is a movement away from exulting in sensory experience as an end in itself to a stage where the senses are, of course, dethroned from their high pedestal (without denying their legitimate position in life), and the Hemingway hero looks for more lasting linkages with the world of human beings and not of nature alone in his quest for identity.