

Wound And Death in the Novels of Earnest Hemingway

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Abstract- Works of Earnest Hemingway, the legendary figure of America reveal sense of disenchantment, alienation and revulsion from the horrors of war. By and large Hemingway deals with violent situations and characters. He never wanted to write about everyday life. Instead, he wanted to concern himself with the ultimate crises of human experience. Hence in most of the novels, wound and the violent death are the themes. This essay makes an attempt to analyse how Hemingway has delineated wound and death in his novels.

Key words: violence, post -war scenario, sense of disillusionment, sense of alienation

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) an American novelist, short-story writer and Journalist is known for his economical, unpretentious style and that style influenced later 20th Century writers significantly. Hemingway wrote what he had known and most of his novels are based on own experiences. His range of subject matter is not wide, and he returns again and again to the same kind of material. But there is honesty in his exploration of those themes. He took for his themes some of the primal experiences of his own generation and the generation that followed, which were bred in an age of destructive war and violence, when the traditional values were disrupted and the meaning of existence obscured for most of the people. By and large Hemingway has dealt with violent situations and characters. He has reflected the world, the contemporary problems resultant of the war, the desperation and defeatism of the age, the disintegration of the traditional and old values, the social and economic iniquity. The choice of his subject matter was further modified by his own individual experiences, his initiation into the world of violence and the brutality, his physical and psychological wounds received on the Italian front, his interests in the bull fights, boxing and fishing, and his participation in the wars. Hemingway had felt the deep agonizing experience of war as a soldier and this impacted his psyche severely.

His novels have depicted the problems and the life of the post-world war period. In the post -war scenario, the violent death caused a great imbalance in the life of man. Different degrees of violence affected human life to the maximum extent. The violence was not only because of the strong emotions, it was also resultant of technological means. The modern age increased anguish and futility of man. Hemingway who had personally experienced the torment of the modern age did not want to throw the veil over any dark aspect of life; he neither wished to resort to evasion. Because of this determination he had, he never wanted to write about everyday life. Instead he wanted to concern himself with the excruciating experience of human beings. He also had the knowledge of death as a boy in the Indian camp in the company of father. He had seen death in the world wars and the bullfights.

The traumatic shock has appeared again and again in his works. The mental injury was resultant of the physical wound and it was necessary for him to devise means in life to adjust to it. The impact of that wound was deep, it shook his confidence in the past and he was completely a changed man. He started distrusting and suspecting the society. He developed sense of despair and disillusionment along with isolation. He depended on personal experience for the background of his fiction. His novels take us into a flat, chaotic world where man himself is made into an object, a thing. This entire extrusion of personality into the outward sensational world makes his characters the inwardly passive victims of a meaningless determinism. They exhibit a world which, because it has been emptied of inwardness, is entirely without significance.

A Farewell to Arms portrays the life of Frederic Henry- the young American volunteer, serving in the Italian Ambulance. The novel depicts the intense love affair between Henry and Catherine Barkley. Fredric Henry has borne the wounds of the battle as Hemingway himself did. Henry was admitted

into the hospital in Milan where he develops intimacy with Catherine. The third part of the novel portrays the defeat and the retreat of the Italian forces at Caporetto. Henry and Barkley start living as husband and wife. Henry is fed up with the war and suspected to be a German Spy. He deserts the army to escape the persecution of the Italian Police. Barkley has left nursing and is pregnant. Henry and Barkley leave their country and run away to Switzerland to live in peace, unfortunately Barkley dies in childbirth. Henry is the sole spectator of the tragedy. The birth of the child and death of its mother have aggrieved him most. Henry is distracted with the chaos, killings and the confusion of the army. In their retreat, the Italians have killed their own men. The ghastly savagery of war is witnessed by the central character. Henry's service in the ambulance corp, the shell shock, the smashing of his friend's legs by the fire, these experiences remind one of Hemingway's own injury.

Ernest Hemingway was of the opinion that life could never be separated from death. His novels *Death In the Afternoon* and *The Sun Also Rises* have also dealt with Death. *Death In the Afternoon* is a treatise on the bullfights, its mortality, the danger and the death involved. The bullfight gives him the idea of death.

The Sun Also Rises is full of suffering and emasculation caused by the war, pessimism and despair. Jake Barnes has been emasculated by the wound received during his role of the newspaper-man in Italy, and he is confronted with the problem of adjustment in life. He is in love with Lady Brett who is to marry Mike Campbell. She lives a life of promiscuity with Robert Cohn, a selfish Jew. Brett comes back to Jake Barnes again, unfortunately Barnes has received the physical injury which not only has incapacitated him from sexual life, but also has inflicted deep psychological wound.

In *To Have and Have Not* Hemingway has delineated economic problems along with the portrait of wound, death, suffering and surrender. Harry Morgan, an ex-policeman has been ruined financially. His fishing gear has been lost, and the person owing him eight hundred dollars has run away. Morgan is left with only forty cents. This financial loss makes him indulge in unlawful activities of murder and smuggling. He is injured with a bullet in a gun-fight with the customs police. The criminal tendency he has

grows and he plans for Cubans who want to kill him. He shoots them dead and received wound in his belly.

His most popular novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls* deals mainly with Spanish war, its slaughter, death and violence. The protagonist Robert Jordan is involved in mankind not as a Marxist, but as a believer in Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. Robert Jordan has been entrusted with the job of blowing off the bridge to prevent the march of the Fascist troops. He is mortally wounded while attempting to complete the assigned task. He is in love with Maria and his experiences of love has strengthened him. In this conflict, there are acts of savagery and barbarism, perpetrated by both the sides. Pablo the guerrilla leader, has killed many Fascists. El Sordo and his companions have met their doom in the bombardment. Even the central character of the novel Jordan has been severely wounded and dies in frustration. The subject of this novel has a political bias, but it deals with a universal human predicament. Hemingway's interest centred around the Spanish war, its slaughter, death and violence. The novel is full of the accounts of death, slaughter, onslaught, war and brutality.

His most celebrated novel *The Old Man and the Sea* gives the account of Santiago's struggle with the Marlin and this has a tragic quality. If we apply the age old tests to this novel, we shall certainly conclude that it is a tragedy. A tragedy is a tale of exceptional suffering leading generally but not always to the death of the protagonist or the hero who has admirable qualities. The account of Santiago's struggle with the marlin has a tragic quality because of the suffering of the marlin and because of the endurance of both the fish and the fisherman. Santiago's struggle with the fish is man's struggle with the natural forces which he vanquishes and defeats. During his struggle with the marlin, his palms are bleeding and the cry uttered by Santiago at the sight of the sharks recalls the imagery of a person into whose palms and wood the nails are being driven. While climbing his hut, he stumbles and brings to our memory the image of Christ ascending the Calvary mountain carrying his own wooden cross for crucifixion. The old man lies down exhausted with his arms spread out straight and the wounded palms upwards in his hut.

Across The River and Into The Trees the last novel of Hemingway deals with the aftermath of war and the brave and the brave Colonel Cantwell deformed through war. He is the central character who has lost



his knee cap in his participation in the war on the Italian Front. The bullet injury has made him ugly and disfigured. His right hand is broken, and he has received bullet wounds on the head and the body. Along with the wounds on the body, he also suffers from the emotional wound. The Colonel, a brave hero becomes the victim of blood pressure and heart disease, recalls how he lost three loves and committed mistakes in his military decisions on the battle field. He is in love with his adorable Renata. He meets his death courageously and bravely.

The close analysis of his novels indicates that Hemingway has grappled with the predicament of the man in the modern age. The wound and the violent death are the themes of his works. The love of violence and the wound and death is his special preference which manifested itself in his novels. Death is at the centre of life in Hemingway's world. One critic goes so far as to assert that in reality Hemingway has one only theme-death. The various deaths of Catherine, Macomber, Harry, Harry Morgan, Robert Morgan, Colonel Cantwell, and many unnamed characters may influence and tempt us to agree with the critic who said that Hemingway really had only one theme -death. But this is not the whole truth. Hemingway takes great interest in death because he is interested in life. He accepts death as the centre of life which completes life. Mastery of life pre-supposes mastery of death and mastery of death indicates mastery of life. He takes death as seriously as life and thereby establishes their oneness. His interest in death is not really a matter of obsession. Hemingway's art emerges as a wholly integrated one.

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- [2] Works by Ernest Hemingway at Project Gutenberg 
- [3] Works by Ernest Hemingway in eBook form at Standard Ebooks
- [4] Works by Ernest Hemingway at Faded Page (Canada)
- [5] Works by or about Ernest Hemingway at Internet Archive