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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE ECHO OF HUMANISM IN ERNEST MILLER HEMINGWAY

The Echo of Humanism in Ernest Miller Hemingway

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Ernest Miller Hemingway, one of the greatest humanists of the twentieth century American fiction, was born in Oak Park, Illinois, on 21st July 1899. His father Dr. Clarence Edmunds Hemingway, who was fond of hunting and fishing, was a physician and introduced Hemingway to the outdoor life. Hemingway received his primary education from a local school and graduated from Oak Park High School in 1917.

Hemingway, who had a pleasant and charismatic personality, was six feet tall, handsome, energetic, attractive and fun-loving. He was also known for his generosity. A.E. Hotchner describes Hemingway as "a Man who had a zest for life and adventure as big as his genius."¹ When Hotchner first saw Hemingway in 1948, he felt that he had "never seen anyone with such an aura of fun and well-being."² He is perhaps the most universal of all American authors. Hemingway was an adventurer, an hard drinker, a warrior who was decorated for his bravery on the front, a first-rate hunter, a deep-sea fisherman, an excellent shooter, a boxer, and a brilliant columnist and journalist. It is quite strange how he was able to assimilate so many facets in one personality.

Humanism has been the recurrent theme of many American novelists. A brief survey of American authors show that humanism is integral to the American literature and it has been enriched by a number of writers who have emphasized on one or the other aspects of humanism in their works. Hemingway in his personal life was, according to Archibald Mac Lesih, his friend "one of the most human and spiritually powerful creatures I have ever known."³ He was according to Stewart Sanderson, a man who is known to be "warm-hearted and generous and to be capable of great kindness."⁴ Hemingway's own words "All I care about are human beings and alleviating their suffering"⁵ are a testimony to Hemingway's humanistic learning. The way he actively participated in different wars on the side of democratic forces and repression in his journalistic as well as fictional writings speak clearly of his commitment to the larger human causes.

Humanism in literature has a long history. Generally, the end of the Middle Ages in Europe is considered to be the birth of Humanism in European literature. According to Smith, "The Renaissance humanists took

as the inspirations for their writings and studies the classical literature of Greece and Rome."⁶

In its primary connotation humanism simply means love for humanity, that is devotion to human interests and human values. Humanism in this way signifies man's relationship to man and acknowledges compassion, reverence, care and a sense of solidarity for fellow man. It does not tolerate discrimination against any people or nation as such and, therefore, seeks to establish successful and peaceful relationship between friends or races, religious sections or nations. Harold H. Titus in his book *Living Issues in Philosophy* defines humanism as a "doctrine that emphasizes distinctively human interests and ideals."⁷ Humanism is a way of life which relies on human capacities and natural and social resources. It is an attitude which requires the acceptance of responsibility for human life in this world, emphasizing mutual respect and recognising human inter-dependence.

A brief survey of American authors show that humanism is integral to the American literature and it has been enriched by a number of writers who have emphasised on one or the other aspects of humanism in their works. Walt Whitman, Hawthorne, Mark twain, Henry James and Ernest Hemingway are some of the important writers who have contributed in their own ways to the powerful stream of humanism that runs through the American literature. They have emphasised in their works the significant place that man possesses in the scheme of the world.

Researchers have remained confined largely to such aspects of Hemingway's fiction as symbolism, allegory, style and narrative technique. A little attention has also been paid to some of the aspects of Hemingway's code and his themes in his novels as well as in short stories. Most of these studies have remained heavily dependent either on the writer's biography or such extra-literary sources as psychology, philosophy, politics and religion. His faith in the validity and viability of the values of liberal humanism can be cited as one of those important aspects of Hemingway's vision which have not been appreciated adequately by his critics.

Hemingway is a moralist who instead of having a palpable design, gives us an unobtrusive sense of the positive values of life. He gives the message of indomitable courage and inexhaustible endurance, the greatest and most valuable message for mankind- that when fate traps you all what you have to do is to be brave and face its consequence with calm. Hemingway does not consider man a helpless puppet in the hands of fate. On the contrary man has an infinite capacity to make himself happy. Despite the harsh and bitter realities of life, Hemingway does not lose all hope for humanity.

Hemingway gives a graphic picture of the suffering, shock and pain of the modern man. The world of his novels is a place where the shadow of death looms large. Hemingway knows that all life ends in death, so his heroes desire to live each moment properly and skilfully. The heroes of Hemingway show great courage even when they are at the point of death. Most of his characters lead a life of nothingness. The only ray of hope in their life is their individual human courage.

His fiction is almost always an exposition of his dynamic relation to the world at the time he is writing. In *The Sun Also Rises* Hemingway draws a comparison between the cultures of Paris and Spain. On the one hand he shows directionlessness, confusion, immortality, loss of values, rootlessness and artificiality of Parisian culture. On the other, he represents stability, brotherhood, religiousness and lovable traits of the Spanish culture. Hemingway presents Spain as a metaphor for a way of life.

Hemingway puts to test all of these values in his novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) by dramatizing the emotional, spiritual and psychological lostness of post-war generation. Hemingway clearly presents the post-war realities of disintegration, chaos in human relationships and emotional sterility in this novel. Hemingway's concerns for the humanistic principles have not been fully acknowledged by major Hemingway critics. If one reads Hemingway as a writer with serious moral purpose, one finds that his main purpose in *The Sun Also Rises* has been to understand the significance of those moral and human values which had disappeared after World War I.

Frederic Henry in *A Farewell to Arms* also embodies the ideal of serving a larger cause of humanity, set over and above his personal concerns. He is an American, but comes a long way to fight for the cause of human dignity, individual freedom and justice on the side of the Italians. The way he brings cheese for his fellow soldiers under heavy bombardment and his insistence that he would get medical aid only after those who were seriously wounded had been attended to reveal his intense desire to serve mankind in the face of personal hazards. The study of the novel reveals that humanistic values are relevant and valid not only in coping with the situations of war and violence but they are essential to enable man to

conduct himself gracefully in all the other areas of life as well.

The brief survey of major critical works on *A Farewell to Arms* shows that none of the critics has taken full and balanced view of Hemingway's treatment of positive human values in the novel. They have focussed mainly upon the writer's biography and have not tried to separate the creator from his creation. Hemingway's faith in the validity of these humanistic values has not been presented in the novel in crude or explicit terms. His commitment to principles of humanism comes out very sharply and clearly when Frederic Henry, the hero, who represents the most comprehensive version of these values, is placed in comparison with the conventionally religious and cynically sceptical attitudes represented by character like the Priest on the one hand and Rinaldi on the other.

Being a humanist, Hemingway treats deviation from the norms of balanced behaviour in an ironic mode. The attitude governed strictly by religion has been treated by the writer in a satirical manner. Frederic's concern for his associates and his eagerness to save them even at the risk of his own life are indicative not only of his sound humanity but of his heroic nature as well.

The significance of these humanistic principles in the life of the individual, their relevance in modern times and the nature and strength of the forces antithetical to them, become more evident once we examine the attitude of Frederic Henry towards life, love and war. Henry's relations with his beloved as well as with his other fellow human beings are governed mainly by the positive values of liberal human understanding. His commitment to humanity does not break down under the severest test. As a liberal humanist, virtue for him lies in acting in accordance with the best impulses which exist in every individual and which embrace all humanity in love and fellowship. Through Henry, the protagonist of the novel, Hemingway brings to light the value of man's commitment to causes and concerns larger than himself, his critical understanding of himself and his society, his sensitiveness, and humane response to situations and one's faith in the values of sincerity, solidarity, love, sympathy, compassion and human understanding of one's fellow beings.

Henry's commitment to the service of humanity, however, is not the result of any blind devotion to any religion or abstract principles outside himself. It is, in fact, rooted in his urge to serve his fellow human beings in a crisis- ridden world whose nature and causes he understands more than others in the novel. He combines full awareness of the complexities of war with an inner strength to cope with its pressures.

The study of the novel reveals that humanistic values are relevant and valid not only in coping with the

situations of war and violence but they are essential to enable man to conduct himself gracefully in all the other areas of life as well. For example, his treatment of different responses to situations of love again highlights the viability of humanistic values in this area of human experience also. The concept of love which the writer seems to endorse can broadly be described as humanistic which demands dynamism in the personality of the lovers. This type of love is not confined only to bodies but it unites hearts and souls. This type of love is not for selfish motives but is extended further. It develops into a liberating experience and no longer remains a subjugating and restricting force.

An analysis of the novel shows that Hemingway treats the situation and experience of love in times of war with adequate complexity. Rigidly conventional, orthodoxly religious and cynically erotic attitudes to love are juxtaposed with the humanistic love of Frederic Henry and Catherine in the novel. It also reveals the great importance and values Hemingway attaches to human relations based upon human understanding, mutual sympathy, compassion and a sense of human solidarity. Love, here, encompasses relations between man and woman as well as the broader relationship between men and his fellow beings.

The study of the novel reveals that the humanistic values are relevant and valid not only in coping with the situations of chaos, distress, despair and violence but they are also essential to enable man to conduct himself gracefully in all the other areas of life as well.

In his earlier novels, it is through the protagonist that he puts across his humanistic code of values. But in *To Have and Have Not*, there is no character who can be regarded as an embodiment of complete Hemingway code. In this novel Hemingway achieves his purposes and effects through a series of dealings with the life of the rich and the poor. The treatment of their poverty, miseries, family disintegration and inner emptiness is something that strikes the reader most in this novel. Hemingway has portrayed here how average men and women with limited awareness and inner resources tend to become dehumanized under the pressure of political and socio-economic system. The writer seems to sympathise with the poor. He was unhappy about the lives they were leading. The treatment of Harry's character brings out Hemingway's full awareness of human nature.

Most of critics have failed to acknowledge Hemingway's concerns for humanistic principles as they are revealed in *To Have and Have Not*. The treatment of Economic, social and moral crisis and how the individuals tend to make compromise with their situation, reveal Hemingway's full awareness of the pressure under which average man has to work. The depiction of how an average man is dehumanized

by the forces beyond his control is an evidence of Hemingway's faith that it is only by adhering to certain humanistic values than man can protect his humanity and face challenges in a dignified manner.

The various shades of human relationships are to be found not only in his novels but also in his short stories. In fact, Hemingway is a true humanist and his humanistic concerns are reflected clearly in all his writings. Hemingway emerges as a writer who firmly believes in the humanistic principles of reason, love, sympathy, human dignity and universal brotherhood. These humanistic values, however, do not appear as abstract principles in his fiction rather they appear as a way of life. Even some minor characters like Bill in *The Sun Also Rises* and Captain Willie in *To Have and Have Not* also present a partial version of Hemingway's humanistic ideals.

An analysis of Hemingway's fiction reveals that he firmly believes in the principles of Humanism. The study reveals that the vision of the author is not romantic or existentialistic but humanistic. The selfishness, animal instinct of self-preservation, moral, emotional and social apathy are some aspects of the modern life which Hemingway treats mockingly. To conclude, humanism for Hemingway is a way of life. His treatment of these principles is realistic not academic.

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