



## Quest for self-identity in the short stories of Ernest Hemingway

Dr. Manoj Kumar

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Gopeshwar College, Hathwa  
(Jai Prakash University, Chapra)

DOI: [10.33329/rjelal.13.2.31](https://doi.org/10.33329/rjelal.13.2.31)



### Article info

Article Received: 13/03/2025  
Article Accepted: 16/04/2025  
Published online: 20/04/2025

### Abstract

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) was one of the most eminent American novelists in English literature. He was a short-story writer, Nobel laureate, journalist, all combined in one. His characters are grappled with a quest for self-identity in his stories. They represent the backdrop of war, loss and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. So, his theme has the indifferent universe, masculinity, courage, relationships, the power of experience and the search for meaning in his stories. He has written a number of novels, the prominent among them being *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) and *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) as well as short story collections such as *In our Time* (1925), *Men without Women* (1927) and *Winner Take Nothing* (1933). To him, man is not made for defeat.

**Keywords:** War, Masculinity, Love, Loss, Courage, Stoicism and Iceberg theory.

### Introduction

It is clear that every great mind offers both the creature and creator of his time. Hemingway's art of writing has to be visualised in his prospective.

He has intellectually dynamited by the depth of his vision, use of short sentences and easy to read language, covering a sense of simplicity in his story-telling. 'Iceberg theory' is his writing style. It is clear and direct avoiding adverbs or flowery language.

Hemingway's *In Our Time* is the most powerful volume of fourteen short stories on a

definite deflection. It has aspects of love and loss based on World War I. *Indian Camp*, *The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife*, *The Three-Day Blow* and the *Battler* are major stories of *In Our Time*. *Men without Women* deals with men in their situations of defeat in a post-war world. The undefeated, *In Another Country* *The Killers* and *Fifty Grand* are its major short stories. There is nothing lent only harsh realities of human experience in these stories. These stories have love, loss, vulnerability and complexity of human connection with travel and war. *Winner Take Nothing* has fourteen stories containing varying length. *After the Storm*, *The Light of the World*, *The Sea change*, *A Day's Wait* and *The Gambler the Nun*

and the Radio are its major stories depicting complexities of human life. In this way, depth and complexities of life are occurred in these stories including emotional exploration.

### Thematic Analysis

*Indian Camp* depicts about the nation of initiation and complexity where Nick is being initiated. It also deals with the relationship between father and son and the delicate balance between life and death. Having finished the operation of a Woman Nick's father watches her husband. Her husband cuts his throat and the author has remarked :

... The Indian lay with  
his face toward the wall.  
His throat had been cut from  
ear to ear. The block had  
flowed down into a pool where  
his body sagged the bunk.  
His head rested on his left arm.<sup>1</sup>

From the above remark, it appears that the story depicts about the life of a helpless Indian. He has to face difficulties and complexities. He feels a bitter experience of life.

Hemingway's *The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife* contains the issues of deflection and masculinity versus femininity. Here Dr. Adams is a physician and his wife, is in bed and cautions her husband with platitudes. Dick Boulton is an Ojibway Indian in the story. The story reveals the predicament of human existence. To the author, Dr. Adam tries to assert that the logs are driftwood and Boulton uncovers its mark. He tells him that the logs belong to white and MCN ally. After that the doctor's humiliation is emerged of a moral blow but logs are stolen. The, story, *The Three-Day Blow* is a dramatic story that accounts for a frightful day. Here two friends Nick and Bill meet at Bill's Cottage and they drink wine. Hemingway has presented their conversation :

..."That's the peat into liquor,"

Nick said.

"That doesn't make any  
difference," Bill said.

"you ever seen and peat?"

Nick asked.

"No," said Bill.

"Neither have I,"

Nick said."<sup>2</sup>

The story, *The Battler* has a turn when Nick decides to "but in" and eats other people's food. Here Bug tries to suggest Nick to move on. Bug is and African, American who makes his way above the Mason - Dixon line (the demarcation between Northern and Southern United States). When racial violence is occurred in cities like Chicago, Saint Louis, Baltimore, Tulsa, etc the white compete with the Black. Nick is relieved in the story when Bug plays his role. Thus, the story depicts about an evident of deflection and manliness of Bill as independence from the commitments of marriage, money, and work. Therefore, Samudson thinks that nothing but image of war hero is obvious :

...The Hemingway's presence and celebrity depend, of course, on his role as war hero, big game hunter, deep sea fishermen. Ironically, these guise tend to shadow Hemingway's work as a writer but sense to quality him as an American character. And after the image hype, it is refreshing to return to the fiction, to see the hero-victims that permeate his writing and ring, in someways.<sup>3</sup>

*The undefeated* is related to the themes of racism, exploitation and perseverance manned Garcia is the central character of the story who is a veteran bullfighter and Retana is an old bullfight promoter who hires him for work in Madrid. The story starts in Retana, office and

manner looks very pale due to his sickness. Manuel is an attractive figure who offers positive thought. The bull tries to charge again and again and Manuel brings around the "muleta" in a half circle. The story gets a turn when Manuel is lying on the ground and kicks at the bull's muzzle with his feet. *In Another Country*' is a story about an ambulance corps member in Milan during world war I. The story has unnamed narrator-accepted to be the autobiographical alter ego, Nick Adams. The major acts as a mentor figure for the others and he tries to teach the Americans how to speak Italian. Nick thinks that the physical therapy machines are ineffective. Here love, loss and vulnerability are felt and the major is grievously wounded.

*The Killers* is another link in the chain of Hemingway's short-stories. In the earlier part of the story, Nick Adam's confrontation with unmitigated evil in the story. Max also tells George the truth, which is that they are at Henry's to kill Ole Andreson, a Swedish man. Al and Max order Nick to inquire the situation. They are two killers and try to make a fuss. In this way, the story reveals Nick Adams heroism and his disillusionment. *Fifty Grand* is a major story in which Jimmy Walcott plays a vital role. The story deals with Jack Brennam who trains for boxing in his fight with Walcott. A grand is equal to one thousand dollars and 50 grand means 5000 dollars. As a boxer, Jack fights with him. Hemingway has presented Jack and Walcott :

...Jack turned quick and went out. Walcott came toward him and they touched gloves and soon as Walcott dropped his hands Jack jumped his left into his face twice. There was not anybody, and nobody ever boxed better than Jack. Walcott was after him, going toward all the time with his chin on his chest...<sup>4</sup>

Hemingway's *After the Storm* opens with the predatory potential of mankind. Here the narrator tries to crack windows due to a storm. He has no any strong tool and he comes to the shore. He meets to a group of Greeks. A fight is occurred between two men : the narrator and his assailant. The man dives and he sees a woman with flowing hair. Sea birds appear feeding on pieces of flesh and the storm presents the narrator's desire. The storm also symbolizes danger or charge on the horizon and the interpretation is based on the imagery. On the other hand, *The Light of the World* depicts sexual initiation into the world of adulthood. Here Elizabeth Alexander finds herself at an existential crossroads after the death of her husband. Tom and Nick don't try to offer light in their entrance Steve Ratchel, a boxer symbolizes as a Jesus for a woman named Alice who lives in illusion. She offers a sexual relationship with Jesus. To Adam, Alice has a chance to change her life. All characters of the story offer the situation of the society and they like beer to remain in tipsy condition.

The story, *The Sea Change* has themes like identity, acceptance and inner transformation. It has also sexuality in the critical context of homosexual desire. To the passage of time, understanding dawns upon Phil. The contact with the girl makes him comprehend. He has to wander into a beautiful dream world. The girl respects him as Hemingway points out :

"No you won't."

"I will come back."

"No you won't. Not to me."

"You'll see."

"Yes," he said. That's

the hell of it. You probably

Will."

"of course I will."

"Go on, them."<sup>5</sup>

The story has lack of plot because the plot appears nonexistent and motives are not clear. Its subject is reflected in different attitudes towards the woman's homosexual infidelity. *A Day's wait* accounts for the relationship between a father and a son. It is about the idea of life and death. Here the 'hundred and two' acquires that signified a true struggle between Schatz and father, The theme of the story revolves around Schatz and his father. He leads and unhappy like due to his misunderstanding with his father.

The story, *The gambler, the Nun and the Radio* contains the themes of loneliness, suffering, and the human quest for relief from complexities of life. Cyetano is a Mexian gambler and Mr. Frazer listens the radio his sickness. The theme of the story acquires a new dimension in a hospital. Cayetano was shot at Montana and a nun aspired to be saint. Mr. Frazer demonstrates that in primitive societies. Here the emergence of symbolic structures is an essential feature of human transition.

#### Aspects of Disillusionment:

The following are major aspects of disillusionment in short stories of Hemingway :

- (a) Characters of short stories reflect existential approach and they struggle with a sense of emptiness.
- (b) Hemingway brings his characters out of their comfortable ignorance through traumatic events.
- (c) Events of the stories cause a certain sense of disillusionment.
- (d) Stories have socio-political lives nature is a benevolent influence on characters.
- (e) Stories offer Fatalistic Heroism. The clearest expressions of Hemingway keep depressing disillusionment.
- (f) Animals serve as symbols in short stories of Hemingway. Some characters have ambivalence feelings.

#### Critical Study:

Hemingway has explored the themes as restlessness, war, loss and death in his short stories. Characters like the old bullfighter of *The Undeafed* or the purilist of *Fifty Grand* don't contain emotion display for the readers. So, Colin, E. Nicholson has commented about Hemingway's short story as :

The typical setting of a Hemingway short story call up enclosure, states of discontinuity and transistorizes. The typical denizens of these fleeting moments and impermanent place are those struggling with frustration or despair figures variously shell-shocked... A disab-ling sense of contingency croupiers with a pervasive feeling of purpose-lessness to define and imagine novel order where in the most to be expected is momentary stay against integration.<sup>6</sup>

Not only that, Hemingway's writing style has direct word choice. His *Indian Camp* offers the theme of Cross-Cultural Encounters, Masculinity, birth and death but The Battler places the point of view of Nick, a man just thrown off a passing train. The author is concerned with the man and his relation to the world. He has arranged 'Iceberg theory' in his short stories but his death has been comminuted in many ways. As Bark Spika has remarked :

Hemingway's preoccupation with death has been explained by various ways by his desire to write about simple fundamental things, by his "sodomasochism" or more fairly and accurately by his need to efface an actual war would or to supplant the ugly senseless violence of war with ordered graceful violence.<sup>7</sup>

#### Conclusion

To sum up, it is obvious that inspite of all the efforts made till now, Hemingway's stories move to the traditional nineteenth and

early twentieth century stories. His stories have been described as "well-made" in the world of disillusionment. They take the limited length in their setting, plot, characters, conflict, stoicism and theme. Hence, his protagonists have to struggle hard encountering the challenges in life and nature to probe the mystery of life and death. Nick Adam is his first protagonist who tries to keep appearing under other names. His style is related to 'Iceberg theory' where the author has tried to transcend story telling resonating on multiple levels. His imagery has sense of sight, hearing and touch.

### Reference

- [1]. Earnest, Hemingway, *In our Time*, Boni and Liver right, Newyork, 925, p. 20.
- [2]. *Ibid*, p. 46.
- [3]. Scott, Samuelson, *Study Guide For The Short Stories Of Earnest Hemingway*, English Dept. Rick College, Rexburg, Idaho, 1992 p. 41.
- [4]. *In our Time*, p. 152
- [5]. Earnest, Hemingway, *The Complete Short Stories the Finca Vigia Edition*, New York, 1987, p. 244
- [6]. Colin, E. Nicholson, *The Short Stories After In Our Time, A Profile In A Robert Lee Ed. Earnest Hemingway's New Critical Essays*, London, Totona N.J. Vision Barners and Noble 1983, p. 216.
- [7]. Mark, *Spika Death of Love in the Sun also Rises in Hemingway and his Critics*, ed. Carlos Baker, 2002, p. 87.