

Effective Use of Nature Symbolism in Ernest Hemingway's Novels

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ABSTRACT: The present paper aims at the careful study of some of the novels of Ernest Hemingway with a special insistence on his way of treating nature. Nature directly or indirectly plays a significant role in his creations and is much crucial aspect in the life's of the various characters. Hemingway's famous 'Iceberg theory' is also explained through an element from the nature itself. He has beautifully described the relationship of human beings with the nature around them, the environment they are a part of, the flora and fauna they are surrounded with. At places, nature becomes a prominent symbol of expression to convey various emotions. Hemingway's way of dealing with the theme and symbols from nature is par excellence. This paper traces some of the instances where Hemingway very creatively exhibits nature and its various forms. He associates different connotations with different seasons; summer being positive and winter being the time of hopelessness. In *A Farewell to Arms*, rain is symbolic of pain, loss, agony, despair, and death. Destructive aspects of nature are balanced with the motherly traits of nature in the real world and in the world created by Ernest Hemingway. In *Old Man and the Sea*, nature is presented in its fierce and devastating form almost taking away the life of an aged fisherman; the sea, the creatures, the winds everything against him bringing unbearable hardships. On the other hand the 'Sun' in *The Sun Also Rises*, is an indicative of hope, beauty, and optimism and also signifies life. Along with that a startling contrast has been drawn between the horrifying lives people lead in modern day city to that of people living peacefully in heavenly countryside. Also people struggling with the aftermaths of war, seek shelter in the lap of nature. It is explicit here that for Hemingway, Nature is a juxtaposition of peace and violence; bringing life and death; being constructive and destructive; having angelic and ghostly attributes at the same time.

KEYWORDS: Environment, Flora, Fauna, Attributes, Fierce, Devastating, Tranquil, Violence, Countryside, Optimism, Juxtaposition.

INTRODUCTION: Hemingway was unquestionably a master of English prose, the great stylist of his generation which made his place secure and pre-eminent in American literature. He was indeed a magnificent nature writer because his works beautifully encompass all the aspects of nature. Also he left tremendous influence on writers all over the world, and on the whole it was a good influence for his contributions were large and worthy.

Alfred Kazin, a famous author and critic said in the praise of Ernest Hemingway:

“Probably no other American writer of our time has set such a stamp on the modern literature. Hemingway was one of our true creators. He gave a whole new dimension to English prose by making it almost as exact as poetry, by making every word sound, by reaching for those places of the imagination where the word and object are one”.

He was the spokesperson of “the lost generation” and the Nobel Laureate who talked about various recurring themes of love, war, wilderness and loss in an entirely different way all of which were strongly evident in his creations. At its core, much of Hemingway’s works can be viewed with Nature being a predominant aspect. According to Stoltzfus and Fiedler, in Hemingway’s work, nature is a place for rebirth, rest and rejuvenation. It is a moment of transcendence, i.e. Hemingway’s characters find redemption in nature. Thus ‘Nature Symbolism’ plays a significant role in all his novels. Most of his stories explicitly or implicitly use various aspects of nature to structure and to beautify the plot. Nature serves as a symbol at places replacing the use of words, statements to express the inner turmoil of human mind and soul. Although always available, symbolism in nature is subtle and hard to grasp at first sight, but if seriously studied one can derive deeper meanings from very simple natural happenings. It is correct to state that Nature is Art of God.

A Farewell to Arms (1929): The storyline and character traits of this novel are largely affected by Hemingway’s use of symbolism especially Nature symbolism. Sometimes there is no mention of pain, agony, suffering, joy, fear, happiness, anxiousness, gaiety, or any such feeling through words. The elements of nature and changes in the surrounding are aptly used to convey the same. For example in this novel, ‘summer’ is signifying prosperity and life; and this can be contrasted

by autumn, which is identified with bareness and darkness. The separation of the seasons sets up the transition in the plot from good to bad: good being represented by the dry season, bad by the wet season.

And in the fall when the rain came the leaves fell from the chestnut trees and the branches were bare and the trunks black with rain.

Hemingway's use of such symbols adds beauty and concreteness to his thought and effectively represents the abstract ideas or concepts. 'Water' is a recurring metaphor in the novel; rivers are used as symbols of rebirth and escape and rain as the tragedy and disaster; what he calls 'raging torrent'. The symbols presented are vivid and dynamic; they include: lakes, rivers, snow, ice, mountains, plains, night, seasons, and weather. Although rain is usually considered as a symbol of inevitable disintegration of happiness in life, but it is not the same here. Catherine Barkley, the English nurse who falls in love with our protagonist Fredric Henry, an American paramedic serving in the Italian army infuses the weather with meaning as she and Henry lie in bed listening to the storm outside. As the rain was falls on the roof, Catherine admits that the rain scares her and says that it has a tendency to ruin things for lovers. She utters, "I'm afraid of the rain."(125) as they stay in Milan. She goes to explain to explain;

I'm afraid of the rain because sometimes I see me dead in it... And sometimes I see me dead in it."(126)

Of course no meteorological phenomenon has such power; symbolically, however, Catherine's fear proves to be prophetic, for doom does eventually come to the lovers. Here the falling rain validates Catherine's anxiety and confirms one of the novel's main contentions: great love, like anything else in the world- good or bad, innocent or deserving- cannot last, symbolizing mortality of human body, emotions along with natural seasons. It ultimately incorporates the themes of impermanence and change.

Hemingway brilliantly uses nature to symbolize and foreshadow certain other events in the couple's difficult journey to escape war and be with each other. When after the death of the heroine, Henry leaves the hospital and walks home in the rain with his world devastated and everything shattered in bits. Hemingway describes the relation of man's life and destructive forces of nature. Thus the novel is an epitome of star-crossed lovers; both showing erotic

flirtations that rapidly develop into serious love affairs, all set against the backdrop of natural turmoil.

The Sun Also Rises (1926): The title of Ernest Hemingway's this novel itself has one of the major constituents of nature i.e. 'sun', which comes from a verse in the Bible - "The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose." which implies where there is despair, there is hope. As everything seems disillusioned because of the ill effects of war, everyone has become hopeless, the writer assures that this is not the end of the world and uses a very beautiful reference from nature that after every night, the day is sure to come, the sun will undoubtedly rise tomorrow, it will shine bright bringing with it positivity and hopefulness. Despite the aridness, and aftermaths of war, there is a glimmer of the hope for the future of the Lost Generation in the rising of the sun. The title 'The Sun Also Rises' is thus about cycles, one can never be saddened by an ending, a new beginning is always just around the corner; the sun may set on good times, it always rises again.

Apart from the title, for most of the novel, there is a noticeable lack of natural landscape. The action is urban and repetitive. The characters are dissatisfied with city life and suggest trip after trip to try to find satisfaction. Hemingway successfully keeps simple country life much above the so called modern city culture. He beautifully describes:

In the Basque country the land all looks very rich and green and the houses and village look well-off and clean... the houses in the villages had red tiled roofs, and then the road turned off and commenced to climb and we were going way up close along a hillside, with a valley below and hills stretched off back toward the sea.

There is an overwhelming sense that the modern world that Hemingway has portrayed runs the risk of drifting dangerously far from the natural world. Many of the characters have lost the connectivity with the natural world; also the perpetual drunkenness that ultimately takes characters far away from their original thoughts and real emotions. Although some of the characters do have a profound appreciation for nature, and due to this they seek shelter and refuge from the devastating ill effects of the post-war society. Bill rightly states the condition of people called 'Lost Generation':

You're an expatriate. You have lost the touch of the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see. You hang around cafes.

Although some prominent characters in the novel do have a sense of appreciation and an innate understanding of nature which is explicitly described in the fishing trip of Bill and Jake. Hemingway describes nature as 'a pastoral paradise' uncorrupted and undisturbed. There are instances in the novel which explicitly states that bounties of nature are highly rejuvenating for the people and ultimately soothes their mind. Rightly stated by an American biologist, Rachel Carson, "There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature."

The Old Man and the Sea (1952): Nature plays a huge part all throughout the novel since the setting is the sea and the fish is Santiago's counterpart. The story centers on a poor fisherman from Havana and his continuous three day long struggle with a huge fish. The environment of the fisherman Santiago seems at first sight to be something completely ordered and in the perfect harmony – the sea, creatures in the sea, the sun, the moon, and the stars all are in coherence. Nature indeed plays a significant role in the course of the novel, the nature is depicted in both its tranquil and fierce state; the nature that seems to be friendly most of the time, can also act like enemy bringing misfortune and sometimes death. This implies like always there is not just the positive portrayal of nature; it can be destructive and hostile as well. It depicts that it's not always a pleasure rowing on the ocean for the search of fish. Santiago is an example that man being a part of nature is inferior;

[...] fished alone in a skiff in the Gulf Stream and he had gone eighty-four days without catching a fish.

His whole body shows signs of destructiveness of nature and somehow witnesses the long struggle he had with nature. The sun assailed his skin leaving brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer on him. His deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords.

Santiago connects with the nature so much that he starts realizing the pain, sufferings and feelings of other creatures; giving the concept of 'fellow-sufferers'. In this world every element

of nature is tied with the thread of harmony and love. The old man also feels heart to heart connectivity with the creature of nature:

I have such a heart too and my feet and hands are like theirs.

The Old man thrice sees the pleasant dream of the lions at play on the beaches of Africa-the night before he departs on his three day fishing expedition, on the boat when he sleeps for a few hours and towards the end of the book. The use of 'lion imagery' is highly symbolic to exhibit the courage of an elderly man who struggles for his life and ultimate victory over the fish. The novel is suggestive juxtaposition of life and death, love and hate, destruction and regeneration.

A sense of brotherhood and love in a world in which everyone is killing or being killed, binds together the creatures of nature, establishes between them a unity and an emotion which transcends the destructive pattern in which they are caught. It is very clear in the novel that all the creatures are related to survival, they are all in search of food. Santiago's role is to overwhelm the fish, marlin, marlin's role is to escape the old fisherman, and the bird has to catch the fish to survive. Hemingway believes in the theory of hunting and being hunted; and the law of nature that superior will always dominate the inferior in every possible way. He strengthens the fact that people who live their life to the fullest will be least affected by these storms because they have the strength and the experience to handle the destruction the storm caused.

Thus, Nature in the novels of Ernest Hemingway not only works in the backdrop but also becomes one of the most suitable characters significantly helping in the ascendance of plot and development of a beautiful and unique story. In every walk with the nature his characters receive more than they seek and promoted the notion 'change owns self, not nature'. At places nature symbols are used to convey various moods and turbulences of human mind and heart, and sometimes nature itself dwells into the counterpart of humans. It can be deduced that there is no better place to find shelter, guidance, support, meaning and messages than nature. It is rightly said by Einstein "Look deep into the nature and you will understand things better."

To conclude with a beautiful thought of Ralph Waldo Emerson: "Things admit of being symbolic, because nature is a symbol, in the whole, and in every part... it transcends speech."

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