UNIT 2 HEMINGWAY: *A CLEAN, WELL-LIGHTED PLACE*

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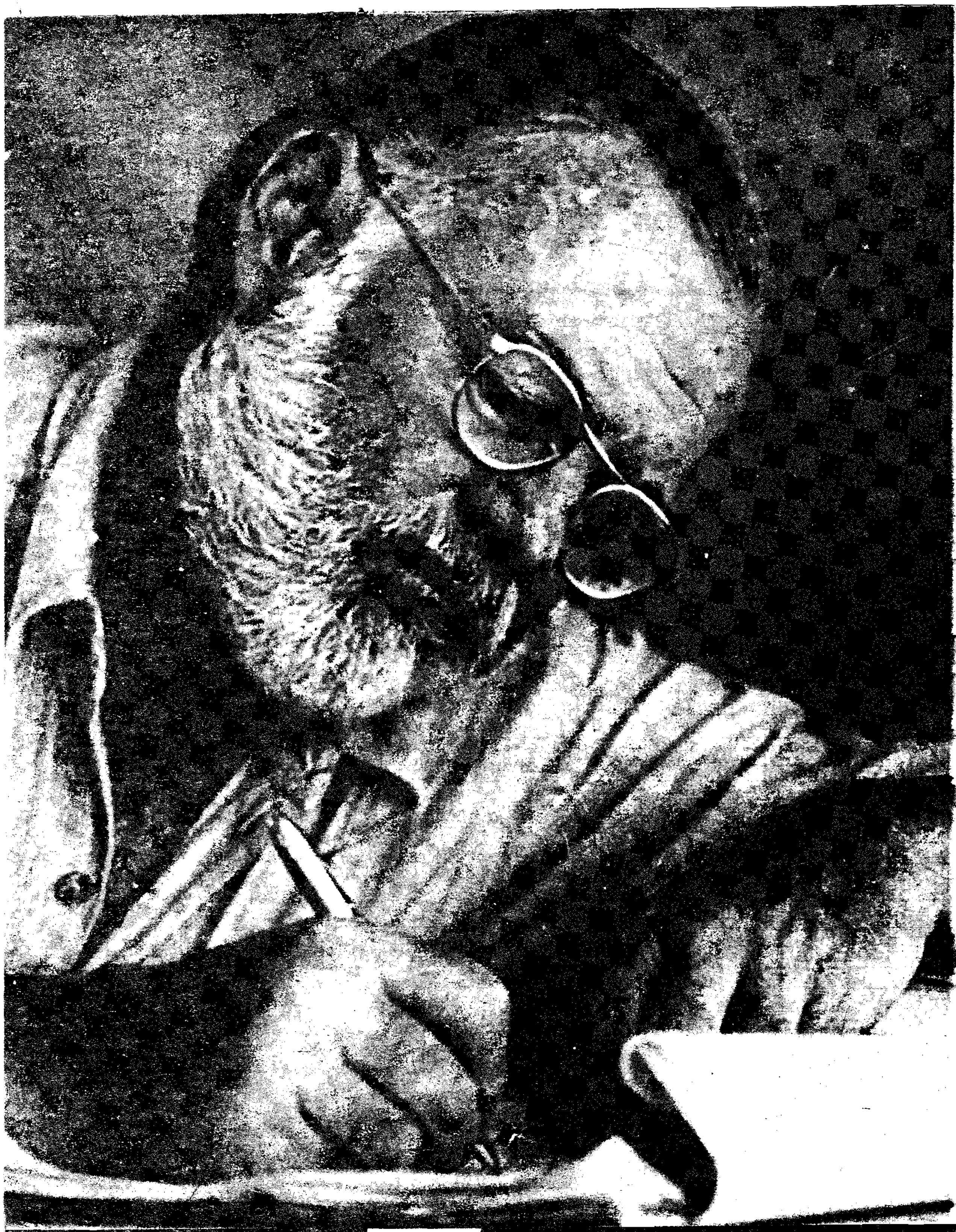
2.0 OBJECTIVES

This second unit is focussed on a close reading of the distinctive features of both Hemingway the short story writer and his short story "A Clean Well-Lighted Place." It begins with a select chronology, and moves on to discuss and evaluate the author's major themes and concerns, his mode of writing, autobiographical predilections, artistic objectivity, code of conduct, and narrative techniques, especially those of symbolism and irony. The text of "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" is critically examined and assessed largely in the context of these tropes. The twin objectives foregrounded in this unit, then, are to assist you in realizing the kind of short story writer, Hemingway is and the kind of short story "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" makes.

2.1 ERNEST HEMINGWAY

2.1.1 Chronology

The following chronology, largely based on the one made out by Earl Rovit, offers a concise biographical perspective on the major events in the life of Ernest Hemingway. It is of course selective, not comprehensive; and during the course of your readings on this author you may notice several other milestones in his life. You may then draw up your own chronology of events relating to Hemingway's life and works.



Ernest Hemingway

1899	Born on July 21 in Oak Park, Illionois, son of Dr. Clarence E. and Grace Hall Hemingway.
1917	After graduation from Oak Park High School, worked as a reporter on the Kansas City Star.
1918	Enlisted as an ambulance driver for the Red Cross in Italy; was severely wounded under mortar fire at Fossalta di Piave on July 8.
1920-1924	Worked as a reporter and foreign correspondent for Toronto Star and Star Weekly. Met Sherwood Anderson (1920-21), married Hadley Richardson (1921), published Three Stories and Ten Poems in Paris (Contact Publishing Co., 1923), made friends with Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. As correspondent, covered Greco-Turkish War (1922) and interviewed Clemenceau and Mussolini.
1925	Published in *Our Time* (New York: Boni and Liveright), his first collection of short stories.
1926	Published The Torrents of Spring (a novel) and The Sun Also Rises (a novel) with Charles Scribner's Sons. All subsequent works except The Spanish Earth came under Scribner's imprint.
1927	Divorced Hadley Richardson; married Pauline Pfeiffer. Published Men Without Women (a collection of short stories).
1928-1938	Set up his home at Key West, Florida.
1929	Published A Farewell to Arms, his first widely acknowledged novel.
1930	Hurt in automobile accident in Montana.
1932	Published Death in the Afternoon (a book on bullfighting).
1933-1934	Published Winner Take Nothing (1933) a collection of short Stories. Made first safari to Africa; also visited Paris and Spain.
1935	Published Green Hills of Africa (a book on big-game hunting).
1936-1938	Covered the Spanish Civil War for the North American Newspaper Alliance. Published To have and have not (1937) A novel; helped in preparation of the film The Spanish Earth (published in 1938) a film-script; and issued The Fifth Column and the First Forty-Nine Stories (1938).
1940	Divorced by Pauline Pfeiffer; married Martha Gelhorn. Published For Whom the Bell Tolls, another widely acknowledged novel.
1942-1945	War Corespondent in Europe, flew with the Royal Air Force, participated in Normandy invasion, and attached himself to the Fourth Infantry Division to liberate Paris. Divorced from Martha Gelhorn to marry Mary Welsh in 1944.
1950	Published Across the River and Into the Trees (a novel)
1951	Published The Old Man and the Sea, yet another widely acknowledged novel.
1953-1954	Revisited Africa; suffered two airplane crashes; was reported dead in the world press. Received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1954.
1961	Died of self-inflicted wounds at his home in Ketchum, Idaho, on July 2.

2.1.2 Themes and Concerns

Hemingway's theme, condensed in one word howsoever simplistic and inadequate, is the violence at the heart of men and things. Its figurations include not only physical violence but also psychic violence, not only the violence of war but also the violence in everyday life, not only the threats and confrontations with violence but also its consequences. This foregrounding of violence also impinges on Hemingway's choice of characters, situations, sense of life and world, and evokes the emotions of fear, pain, hurt, anxiety, empathy, tension, trauma and so forth. Hostile critics of Hemingway censure such a preoccupation with violence as an obsession, find his fictional world narrow and limited, and insist that less is simply less in Hemingway. But his admirers consider such a pre-eminent positioning of violence quite authentic,

and while they acknowledge the limited nature of his world they insist that it is intense and poignant and that in Hemingway's oeuvre less is more.

Young Hemingway, far right, with his family, 1906

To move from this broad spectrum violence as the presiding metaphor in Hemingway's works to the specific and particular themes in his short stories, we notice that they are mainly focussed on the (i) shocks of experience, (ii) violence of war, (iii) man-woman relationships, (iv) quintessential nothingness, and (v) celebrations of values. Boy-protagonist of his stories of shocking, violent experiences are often caught unawares when they, for instance, encounter the contract-killers at a small-town lunchroom ("The Killers") or face the threatened, pointless violence of a demented ex-prizefighter ("The Battler") or witness the violent, ironically tragic death of the much-maligned father ("My Old Man"). The impact of such experiences stupefies and shatters them: nonetheless, contrary to several critics, their stories may not be categorized as the stories of initiation. For they hardly evince any sense of better understanding of the 'self' and the 'surroundings' in their protagonists after the impact, and carry nothing of the ritualisitic elements that accompany all initiations. Slightly different are the stories focussed on the violence of war which Hemingway used to call "invaluable and irreplaceable" as a subject and in which he captures "people under tremendous stress and before and after". These stories transmit the predicament for instance, of the older people and the animals left behind during the evacuation of a village under threat of imminent bombardment ("Old Man at the Bridge") or the shell-shocked soldiers whose wounds may have healed but who continue to suffer from the neurosis and frequent nervous break-down ("A Way You'll Never Be") or those who despite their discipline and control over this post-wound neurosis spend sleepless nights

listening to the silkworms eating in the dark ("Now I Lay Me"). They etch out the irrational, impersonal, devastating face of violence the savagery and grimness of which is occasionally countered by the intermittent camaraderie and togetherness of some of the men-at-war.

Subtly suggestive of surface calm and inward restlessness, of high tension and gnawing anxiety are Hemingway's stories of man-woman relationships between unmarried lovers or married couples. Now and then these stories depict sexual inhibitions and deviations in such relationships ("Mr. And Mrs. Elliot" and "The Sea Change"): but more often than not they deal with the temperamental incompatibilities and marital maladjustments between males and females, such as the fertility wish in woman and the evasion of parental responsibility in man ("Cat in the Rain" and "Hills Like White Elephants") or the sullen acquiescence of a wife in the dogged insistence of her husband on forbidden fishing ("Out of Season"), and so forth. Almost as a rule, the male in these stories is determined and dominant and the female submissive but tense and uncertain the former sadistic and the latter masochistically pliant. By investing his women with a greater sense of responsibility and commitment in love/marital relationships which his men fail to share, much less demonstrate, Hemingway the artist seems to castigate the real-life, egotistic, self-aggrandizing Hemingway, and tends to echo Melville's telling phrase: "the conflict of convictions spins against the way it drives".

A class apart, however, are the stories of the ultimate nothingness, of an overwhelming and all-engulfing *nada* which go far beyond gender conflicts and draw attention to a "God-abandoned world", a world with nothing at the centre". Characters in these stories, resigned as they are to all kinds of losses and gloom, find themselves "not in His (God's) Kingdom" ("Soldier's Home"), are irretrievably landed in extremely hostile situations ("In Another Country") and are increasingly deprived of the few redeeming bits of sunshine in the midst of surrounding darkness ("A Clean Well-Lighted Place"). These are essentially stories of total resignation to living without any shred of hope, to living with nothingness.

In contrast, the stories of celebration, of the triumphant ideals in the midst of violent death depict the protagonists of courage. These protagonists withstand and fight the worst challenges of life, make a supreme all-out effort to do whatever they hold closest to their heart, and in a manner of speaking achieve it in death. Plunged in a most trying situation, therefore, a Macomber, for instance, regains his selfhood as a big-game hunter ("The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber") and a Harry his as a writer ("The Snows of Kilimanjaro"); and a Manuel preserves his honour as a bullfighter ("The Undefeated"). The suffering and death of these characters, however, do not involve any proverbial fatal flaw, nor any particular set of circumstances pitted against them; nor do they derive fom any secret cause or commotion in the moral order. The stark and inevitable tragedy of these people is just a condition of their lives if only because they refuse to be broken by the world; and in Hemingway's scheme of things, people who refuse to be broken have to be killed. "Commitment in Hemingway's books leads to disaster; and complete commitment to complete disaster", say J.J. Benson. Nonetheless, their acceptance of death with dignity and their gallantry in moments of grief and death is "bracing rather than dispiriting": it affirms the principle of the possibilities of life and of how best can man acquit himself as man.

The themes and concerns of Hemingway create, as R.R.Weeks observes, "a limited range of characters, placed in quite similar circumstances, and measured against an unvarying code." Also, such characters largely remain isolates and expatriates severed from the context of their family, community, society and country, and engage themselves rather exclusively in out-door activities. Naturally then, the range and scope of Hemingway's creative explorations stays restricted in that it relates to "no past, no traditions, no memories" and reflects little sense of "religion, morality, politics, culture or history." Significant areas of human experience are therefore

blocked out to Hemingway readers: but whereas "we may regret this exclusive glorification of brute courage in Hemingway", we "doubt if it is literary criticism to do so". Harry Levin has neatly summed up the strength and limitation of Hemingway's thematic achievement in his remark: "That he has succeeded within limits, and with considerable strain, is less important than that he has succeeded, that a few more aspects of life have been captured for literature". Thus considered, Hemingway's theme(s) more than vindicate their validity and stand out at least in as much as they stand apart.

2.1.3 Modes of Writing

Hemingway's most memorable lesson in writing came from Lionel Moise, an older colleague of his journalistic days at the Kansas City Star. Moise used to say: "Pure objective writing is the only true form of story-telling. No stream of consciousness nonsense: no playing dumb observer one paragraph and God Almighty the next. In short, no tricks." Hemingway religously followed theis golden piece of advice during the course of his writing, both journalistic and literary. Of course he got out of journalism before it began to use up the juice needed for creative writing; but he repeatedly acknowledged, as a latter-day eminent fictionist, the debt he owed to Moise.

In his writing, therefore, Hemingway always endeavoured to cut out emotional exaggeration without lapsing into emotional suppression either. He attempted at once to stimulate and regulate emotion, and to keep it clean and functional. His emphasis, therefore, fell upon the right selection of external details – facts, images, events and actions-which automatically evoked the inward emotion in the reader. In Hemingway's critical parlance this communicated not only "what you really felt, rather than what you were supposed to feel, and had been taught to feel" but also "what really happened in action ... the real thing, the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion."

This method of using selective but representative details of experience in order to evoke the intended emotion came close to what T.S.Eliot had described, more than a decade earlier, as the use of "objective correlative" in any artistic creation. Eliot had defined the objective correlative as "a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion; such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked." Likewise, Hemingway also sought to reproduce 'the real thing' which came through in the right selection of external details and consisted of 'what really happened in action .... The sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion.' The resemblance between the two theories was too conspicuous to be merely accidental: and Eliot was the first to state it in English criticism.

Characteristically perhaps, the belligerent Hemingway not only gave the impression of devising this technique on his own but also struck a needlessly dismissive and hostile attitude towards the author of "The Waste Land" and "Four Quartets." He has gone on record offering to grind "Mr Eliot into a fine dry powder" and sprinkle "that powder over Conrad's grave" if this could bring Conrad back to life. This vitriolic comment was perhaps his typical defence mechanism to preempt any possible suggestion of his indebtedness to Eliot. A titan of ego, Hemingway has used this strategy against a host of major contemporary writers, including Sherwood Anderson, Gertude Stein, Scott Fitzgerald and Ford Madox Ford, from each of whom he learned something or the other. It must however be said to Hemingway's credit that in practice he invariably moulded his learnings into something of his own and successfully whittled out one of the most powerful and durable prose-styles of our age.

Whatever the exact measure of Hemingway's debt to Eliot, this method of objective rendering of emotion was truly challenging. It wasn't merely a matter of clever artifice and charming mannerisms as Leon Edel made it out to be. Nor was it simply

the fact that Hemingway invested his writing with "an aura of emotion – by walking directly away from emotion!" It required rigorous concentration on the part of the author as also right absorption and assimilation of experience, and called for its controlled and objective expression. It was a high ideal of prose-writing that Hemingway set for himself, as rewarding as it was demanding. It entailed, as argued by Earl Rovit, the transference of the precise "emotion from the neural system to the texture of a prose narrative," for "caught and frozen in the narrative, the emotion would be safe from the fritterings of time and the distortion of memory." Hemingway learnt it the hard way, and achieved it in the best of his prose-passages.

2.1.4 Autobiographical Element: Biographical Criticism

Ernest Hemingway enjoys a formidable reputation as an autobiographical writer. When once asked if he was writing about himself in his books, he retorted: "Does a writer know anyone better?" His books corroborate this remark, and convey an unmistakable feel of the places he lived in, the activities he was involved in, and the people he came to know. They depict the oppressively genteel Oak Park (where Hemingway was born), the uninhibiting Michigan woods (where he had his early fishing and shooting), and the cities of Paris, Madrid and Venice (where he spent some of the most eventful years of his life). No less do they capture the areas of Hemingway's major interests, such as bullfighting, deep-sea fishing, big-game hunting and the war, all of which he closely watched as a correspondent or particularly liked or disliked make for a large part of his fictionalized world. Pointing to this proximity between his books and the exploits and adventures of his life Hemingway himself remarked: "We have been there in the books ... and where we go, if we are any good, there you can go as we have been."

These autobiographical aspects of Hemingway's works do excite our curiosity about Hemingway the man; but they do not enhance our critical awareness of his works more than marginally. They trigger the identification of the author's fictional characters and situations with their possible counterparts in his life, but not necessarily the illumination of the books themselves. Hemingway's art, though deriving from his life, is intrinsically different in character: it is life-like yet not a copy of his life. It does not describe something that has existed; it makes something that has never existed before. It does not come directly out of the world around him; it comes out of him, out of his imaginative absorption and transmutation of reality. It is not dependent on the extraneous facts of life for the quality of its achievement; it is an organic whole, complete in itself, having an internal logic of its own.

Inadequate appreciation if not total neglect of his autonomy of a work of art has blurred the perspective of some of the major biographical and psycho-biographical critics of Hemingway. They have overplayed their hand in that they have suggested sweeping resemblances between Hemingway's life and his art leading to myopic interpretations of his works. They rightly assert that Hemingway refuses to stay out of his books and that the author and his books are of a single piece; but some of them almost mistake Hemingway the man for the Hemingway hero, and hand out dazzling distortions of his works. Such critics build up their arguments, for instance, on the centrality of the war-wound Hemingway once received (Philip Young) or the Oedipal conflict he experienced in the family context (Richard Hovey) or the public postures he acquired and the personal pronouncements he liberally made (Steward Sanderson) and then proceed on to impose these views all over his works. They, therefore, write with one eye cocked on what they knew of the author and the other on his books. Their gaze is fixed on "an inextricable, twinned, double-exposure image" of Hemingway/Hemingway hero. Basically author-oriented, such criticism distracts us from examining Hemingway's fictions for their own sake. Ben Ray Redman's words of caution, spelled out in his review of Across the River and Into the Trees, seem eminently sensible. He observes: "Perhaps we really do know too much about Hemingway, or at least his public poses, to judge his work impartially. If this is so, all of us ... should do our heroic best to thrust aside our knowledge, or half-

knowledge. Otherwise we shall never be able to see clearly the book in hand, the book-in-itself."

If the biographical critics tend to lose sight of making legitimate and necessary discriminations and distinctions between Hemingway and the Hemingway hero, the author's penchant for self-gratifying, autobiographical writing at places gives way to his totally unacceptable self-glorification. He then throws to wind all the basic norms of separating and distancing himself from his created work, and replaces the much needed artistic discipline by notations of self applause. Edmund Wilson brings home this uncondonable lacunae when he contrasts Hemingway's Green Hills of Africa and Death in the Afternoon with his short stories. He suggests that when Hemingway expounds his sense of life "in his own character of Ernest Hemingway, the Old Master of Key West," as he does in Green Hills Africa and Death in the Afternoon "he has a way of sounding silly": but when he transmits this sense of life objectively, as in most of his short stories, the outcome is "as hard as crystal and as disturbing as a great lyric." The two books, therefore, tend to become "fatuous or maudlin" in contrast to the short stories where Hemingway's art stays "severe, intense and deeply serious." The primary of artistic transformation of reality over mere self-expression, which Northrop Frye insisted on in the case of Wordsworth's poetry, is therefore quite applicable to Hemingway's works. Frye held: "There is no self-expression in Wordsworth's poem, because once the poem is there the individual Wordsworth has disappeared. The general principle involved is that there is no such thing as self-expression in literature." In vintage Hemingway too the self is taken over by the artistic output; and whenever it attempts precedence over art it inevitably bludgeons the artistic endeavour.

It therefore follows that both Hemingway the man and Hemingway the artist, though aspects of the same personality, stood far apart. This distinction, otherwise a commonplace of literary criticism, stays at the centre of any meaningful discussion of Hemingway's works. Hemingway the man was obviously the self but Hemingway the artist was, in a manner of speaking, the other self. The man aimed at public acclamation, the artist at a niche of immortality. The man went for money, the artist into what money does to man. The man flaunted his courage, the artist probed the problems of holding on to one's courage. The man revelled in his virility, the artist captured the adjustments and maladjustments in man-woman relationships. The man paraded himself as a war-hero and a war-veteran, the artist kept up a lifelong love-hate affair with war. The man was at times a reckless public brawler, the artist was reticent and disciplined. The man was at times a reckless public brawler, the artist was reticent and disciplined. The man sought to excel others; the artist to excel himself, to scrutinize his own self-divisions and self-conflicts, and to resolve these into controlled art.

2.1.5 Objectivity

Early in life, Hemingway the artist, disciplined, probing, self-divided and ambivalent, realized the paramount significance of artistic objectivity in writing. In an article published in the Esquire Magazine in 1935, he wrote: "As a man, things are as they should be or should not be. As a man you know who is right and who is wrong. You have to make decisions and enforce them. As a writer you should not judge. You should understand." The implications in this journalistic piece, appropriately called "Monologue to the Maestro, " are clear: as a writer Hemingway is concerned with what is and not what "should be or should not be," with who is who and not "who is right and who is wrong," with imaginative realization and projection of experience and not with pronouncing judgement on it.

It is therefore interesting to note how Hemingway's creative anxiety manifested itself through his ambivalence when not conflicting attitudes and responses towards the subjects he wrote about, such as big-game hunting, deep-sea fishing, bull-fighting and the war. He came to love and admire the animals he hunted, feel a sense of oneness and brotherhood with the fish he harpooned and bagged, and experience 'the

moment of truth' in bullfights when "man and bull form one figure as the sword goes all the way in, the leaning after it, death uniting the two figures." Likewise he found the experience of war invaluable and irreplaceable as also irrational and devastating. Thus Hemingway's sense of relating himself with the hunter and the hunted, the bullfighter and the bull, the fisherman and the fish and of love-hate relationship with the war helped him to write "without tricks and without cheating, and 'with nothing that will go bad afterwards."

Some of the general aspects of Hemingway's objectivity have been pointed out by Robert C.Hart in his article "Hemingway on Writing" published in College English in 1957. He refuses to force his material and bend his fictions, Hart opines, to any preconceived design. Ideas in his short stories, therefore, are not subjectively imposed upon but objectively lived out. Action is not what should happen but "what would have to happen as it (the story) goes along." Themes are seldom meant to solve a problem, and never "to confirm a solution already laid down." Characters are not fictionalized prejudices and partialities of the author but artistic explorations into human nature, a certain pressing forward into it. And structures keep out "what is non-functional or even malfunctional," and imply prose as "architecture, not interior decoration."

On these fundamentals Hemingway made no compromise. He was critical of the writers who evaded or ignored these requirements. He criticized Poe for his predetermined effects even if these were "marvellously constructed", Melville for the excess of rhetoric, and Hawthorne and company for not using "the words that survive in language." He even disapproved of Tolstoy, a writer he admired most, for that part of War and Peace "where Tolstoy tampered with the truth to make it fit his conclusions." His endeavour throughout remained "to write as truly, as straightly, as objectively and as humbly as possible."

2.1.6 Code of Conduct

The code of conduct, so insistently discerned and so vigorously established in Hemingway's oeuvre by Philip Young, has also been a matter of much debate and controversy. Quite a number of Hemingway's works do embody great admiration for certain values of the code such as courage, honour, duty, discipline etc. But not all of them seem to adhere or even relate to the norms of the code. The code unquestionably operates "among various sporting figures" of Hemingway's short stories and the code hero in distinctly noticeable in some of them. But contrary to Philip Young's proposition, both the code and the code hero do not offer "solution to the problems of a large number of the protagonists of Hemingway's short stories, if only because they neither figure in nor are relevant to them. Their protagonists, when confronted with a test-situation or a nasty experience, do not look to any 'code' or 'code hero': they look to life itself, and learn or fail to learn from it. The code of conduct, therefore, may be central and basic to some of Hemingway's short stories; but it is also irrelevant and beside the point in quite a good number of them.

It is in this sense that the presence of courage and honour in Manuel, an old-growing but intensely committed bullfighter, is an integral and indispensable aspect of his character in "The Undefeated": but the same sense of courage and honour is not required of Nick in "The Battler" when he is threatened with the thoughtless violence of Ad. It may even be stupidly hazardous of Nick's father in "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" when he is provoked into quarrelling by Dick Boulton, a bum. Again, lack of physical courage in Macomber who bolts when charged by the lion he had wounded is clearly cowardly of him as a big-game hunter in "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber": but the need for this kind of bravery may be utterly irrelevant to the older waiter in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" much though he is involved in the larger fate of mankind.

It therefore seems more appropriate to say that Hemingway's characters, instead of seeking to follow the code as defined and elaborated by Philip Young, seek what James B. Colvert calls "a new morality in action" based on empirical methods and practical experiences. They "reject all value judgements of the past" and "consciously search out the meaning of experience." The meaning arises for them out of their interaction with other characters in the specific fictionalized context. It is rooted in the author's consideration of real-life experiences, not in any infallible and dogmatic code of conduct.

2.1.7 Symbolism

Symbolism and irony, attributes of the art of implication and indirection, are among the major narrative techniques of Hemingway. He makes ample use of both of them in order to interpret the complex reality of his times imaginatively and to lend multiple nuances and resonances to his writing. E.M. Halliday, making the distinction between the two, observes that all human perceptions are "reducible" finally to perceptions of likeness of perceptions of difference, and that symbolism, in the main, points to the "perceptions of likeness" and irony to "those of difference". He also adds that "symbolism signifies through a harmony, irony through a discord; symbolism consolidates, irony complicates; symbolism synthesizes, irony analyzes." Symbolism in Hemingway, we may further add is often a visible sign of something invisible, the small tip of the iceberg on the surface of water suggestive of its seven times larger mass under the surface. It is also a concrete and distinctly notable manifestation of the less concrete and less distinctly notable facet of human experience.

The use of symbolism in Hemingway, it needs be noted, is vastly different from that of the better known symbolists like Poe, Hawthorne and Melville. Unlike theirs, his symbols are not designed to serve the ends of some fable, parable or allegory: nor do they dwell in the realms of magic, mystery or fantasy. In fact Hemingway's kinship with "Poe and Hawthorne and Melville: the haunted and nocturnal writers, the men who dealt in images that were symbols of an inner world," as suggested by Malcolm Cowley, can not be pressed very far. It was a tentative observation made to draw attention to the then unnoticed symbols in Hemingway's works. To be sure, Cowley himself admitted that Hemingway's method was "not in the least like theirs," that his visions though as terrifying as those of Poe ("The Pit and the Pendulum," for instance) were invariably " copied from life, " and that in his fictions he never "seems to loosen his grip on reality" which may not quite be the case, for instance, with Hawthorne in The Marble Fawn. "Haunted" therefore Hemingway may be, as suggested by Cowley, but haunted by an experienced physical reality of the world in our time. "Nightmares" there are in his books, but these are "realities that have become a nightmare.

Hemingway therefore makes the best of both realism and symbolism to communicate his meanings. He retains all the naturalistic and factual details of a realist seeking meaning in actual experience: but he also unfolds the complexity and multiplicity of human experience through its secondary meanings at symbolic level. It is due to such an aesthetic stance that Hemingway's symbols are connotative not denotative, contextual not allegorical. Their significances vary with changing situations. They even trip themselves. The high mountains, associated with peace, permanence and immortality in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" also symbolize the conditions of unnatural living in "An Alpine Idyll," leading to much of the shame and confusion of the upland peasant. Also, they are debunked in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" itself, for while tramping along the snowy mountains feet get bloody and people die. Again, women often symbolic of the home in Hemingway, are nowhere around the "home" the old man seeks for himself in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" or Nick makes for himself in "Big Two-Hearted River." In fact, many a time Hemingway's aim is simply a symbolism of association. The utterances of his characters on such occasions are at once factual and symbolic. Take for instance, "(I am) with all those who need a light for the night" in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place:" "You could not get

away from the sun" in "An Alpine Idyll;" I'm not in His Kingdom" in "Soldier's Home."

It therefore appears that Hemingway was totally on the side of Nick Adams (In "The Three-Day Blow") who disapproved of the symbol of naked sword between the forest lovers lying together. Like Nick he would wonder "what good the sword would do. It would have to say edge up all the time because if it went over flat, you could roll right over it and it wouldn't make nay trouble". Like Nick, too, he wouldn't find it "practical' enough. To be practical, symbols for Hemingway have to be rooted in real-life experiences and operate convincingly.

2.1.8 Irony

The principle of irony in Hemingway largely rests on what Heakon Chevalier has called a contrast between appearance and reality, between surface meaning and under-the-surface meaning. Behind such contrast stands out "the possible other case, the case rich and edifying where the actuality is pretentious and vain." Manifestations of this principle of contrast in Hemingway's short stories are persistent, recurring and varied. It may be a contrast within a character, or within a situation; or a contrast between two characters, or between two situations. Also, it may be a contrasted view of an idea, an ideal, an episode, an event and an action. As a rule, the sharper the contrast, the more striking the irony; also, the more complex the contrast, the more cumulative the effect of irony.

This cardinal principle of ironic contrast in Hemingway manifests itself in various facets and forms of "confident unawareness" in his characters which may be both real and pretended. When real this confident unawareness may be complete or partial. and when pretended it may be self-assertive or self-deceptive. Complete unawareness, the commonest and simplest prop for irony, is reflected for example in the platitudinous American mother in "A Canary for One" who, impervious to reality, insists that "American men make the best husbands" or in the blindly confident younger waiter in "A Clean, Well-Lighted Place" who, impatient to go home and unaware of the horrors of *nada*, bullies the old man (the last, lone customer) into leaving the clean, bright café. Compared with this complete unawareness, Hemingway's use of incomplete unawareness, a mix-up of awareness and unawareness in various measures, is subtler and more effective. It is betrayed, for instance, by the doctor in "Indian camp" which is distinctly competent at surgery but totally ignorant of the consequences of humanly intolerable emotional strain; or by Mr. Frazer in "The Gambler, the Nun, and the Radio" who has plenty of knowledge but little understanding.

At the other end of the scale, as opposed to the real unawareness (complete or partial) the pretended unawareness is a 'mask of dissimulation,' a certain "pretending to be what one is not and pretending not to be what one is." It may be self-assertive as in the American in "Hills Like White Elephants" and the man in "the Sea Change" who both refuse to see the reality even though it stares them in the face. But it may also be self-deceptive as in the Elliots in "Mr. And Mrs. Elliot" who pretend to be "very happy" in a situation of perverted compromise, or in Jig in "Hills Like White Elephants" who pretends to "feel fine" even as she unwillingly submits to a forced abortion.

However, quite often in Hemingway the contrast emerges not between a reality and an appearance but between two contextual realities. It points not to the correction of a false experience by a true one, but to two real and true experiences. It then suggests flat, ironic dualities in life each true in its own right, for the reader does not see what is and what merely seems. Human experiences, then, go their contrary or opposite ways, convincingly refuting one another. They are impelled by contradictory pulls, and yield antithetical and antipodal meanings. Ironic contrasts then shade off into ironic contradictions and ironic self-contradictions, typical of the present-day drift in

the concept of irony. In "The Battler," for instance, when Nick is knocked off a moving freight by an apparently friendly brakeman he realizes the need to be tough; but soon after, when he witnesses the degeneracy and mental sickness of Ad, the tough ex-prizefighter, he realizes that toughness also does not do.

Of the many critics of Hemingway who have discussed the function of irony in his fictions, E.M. Halliday has cogently made out the case: "The ironic gap between expectation and fulfillment, pretense and fact, intention and action, the message sent and the message received, the way things are thought or ought to be and the way things are – this has been Hemingway's great theme from the beginning; and it has called for an ironic method to do it artistic justice." J.J. Benson, however, notes the greater significance of ironic detachment in Hemingway's art and finds it central to a good number of Hemingway stories and novels and instrumental in restraining too close an identification of their protagonists with the author.

To be sure, Hemingway's kind of ironic detachment prevents him from accepting half-truths in his long odyssey to arrive at the truth. It keeps him longer on the way and avoids any hasty finality. The finality in the form implied discriminations, affirmations even resolutions may come; but not before the author has taken into account the fuller context, the multiplicity of possibilities, the complexity of issues involved; not too soon or too easily. All this makes for the characteristic Hemingway's view and method of resolving the discords of life into controlled art.

2.2 *A CLEAN WELL-LIGHTED PLACE*

2.2.1 Introducing the Story

Almost all the significant short stories of Hemingway came out between 1921 and 1938. "Up in Michigan," his first short story, was written in '1921; followed by the publication of In Our Time, his first collection of short stories, in 1925. Two more collections, Men without Women and Winner Take Nothing, appeared in 1927 and 1933 respectively. Crowning them all came The Fifth Column and The First Fortynine Stories in 1938, the volume which included all the earlier stories and a few new ones and which finally established his reputation as a short story writer.

Themes and concerns of these stories as also their modes of writing and formal strategies have already been examined at considerable length in the preceding section. Of Hemingway's formal strategies, it may be noted here, his objective writing and his use of symbolic and ironic implications contributed hugely towards his success as a short story writer. The objective writing helped him to eliminate authorial intrusions and comments and to strip down the delineation of his material to 'the sequence of motion and fact which made the emotion', and his symbolic and ironic implications engendered multi-layered significances in the creative endeavour. They led to a foregrounding of the skills of condensation and compression in his stories as well as of the projection of maximum meanings through minimum words, and went a long way in shaping him as a powerful short story writer.

Little wonder, therefore, if some of the perceptive Hemingway critics consider him a greater short story writer than a novelist. Ray West, for instance, holds that Hemingway's supremacy is "least in question" in his stories which, he suggests, may not be the case with the author's novels. Philip Young also gives greater kudos to the stories. Summing up Hemingway's literary situation Young concludes: "Hemingway wrote two very good early novels several very good stories and a few great ones." P.F. Paolini goes a step further and categorically maintains: "It would be neither wrong nor overbold to see the best of Hemingway in his short stories," for they embody " a kind of 'Hemingway in its purest state." Such observations are a glowing testimony to what Hemingway could achieve with his masterly pruning of language and his iceberg principle of writing.

"A Clean well-lighted Place," included in Hemingway's short story collection Winner Take Nothing forces attention to this impressive control of the author over his craft. Published in the year 1933, it is rather a plotless story in which nothing much happen. In the late hours of night, at a clean well-lighted café, two waiters one young and the other old, while attending upon their lone last customer, an old man of eighty, intermittently talk about his recently attempted suicide: and when the old man finally leaves the café, they pull down the shutters and go home. But this simple story-line is so deftly handled with a profusion of vigorously controlled techniques that the outcome leaves an indelible effect. Through the bits and pieces of the narrative and the dialogues Hemingway builds up a gripping contrast between the two waiters, imbues their behaviour and conduct with disciplined strokes of symbolism and irony, and tellingly inscribes the theme of nothingness and night, of the all-powerful and all-engulfing sense of 'nada', especially in the old man's life. The story also relates to the autobiographical aspects of Hemingway's life and his affinity with the existentialist writers like Sartre and Camus: but in the main it makes for a brightly focussed but stark portraiture of an old man whose despair exists beyond his plenty of money and who walks out of the clean well-lighted café only when he has to, 'unsteadily but with dignity', precisely the way it was with him. The mere four-page story, evocatively chiselled and crafted, remains a chilling little masterpiece, and understandably, a favourite of Hemingway.

2.2.2 Contrasted Characters

The pattern of contrast between the characters of the younger and the older waiters rapidly gathers momentum as the story forges ahead with the alternation of its narrative and dialogues. Although the two waiters work together at the same café, temperamentally they stand poles apart. The younger waiter is not aware of the old man's (their last customer) needs outside of money and material satisfaction: to him these are 'nothing' and absurd and for no reason. But the older waiter allows room for such needs since these may drive people to kill themselves. The younger waiter is in a hurry to close the cafe: the older waiter is unhurried because "there may be someone who needs the cafe" at these odd hours. The younger waiter, though he waits upon the old man, is sarcastic and hostile; and taking advantage of his customer's deafness says, "You should have killed yourself last week". But the older waiter knows that the old man is clean and has dignity and "that is all that is provided for these hours". The one is cynical and callous about the soldier with the girl and says, "What does it matter if he (the guard) gets what he's after?" The other is compassionate and says, "He (the soldier) had better got off the street now". The one is "all confidence", all faith in himself oblivious of the test-situations of life in which these may prove altogether brittle and fragile. He has youth and a wife to go home to, and does not see the possibility that he may someday be as old as the old man and may outlive the wife like the old man. The other waiter can visualize such terrors of human existence and can identify with the old man's predicament.

2.2.3 Narrative Techniques

The younger waiter, therefore, betrays a sense of arrested awareness and his perceptions are restricted to noticing only his needs of and their fulfilment with a wife, a job, youth, confidence and money. His concerns are myopic, constricted and self-centered,reckoning only with the immediate, transcient and altogether personal. (We may note his sarcastic remark to the old deaf man and his callous observation about the soldier with the girl.) He does not see that in the flux and whirligig of man's life job does imply loss of job, wife does imply loss of wife, youth does imply age, confidence death of confidence, and money loss of money. He stands in sharp ironic contrast with the older waiter who is conscious of all these atrophying and despairing implications and who reflects larger awareness, concern and empathy. Hence, to the younger waiter the old man tried to kill himself for 'nothing' (for no reason) because he has plenty of money, but to the older waiter the despair of the old man who has now turned eighty, is deaf, unsteady on his feet, and bereft of a wife, is

a despair beyond plenty. The older waiter can see that the old man's home, traditionally a symbol of security and comfort, has, as Carlos Baker indicates, turned into a symbol of 'not-home', and the clean well-lighted café may be the only 'home' where he prefers to stay in as long as permitted. Confronted with this larger awareness of the dark forces of multifaceted 'nada' the older waiter symbolically affirms his solidarity with all the benighted brethren: he is with "those who like to stay late at the café. With all those who do not want to go to bed. With all those who need a light for the night." And towards the end of the story when he ponders that he himself would not be able to sleep at night, he self-deceptively says to himself: "It is probably only insomnia. Many must have it" In fact, it is, more probably, insomnia caused by nada, although one wouldn't ever be too sure of it. The dispassionate notations of the lived experience of 'nada', couched in ironic dualities and symbolic nuances very much stay at the centre-stage of the story.

2.2.4 Theme of Nothingness

Despite all the fellow-feeling and solidarity of the older waiter with the cruel predicament of the old man, it needs to be noted, 'nada' has the last laugh in the story. While turning off the lights of the cafe the older waiter continues to reflect on the old man's fate and says aloud: "It was a nothing that he knew too well. It was all a nothing and a man was nothing too... Some lived in it and never felt it but he knew it was all 'nada'". Indeed in a universe which is stripped of all meaning and where man is finally deprived of all the things that can sustain him, 'nada' is the stark reality. The older waiter acknowledges the centrality an omnipotence of this swirling an encircling tide of 'nada', of humankind reaching the end of its teether, and of God having abandoned the world. The older waiter therefore replaces, in blasphemous terms, the lord's prayer with the 'nada' prayer.

> Our nada who art in nada, nada be thy name thy kingdom nada thy will be nada in nada as it is in nada. Give us this nada our daily nada and nada us our nada as we nada our nadas and nada us not into nada but deliver us from nada; pues nada. Hail nothing full of nothing, nothing is with thee.

This stoic and pensive resignation to 'nada' is further affirmed when on the way home the older waiter stops at a bar, and in response to the barman's question "What's yours?" says "Nada". Perhaps what he really wants are clean well-lighted places of life but in the midst of surrounding nada can ask only for a bit of the same. Perhaps, as H.M. Campbell suggests, "In his weary fancy he even imagines that the effects of 'nada' may be overcome if he considers that he is drinking it. If the younger waiter is an unconscious victim of life's ironic contingencies, the older waiter is their conscious victim; and neither of them can do anything to dispel them.

This projection of the overwhelming power of nothingness and of man's ways of facing down this power by maintaining his separate identity and dignity brings Hemingway close to the existentialist writers. It may however be noted that whereas "to Sartre the meaninglessness is basically an idea (and) to Camus, the absurd is a concept." Hemingway's sense of meaninglessness and absurdity is not based on any philosophical idea or concept. In writing about them he merely reports on life as he finds it. To him all ideas and concepts are valueless: life's experience is the only value. He cares for an idea only to the extent it is "derived from seeing life," and refuses to "see life according to an idea." This story also attests such a contention and depicts "the irreducible hazards and pains of life" without philosophizing or conceptualizing them.

2.2.5 Autobiographical Element

Such ceaseless assaults of nothingness as projected in this story, it may be argued, took their toll from Hemingway himself during the last few years of his life. Those were the days of a very special kind of agony for the always one-up, always

charismatic Hemingway. Most of his friends and companions were either dead or estranged and he had frequent spells of depression and loneliness. His proverbial strength and stamina had gone and he could no longer hunt or fish or shoot the way he once used to. His magic capacity to turn out enduring prose (the ultimate weapon against life) seemed to have gone bad forever and the right words wouldn't simply come to his mind. In sum, he was reduced to a wreck of his former self both in life and in art. Shockingly discovering that he had now landed 'in another country' where the 'clean well-lighted places' of life were getting increasingly shut to him, Hemingway may have pulled the trigger into his forehead and embraced 'the old whore' with self-inflicted wound.

This could be, as Earl Rovit has suggested, the author's "way of selling a position that could no longer be held" calculated punishment of that aspect of himself which had failed him in his need." This could also be his way of demonstrating that he could be destroyed, even self-destroyed, but not defeated. But this was also and quite simply a situation of his destruction at the hands of an omnipotent nothingness. It was sad but inevitable, in view of how he saw and lived life; a case of aggressive isolation in a world which refused to make sense any more and where the presiding metaphor became the nothingness of it all. The epigraph Hemingway wrote for his volume of short stories Winner Take Nothing, could as well be applicable to him: "Unlike all other forms of lutte or combat, "such are the conditions in the game of life that Hemingway "shall take nothing; neither his ease, nor his pleasure, nor any notions of glory. If take he must, he takes his own life.

2.2.6 Objectivity

Whatever the extent of the resemblance between the latter-day predicament of Hemingway and that of the protagonist in "A Clean Well-lighted Place," it does not in the least compromise his high regard for objective writing. His objectivity in this depiction of potted human conditions lies in what Wayne C. Booth has called an artist's "impassibilite." The author remains at once concerned yet detached, at once ardent yet reasonable. He keeps out any intrusive streak of rhetoric, and maintains "an impassioned rejection of passion." In doing so, he acquires a sort of classical control over his material, and attempts only to discern and realize, and not to judge. Of course, his implicit assumptions, leanings, approvals and disapprovals, discriminations and distinctions are not wiped out from the story, for his is an objectivity within the folds of artistic propriety and norms and not a scientist's neutrality. A scientist, dealing with physical material and chemical salts can be legitimately neutral towards them: but an artist, dealing with human material, emotions and values, cannot be neutral likewise. Hemingway's objectivity in "A Clean Well-lighted Place" therefore lies in his letting his people speak for themselves, in his letting his narrative unfold itself: the author just holds his tongue and, in a manner of speaking, keeps his hands off the story.

2.3 LET US SUM UP

Hemingway's themes, characters and situations signify a limited world; nonetheless they make for, you must have observed, an intensely realized world. Again, his mode of writing and techniques are simplicity itself: nonetheless this simplicity conveys a lot more than it seems to convey. "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" is a glowing testimony to such a practice of the craft of short story writing.

2.4 GLOSSARY

Irony: The expression of one's meaning by saying something which is the direct opposite of one's thoughts, in order to make one's remarks forceful.

Metaphor: Metaphor is "an implied comparison" "a simile without 'like' or 'as'. It is a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of object or idea is used in place of another by way of suggesting a likeness or analogy between them.

Objective Correlative: In his essay, 'Harlet and His Problems' T.S. Eliot used this term to explain how emotion is best expressed in poetry. "Objective correlative is a set of objects, a situation, a chain of events which shall be the formula of that particular emotion, such that when the external facts, which must terminate in sensory experience, are given, the emotion is immediately evoked."

Realism: it denotes a literary movement of the nineteenth century. It shows real life, omitting nothing that is ugly and painful and idealizing nothing, in art and literature.

Symbolism: an artistic and poetic movement or style using symbols and indirect suggestion to express ideas emotions etc.

2.5 QUESTIONS

1. Compare and contrast the characters of the two waiters pointing to the role they play in "A Clean Well-Lighted Place"
2. Examine the theme of "A Clean Well-Lighted Place" and the techniques Hemingway employs to project this theme.
3. Discuss the major concerns of Hemingway in his short stories and the formal strategies he often adopts in highlighting them.

2.6 SUGGESTED READINGS

1. Philip Young, *Ernest Hemingway: A Reconsideration* (1966).
2. Carlos Baker, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist* (revised edition) 1974.
3. Scott Donaldson, *By Force of Will: The Life and Art of Ernest Hemingway* (1978).
4. Frank Scapella (edited), *Hemingway: Essays of Reassessment* (1990).
5. Kenneth H. Rosen (edited), *Hemingway Repossessed* (1994).