Serenity in Turmoil: With Special Reference to *In Our Time*

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Serenity in Turmoil
— With Special Reference to In Our Time —

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1. Introduction

Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961) is well-known for being a very active man. He loved fishing and hunting. He was given a fishing rod when he was three years old and given a gun of his own when he was ten. When he was young, he fished in a stream or a pond in the neighborhood. When he grew up, he fished in the Gulf Stream. His fishing experiences are skillfully put in works such as In Our Time and The Old Man and the Sea.

He loved hunting, too. When young, he shot at small birds and animals in the woods and when he grew up he went to Africa to hunt big game. These experiences appear in his works such as "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and "The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber." Hemingway writes in "Fathers and Sons" in Winner Take Nothing that "[...]he [Nick, protagonist] was very grateful to him [Nick’s father] for two things; fishing and shooting" (228).

Hemingway went to a lot of wars as an ambulance driver or a reporter. He loved seeing bull-fights, too. He is said to have experienced bull-fighting as an amateur bull-fighter. He makes Jake Barnes, protagonist of The Sun Also Rises, say, "Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bull-fighters" (10). And he also writes in Death in the Afternoon that "The only place where you could see life and death, i.e., violent death now that the wars were over, was in the bull ring and I wanted very much to go to Spain where I could study it" (2).

Hemingway was very active and his behavior was full of hard actions. The days he lived in were in turmoil. The minds of the characters in his works, however, seem to be very serene, or to strongly desire serenity. What Hemingway wants to be seems to be reflected in the agonies of his characters struggling for serenity of mind in this world of turmoil.

The aim of this paper is to exemplify this view by picking up some short stories in Hemingway’s first book titled In Our Time and concretely clarifying the protagonists’ efforts towards serenity of mind in the hard world of disturbance and uncertainty.

2. "Indian Camp"

"Indian Camp" begins with young Nick’s crossing a lake by rowboats with his father and his uncle in the early morning. Though Nick doesn’t know this, they are going to visit an Indian camp to help a woman have a baby.

"Where are we going, Dad?" Nick asked.
“Over to the Indian camp. There is an Indian lady very sick.”
“Oh,” said Nick. (15)

This conversation shows Nick is here without knowing anything about the place or reason where or why they are going. He should naturally feel very unsettled.

They cross the lake by two separate rowboats in the early morning; in one boat sit Nick and his father, and in the other does Uncle George. In each boat there is an Indian rower. The Indian rowing Nick and his father is a poor rower. The distance between the boat carrying Nick and his father and the one carrying Uncle George grows wider and wider. Nick’s uneasiness increases.

The two boats started off in the dark. Nick heard the oarlocks of the other boat quite a way ahead of them in the mist. The Indians rowed with quick choppy strokes. Nick lay back with his father’s arm around him. It was cold on the water. The Indian who was rowing them was working very hard, but the other boat moved further ahead in the mist all the time. (15)

The mist in the early morning causes Nick’s uneasiness to swell up. He can’t see the other boat or anything in the mist. All he can do is hear the oarlocks of the other boat. The noise of the other boat is fainter and fainter. He is very confused and feels very “cold” on the water, although he is held by his father.

Hemingway’s use of words such as “cold,” “cool,” “clean,” and “clear” is very important. Those words are often used to express the state of his characters’ present minds.

The scene Nick sees the instant he steps into the shanty gives Nick a terrible shock.

Inside on a wooden bunk lay a young Indian woman. She had been trying to have her baby for two days. All the old women in the camp had been helping her. The men had moved off up the road to sit in the dark and smoke out of the range of the noise she made. She screamed just as Nick and the two Indians followed his father and Uncle George into the shanty. She lay in the lower bunk, very big under a quilt. Her head was turned to one side. In the upper bunk was her husband. He had cut his foot very badly with an ax three days before. He was smoking a pipe. The room smelled very bad. (16)

Nick steps into the world of “women without men” except the expectant mother’s husband who can’t move off because he has received a serious injury to his foot. The author emphasizes this fact by putting the sentence of “The men had moved off up the road to sit[…] out of the range of the noise she made.” Nick first hears the woman’s scream at the moment of his stepping into the shanty. He notices the bigness of the woman’s belly under a quilt. He is aware of her being pregnant. The smell of a pipe increases his sense of the mess of the place. Nick gets an awful shock through the three senses of sight, sound, and smell.

Hemingway wrote a letter to his father on 20 March 1925 saying, “You see I’m trying in all my stories to get the feeling of the actual life across—not to just depict life—or criticize it—but to actually make it alive. So that when you have read something by me you actually experience

Nick, terribly shocked at the messy world, asks his father, who is a doctor, “Oh, Daddy, can’t you give her something to make her stop screaming?” (16) but in vain. It takes a long time, Nick feels.

The operation ends in great success. A newborn baby breathes out his first breath, and his mother is calm and quiet with her eyes closed. Nick’s father mounts on the edge of the lower bunk in great exaltation to see the mother’s husband, only to find that he has killed himself by cutting his throat with a razor. Nick’s father is completely upset and apologizes to Nick. “I’m terribly sorry I brought you along, Nickie, [...]. It is awful mess to put you through” (18).

In contrast to the confusion of Nick’s father, Nick is very calm. He asks his father about women having babies and about the death of men. In the story, the sentence “It was just beginning to be daylight when they walked [...] back toward the lake” (18) contrasts with the confusion of Nick’s father. And after Nick’s questions about life and death is put the following passage.

They were seated in the boat, Nick in the stern, his father rowing. The sun was coming up over the hills. A bass jumped, making a circle in the water. Nick trailed his hand in the water. It felt warm in the sharp chill of the morning.

In the early morning on the lake sitting in the stern of the boat with his father rowing, he felt quite sure that he would never die. (19)

The reference to the dawn, emphatically repeated, implies that Nick is just stepping into a day of the messy world and he has got his first satisfactory comprehension of the real world. His mind is calm and quiet, warm and peaceful. Nick, whose eyes follow a small fish jumping and making a circle in the water, is very serene. The warmness and confidence of his mind, stemming from his comprehension of the real world, are carried to readers through the warmness of the water. The warmness of Nick’s mind after the inspiring incident makes a sharp contrast to the coldness of his mind before the incident. Nick sits in the stern by himself after the incident while he lay back with his father’s arm around him a few hours ago. He makes his mind function steadily and firmly, and sets out on a rough journey for being independent.

3. “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife”

In “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife,” Nick’s father engages in two conflicts; one is with Dick Boulton, a worker from an Indian camp whom Nick’s father asks to cut up logs for him, and the other is with his wife. In the former, Dick insists that the logs which he is asked to saw up are stolen by Nick’s father, while Nick’s father says that the logs are driftwood, assuming the logs should be left on the beach to waterlog and rot. Their argument is so fierce that the doctor, Nick’s father, yells at the worker, “If you call me Doc once again, I’ll knock your eye teeth down your throat” (25). The row, however, doesn’t develop into violence, ending in Nick’s father going back to his cottage and Dick and two fellows walking back into the woods without cutting the logs up. The figure of Nick’s father when he goes back to his cottage is shown as follows:
“They [Dick and his fellows] could see from his back how angry he was” (25). The fierceness of the doctor's anger is more vividly carried to readers by showing him through those hostile eyes, not from the front but from the back.

Home should idealistically be a comfortable place to heal wounds suffered outdoors. In reality, however, home often retains some discord in it. Biographers of Ernest Hemingway, including Carlos Baker, point out there was some discord between the author's father and his mother. In “The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife,” the first words Nick’s father hears after being back at home are, “Aren’t you going back to work, dear?” (25) These words are uttered by his wife from a darkened room with the blinds drawn. The conversation following the words above makes it clear that Nick’s father and his wife are estranged from each other. The conversation is carried out with a wall between. There is a wall between the husband and the wife mentally as well as physically. The wife, persuading her husband not to lose his temper easily, asks him what the cause of his row with the worker was. He gives her what he thinks the cause was, which she doesn’t believe. She never believes in his words. She repeats, “Dear, I don’t think, I really don’t think that any one would really do a thing like that,” “No. I can’t really believe that any one would do a thing of the sort intentionally” (26). The husband makes up his mind to go out for a walk for a change. When he steps out on the porch the screen door makes a big noise of “bang” behind him. The tension between the wife and the husband rises to the utmost:

The screen door slammed behind him. He heard his wife catch her breath when the door slammed.

“Sorry,” he said, outside her window with the blinds drawn.

“It’s all right, dear,” she said. (26-27)

At the moment of the tension growing extremely tight, the author makes the husband apologize to her and keep their resentment from blowing up. The husband walks into the woods, where he feels at home.

The coziness he feels in the woods is shown in these sentences: “He walked in the heat out the gate and along the path into the hemlock woods. It was cool in the woods even on such a hot day” (27). (Italics are mine.) The word of “cool” is used to carry the state of the character’s mind to readers. This sentence with the word of “cool” in is most important. Nick’s father has had a row with Dick Boulton and has had a conflict with his wife in the cottage, and in the woods he can get complete comfort. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” the last story in In Our Time, after Nick has traveled a lot, seen life, and been hurt, he is back in the woods where he spent his childhood. The outer world is in turmoil, and in the woods there is something genuine. The woods make a person feel serene.

Nick’s father finds Nick in the woods in “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.” The father remembers being asked by his wife to give Nick a message that Nick should come to see his mother.

“Your mother wants you to come and see her,” the doctor said.
“I want to go with you,” Nick said.
His father looked down at him.
“All right. Come on, then,” his father said. “Give me the book, I’ll put it in my pocket.”
“I know where there’s black squirrels, Daddy,” Nick said.
“All right,” said his father. “Let’s go there.” (27)

This is the ending part of “The Doctor and the Doctor’s Wife.” Ignoring the mother’s request, Nick and his father go deep into the woods. Nick’s father willingly accepts his son’s disobedience to his mother. The woods are the place which Nick’s mother doesn’t go into. The woods are a place of refuge from the world. They are a sanctuary. Nick and his father are innocent and genuine in the woods, and enjoy themselves there. Escaping from the noisy world, Nick as well as his father can be cool and clear and serene.

4. “The End of Something”

Everything that stands will eventually perish. Hortons Bay used to be a prosperous lumber town. The sound of the big saws in the mill was heard everywhere in the town. Everyone in the town had something to do with the mill. One day, however, “there were no more logs to make lumber” (31). Then the mill perished and the town itself perished, too.

Ten years later, the love affair of Nick and Marjorie develops in the background of the ruins of the town above. All the remains of the mill are the broken white limestone of its foundations. Marjorie is very merry and pleased to fish with Nick while Nick makes half-hearted replies.

“There’s our old ruin, Nick,” Marjorie said.
Nick, rowing, looked at the white stone in the green trees.
“There it is,” he said.
“Can you remember when it was a mill?” Marjorie asked.
“I can just remember,” Nick said.
“It seems more like a castle,” Marjorie said.
Nick said nothing. (32)

The estrangement is unveiled as time goes on. By the time they set the fishing rods and spread a blanket out and unpack the basket of supper she has brought, their feelings are far apart from each other.

They sat on the blanket without touching each other and watched the moon rise. (34)

The author is very good at suggesting the feelings of the boy and the girl. There spreads a body of water in front of them. Hills stand across the bay and the moon is rising from behind the hills. They sit on a blanket side by side in the evening breeze. Nobody is there except them. The setting is like one in a romantic film. Nick and Marjorie, however, just sit on a blanket without touching each other, watching the moon rise. The sentence above shows their feelings
very clearly and definitely.

After Marjorie goes, Nick can do nothing but lie down with his face in the blanket.

She was afloat in the boat on the water with the moonlight on it. Nick went back and lay down with his face in the blanket by the fire. He could hear Marjorie rowing on the water. He lay there for a long time. (35)

Nick’s face is in the blanket. He cannot see anything. He can only hear the sound of Marjorie rowing farther away little by little. Nick’s agony is more effectively carried to readers by appealing to the sense of hearing, as it is in the mist of early morning in “Indian Camp.”

The cause of the couple’s estrangement is not clear here. The breakup of their love affair is so abrupt to Marjorie. But the love affair carried out in the background of the rise and the fall of the town should be expected to turn out to have this ending. Nick, growing up, experiences love and its breakup. He has told Marjorie what he has to say, and agonizes over it. The difference between the social positions of their families—Marjorie is from an Indian family and Nick is a son of a doctor—is suggested to be the cause of their separation in “The Three-Day Blow,” but nothing is said in “The End of Something.” The interest of the work is on Nick, and he experiences a hard agony and endures it very well. An Indian husband in “Indian Camp” kills himself. At this time Nick’s father, on behalf of the author, says, “He couldn’t stand things, I guess” (19). Seeing this incident, Nick is aware that a man should stand things. Although the agony Nick has in “The End of Something” may be very small and weak, he makes every effort to stand it. He makes every effort to be out of confusion. All he can do is keep still and stand it.

Bill appears at the end.

“Did she go all right?”
“Yes,” Nick said, lying, his face on the blanket.
“Have a scene?”
“No, there wasn’t any scene.”
“How do you feel?”
“Oh, go away, Bill! Go away for a while.”

Bill selected a sandwich from the lunch basket and walked over to have a look at the rods. (35)

This conversation makes it clear that the separation hasn’t broken out by accident but on purpose, and Bill has expected a row may have happened between Nick and Marjorie. We understand the situation is very confusing, and that Nick’s position is hard to bear. When one endures, one must endure by himself. It is helpless for anyone else to try to help a person who is in real distress. There are some hardships that a man must get over alone. Getting over them makes a man grow up. Nick bears them by himself.

Now Nick’s face is “on” the blanket while it was “in” the blanket before. His agony is shown to be a little bit relaxed. He makes every effort to be calm and quiet and endures the agony. In
The Old Man and the Sea, the last novel written by the same author, the calmness of the big fish is admired. And in the same novel the old man thinks, “I will show him [the big fish] what a man can do and what a man endures” (66). Nick, a youth, is now taking the first step on the road toward the world where the big fish and the old man live in The Old Man and the Sea.

5. “Soldier’s Home”

In “Soldier’s Home,” Krebs, who has returned from the war and feels estranged from the way the people of the town live, makes up his mind to leave his hometown again. The people of the town live just as they used to, while Krebs has been changed a lot by experiencing the war. A war can change a man drastically. In “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber,” a story of a man growing up to be independent, Wilson, a guide hunter, who has seen the abrupt change of Macomber from being cowardly to being brave, thinks “he had seen men come of age before and it always moved him. It was not a matter of their twenty-first birthday. [...] He’d seen it in the war work the same way. More of a change than any loss of virginity. Fear goes like an operation. Something else grew in its place. Main thing a man had. Made him into a man” (150). A war can make a drastic change in a man. Krebs has changed himself.

Krebs went to the war from a Methodist college in Kansas. There is a picture which shows him among his fraternity brothers, all of them wearing exactly the same height and style collar. He enlisted in the Marines in 1917 and did not return to the United States until the second division returned from the Rhine in the summer of 1919.

There is a picture which shows him on the Rhine with two German girls and another corporal. Krebs and the corporal look too big for their uniforms. The German girls are not beautiful. The Rhine does not show in the picture. (69)

The two pictures above are sharply contrasted; one indicates Krebs is one of the common students by depicting him wearing “exactly the same height and style collar,” and the other implies Krebs has grown up to be out of the common, by making him “look too big for their uniforms.” Krebs doesn’t show his interest in appearances, while common people tend to want beautiful girls and beautiful landscapes.

Being back at home, the author makes Krebs think he doesn’t want to go into the world of the young girls of the town to get one, although he thinks he likes to look at them from the outside very much. The sentence “Nothing was changed in the town except that the young girls had grown up” (71) conveys the situation clearly. The town remains unchanged. It is sharply contrasted to Krebs’ mind, which has had a drastic change through the war.

Krebs’ uneasiness grows. His father is in the real estate business and uses a car to take clients out into the country to show them a piece of land. The car of Krebs’ father is effectively used as a symbol of the unchangeability of the town.

The car always stood outside the First National Bank building where his father had an office on the second floor. Now, after the war, it was still the same car. (70-71)
Krebs’ father remains unchanged like his car, and Krebs’ mother is, too. She gives him a lecture to get a job as others do. She is very religious and tries to persuade him by talking about God and His Kingdom. Krebs feels embarrassed and resentful. The estranged feeling of Krebs from his mother is clearly shown in the sentence below:

Krebs looked at the bacon fat hardening on his plate. (75)

Krebs’ mother has brought him a plate of some fried eggs with some crisp bacon on them and a plate of buckwheat cakes a few minutes before. They should have been hot and steaming when they were brought in. The dishes, however, have gradually cooled down just in front of him while she gives him a lecture. The hardening fat of the bacon shows his feeling clearly.

Krebs has gone to the war. This makes a clear distinction between Krebs and his father and mother, and between Krebs and the people of the town. He has been changed by the war.

At first Krebs, [...] did not want to talk about the war at all. Later he felt the need to talk but no one wanted to hear about it. [...] Krebs found that to be listened to at all he had to lie, and after he had done this twice he, too, had a reaction against the war and against talking about it. A distaste for everything that had happened to him in the war set in because of the lies he had told. All of the times that had been able to make him cool and clear inside himself when he thought of them; the times so long back when he had done the one thing, the only thing for a man to do, easily and naturally, when he might have done something else, now lost their cool, valuable quality and then were lost themselves. (69-70) (Italics are mine.)

The war has given him something to “make him cool and clear inside himself,” a thing having “cool, valuable quality.” He is now back in his unchanged hometown and is losing what he has got in the place where life and death collide with each other. To obtain serenity, he decides to leave his house and his hometown.

6. Conclusion

Four short stories in In Our Time have been examined. All the protagonists are in turmoil. They make every effort to be out of turmoil and be serene in mind. In many works of Ernest Hemingway protagonists make the same effort. In “Big Two-Hearted River,” the last story of In Our Time, Nick is back in the woods where he spent his childhood. In “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” the plane Harry is in leaves his wife behind and heads for the top of Kilimanjaro, shining “unbelievably white in the sun” (27) in Harry’s dream. In The Old Man and the Sea, the old man “left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean” (28). Both Harry and the old man leave behind the world which stinks a lot and seek the world of serenity.

All the protagonists in Hemingway’s works make every effort to acquire serenity of mind and get something very cool and clear. There is something genuine and valuable in it. The summit of Kilimanjaro, which Harry flies towards in “The Snows of Kilimanjaro,” is called “the House
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of God,” which the leopard couldn’t get to in spite of his desperate effort. The old man’s journey beyond all people in the world in The Old Man and the Sea brings nothing to him in the end. These imply all the protagonists’ efforts may turn out to be in vain. Still, they struggle for something genuine, something clean and innocent. They struggle for a world where they can feel themselves live all the way and their true selves.

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要 旨

アーネスト・ヘミングウェイは活動的な作家として知られ、戦争、闘牛、狩猟、釣りなど激しい動きのあるものを題材とした作品を多く著しているが、そのような激しい動きの裏で、主人公たちは、清く澄みわたる空気の中の無垢なるものを求めている。本稿では、特に『われらの時代に』中の「インディアン・キャンプ」「医者と医者の妻」「何かの終わり」「兵士の故郷」に焦点を当て、これらの作品の主人公たちが、生きていることが感じられ、真の自分と向き合える清く澄みわたる場所を求めて苦悩する姿について分析した。