

EXPLORING ESCAPISM IN HEMINGWAY'S THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA

I. Rufus Sathish Kumar,
Ph.D., Research Scholar
Research & Development Centre,
Bharathiar University, Coimbatore

Dr. K. Ravichandran,
Associate Professor of English,
Thiruvalluvar University,
Vellore

Abstract

This paper aims to bring out the central aspects of theories and its exercise in writing novels, fictions, short stories, dramas, and other literary works. Especially the application of the escapism theory is discussed in this paper. A reader could find all the potentials, promises and the need of theories in the writings of literature. One could see various theories hidden and exposed at some stages in the literature. Literary theories give ideas and methods to bring out the real specifics of the literary works of various authors. Theories give high-quality understanding of the concepts and talk about the traditional stuff and wealth of a country or a group of people or a language.

Escapism was acceptable and found in all writings which give a superior understanding of the text. This theory gives the significance of language, race, country and the customs of people. John Keats who coined the theory Escapism used it to the utmost level in his writings to be a model to other writers and proved the importance of this theory. In Hemingway's novel The Old Man and the Sea one could see the usage and the presence of this theory which has given an excellent effect and made the novel a reputed one and earned a good credit to Hemingway. Hence it is an attempt to talk about Escapism through this paper.

Keywords: Practical, Ability, Distraction, Relief, Unpleasant realities, Dream, and Alcoholism.

The Old man and the Sea a short novel written by Ernest Hemingway in 1951 was published in 1952. Hemingway was an American novelist, short story writer, and journalist. Though his life was packed with adventure, he was uninterested of his familial life at the age of adolescent and determined to make an escape to a new shape of life. He loved to become an ambulance driver all through the World War I. From his juvenile age, he loved aloneness with the nature which was trained by his father. Basically Hemingway was not a man of tolerance. He always attempted to escape from one juncture to other phase in the hunt of adventure and peace.

When he was hurt in the plane collide, he was unable to abide the soreness and so he committed suicide in the summer of 1961.

The purpose of the paper is to explore escapism in Ernest Hemingway's novel The Old man and the Sea. "Escapism" is found typically in every person life without fail but in an assortment of period and state of affair. Hemingway exploits escapism in his novels on many characters. This escapism makes a person to get divert, take pleasure and to invigorate from twinge and social stigma. In some cases escapism proceed as a real remedy to resolve a lot of corporeal, cerebral, and psychosomatic tribulations. Numerous psychiatrics prescribe this code of escapism to achieve an undeviating solution for individual's troubles.

"Escapism" is customarily a derogatory term. It is used to symbolize a burly reproof, a criticism of the habit of shirking and shunning duties, and a failure to face life's trials. Escapists run away from callous, objectionable facts and duties, thus try to conceal themselves in their idle world of reverie and peace, like an ostrich veiling its head in the sands during the desert-storms.

The novel depicts how Hemingway represents the pain of the old fisherman, Santiago during his early days. Being a fisherman Santiago was barren without fish. He had undergone an atrocious mental torture which was made by a cluster of fishermen and neighbours. He wants to be isolated from his routine life and to get away from the throbbing state. He was not contented and satisfied with his wife and family. As Hemingway mentioned in the novel: "He no longer dreamed of storms, nor of women, nor of great occurrences, nor of great fish, nor contests of strength, nor of his wife." (10)

Santiago was in the state of obscurity and unpromising. At one stage he detached his wife's photo from the wall and strong-willed to run away from the position of predicament and to find a place of peace. He moved from the home because he was not satisfied with his wife. In addition to that his dedicated apprentice and friend, Manolin, was enforced to depart him instantly by his egotistical parents. Manolin's parents call Santiago "the worst form of unlucky." (1) The old man was wrinkled, splotched, and scarred from handling heavy fish on cords, but his eyes, which are the colour of the sea, remain cheerful and undefeated. As said in the novel: "But after forty days without a fish the boy's parents had told him that the old man was now definitely and finally *salao*, which is the worst, form of unlucky" (1)

Santiago admits the agony with humility and reveals his plans to go "far out" in the sea the following day. He was neither to fish nor to fight with the storm. He was totally under chaos. His idea was to get away from the excruciating life. He adores the sea, though at times it can be malicious. Escapism was found in different places in this novel of Hemingway. One can effortlessly empathies the amusing situation of the old fisherman in the seas. He was talking with the fish and bird in a congenial way without perturbing the waves of the seas. Basically he was torched by the people on the land wherein he got pleasure from the animals and birds in the water because of escapism. In many conditions one can lead a peaceful life merely with the principle of escapism. As shown in the novel:

Fish, he said, "I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends."

Let us hope so, he thought.

A small bird came toward the skiff from the north. He was a warbler and flying very low over the water. The old man could see that he was very tired.

The bird made the stern of the boat and rested there. Then he flew around the old man's head and rested on the line where he was more comfortable.

"How old are you?" the old man asked the bird. "Is this your first trip?"

The bird looked at him when he spoke. He was too tired even to examine the line and he teetered on it as his delicate feet gripped it fast. (25)

The above lines elucidate the peaceful nature of the old fisherman on the seas. He was free of all condemnation of the worldly life. Few critics affirm that the old fisherman's life was well appropriated with the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. He thought that the toil and tussle on the seas are better than the fishermen's deeds on the soil. Hemingway portrays the old man as a crucified figure, saying that he makes a din akin to that of a man having nails driven through his hands: "He leaned over the side and pulled loose a piece of the meat of the fish where the shark had cut him". (53) Further Hemingway describes the triviality of Santiago as: "The old man looked at the fish constantly to make sure it was true. It was an hour before the first shark hit him". (49) Santiago soliloquizes about the horrific incident as: "The blood smell from my hands means nothing now with all that scent in the water". (55)

The word escapist is often entitled to the name of John Keats because of his escaping tendency from the authentic world to an inventive world. John Keats longed to escape from the veracity of life in a mood that seized him when he was contrasting the lot of man with that of the nightingale. Grief and affliction were anticipated in life and he had fully become conscious that escape from the realities of life was neither possible nor desirable. According to Keats, reality of human life is full of suffering, pain etc; this world is not a desirable place. He has summed up his individual as well as common sufferings of life in 'Ode to a Nightingale':

The weariness, the fever, and the fret
Here, where men sit and hear each other groan;
Where palsy shakes a few, sad, last gray hairs
Where youth grows pale and spectre-thin and dies;
Where but to think is to be full of sorrow
And leaden-eyed despairs;
Where beauty cannot keep her lustrous eyes,
Or, new love pine at them beyond tomorrow. (11 Stanza)

Escapism is an obligatory element in all writings and in real life. Hemingway mirrors escapism with the help of his characters in the novel The Old Man and the Sea and in other short stories. When Santiago was criticized as the ill-starred one by his neighbours, his apprentice was pressured to leave him right away, he altered his mind and started talking about the sports. He started to yak about the most recent progress in American baseball, especially the trails of the old man's hero, Joe DiMaggio. Old fisherman for all time strived to accomplish peacefulness of mood in the midst of all his sufferings which he was undergoing in his own life and which he saw all around him in his life. It is quite apparent that a careful perusal of his novels would make the reader aware of the theory "Escapism". The abrupt amend in the discourse of old man and his apprentice named Manolin is a worthy testimony of the escapism:

Tell me about the baseball," the boy asked him.
"In the American League it is the Yankees as I said," the old man said happily."
"They lost today," the boy told him.
"That means nothing. The great DiMaggio is himself again."
"They have other men on the team. (8)

Ingestion of wine was a mundane practice of a soldier and probably in the case of fishermen. The real source secreted behind the intake of beer in this novel was nothing but to get away and to forget the problems and pains both mentally and physically which was made by the fellow men in the group. Hemingway in his many novels incorporates the manner of consuming

wine and sometime alcohol. Many critics talk about alcoholism and Hemingway beside war and its disaster. There are scores of drinking panorama in his books that drinks and proves as the good example for this theory. Philip Greene wrote a fascinating Hemingway cocktail companion called "To Have and Have Another", which came out in 2012. He wants the reader to feel what the character felt. Ernest Hemingway certainly loved his liquor. According to legends, he created his own eponymous variation of the classic daiquiri, which still appears on bar menus, and a potent Champagne and absinthe concoction called "Death in the Afternoon". He liked his Martinis dry, his Mojitos sweet, and was rumored to be drinking a quart of whiskey a day later in his life. Shaun Usher who publishes the extraordinary site Letters of Note tweeted out a picture of Hemingway's postscript to a letter to Ivan Kashkin, a Russian translator and critic, in 1935:

Don't you drink? I notice you speak slightly of the bottle. I have drunk since I was fifteen and few things have given me more pleasure. When you work hard all day with your head and know you must work again the next day what else can change your ideas and make them run on a different plane like whisky? When you are cold and wet what else can warm you? Before an attack who can say anything that gives you the momentary well being that rum does? I would as soon not eat at night as not to have red wine and water. The only time it isn't good for you is when you write or when you fight. You have to do that cold. But it always helps my shooting. Modern life, too, is often a mechanical oppression and liquor is the only mechanical relief. Let me know if my books make any money and will come to Moscow and we will find somebody that drinks and drink my royalties up to end the mechanical oppression. (1)

Hemingway talks about the optimistic aspects of wine and alcohol which could bring decency to a man who was in state of frustration and confusion. He said that it gave him delight when he was in distress. In A Farewell to Arms Hemingway says that "Wine is a grand thing," I said. "It makes you forget all the bad." (165) Alcohol can change ones idea and make an individual to be free and fair. Alcohol exploits as a noble paradigm for the attitude of escapism by which one can escape from one position to other mentally departing all the challengeable tasks in their routine life for a small numbers of hours. This prototype of taking wine and alcohol was followed by all kinds of writers in maximum. Hemingway at the final stage decided that the consumption of wine and alcohol does not give a good therapy for the problems in our daily life instead it would be the adversary of mankind. As Hemingway says in one of his writings about the champagne, 'The half bottle of champagne is the enemy of man.' Hence escapism in one's life could be a stationary one for a particular period of time according to the above mentioned testimonies of Hemingway. Not only in the works of Hemingway but also in the works of Keats who coined the word escapism proved the same thing that it is not a stationary one for a long time.

In this novel the old fisher man takes beer to overlook his pain and to penetrate a new world mentally. Even his young apprentice named Manolin was very self-assured about beer which could skip away the problems of the old fisher man. Even the young generation of fishermen community had known about the wine and alcoholism which could change the worries of an individual for a period of time by the society. Drinking alcohol and wine was a normal practice of a firm worker in order to get relived from physical pains. But the habit of consuming wine and alcohol had undergone a tremendous change and it is being consumed even by the so called bereft of communities, caste, religion and section. At one stage drinking wine and alcohol was well justified and greeted by Hemingway and other writers of 20th century. In this novel, a young apprentice has no choice of going beyond the words of his parents since he was too

young; he decided to provide wine to his master Santiago. His only aim was to keep his master Santiago out of the crisis that caused by his parents and his neighbours of the village:

“It was papa made me leave. I am a boy and I must obey him.”

“I know,” the old man said. “It is quite normal.”

“He hasn’t much faith.”

“No,” the old man said. “But we have. Haven’t we?”

“Yes,” the boy said. “Can I offer you a beer on the Terrace and then we’ll take the stuff home.”

“Why not?” the old man said. “Between fishermen.” (2)

As Santiago sails back to his village on the fourth day of the novel, towing behind him the carcass of the decimated marlin, he attempts to make sense of the destruction he has witnessed. The next morning a crowd of amazed fisherman gathers around the skeletal carcass of the fish, which is still lashed to the boat. One can easily see the disappointment of the old fisherman when he talks with his young apprentice Manolin. Hemingway talks about the luck in this novel and said that it may come in many form. But he is unable to identify the form of luck in his life: “Luck is a thing that comes in many forms and who can recognize her?”(58) Hence he brings out the discontent of Santiago:

“Now we fish together again.”

“No. I am not lucky. I am not lucky anymore.”

“The hell with luck,” the boy said. “I’ll bring the luck with me.” (62)

The above lines explain the frustration of the old fisherman. He is not ready to confess his failure on the seas so he conveys his unenthusiastic dialogue to his apprentice. When the fishermen of his village visited the skeletal carcass, they started to talk about the unlucky fortune of the old fisherman. Despite his hard work, he failed and came to the shore without the meat of the carcass. He was not appreciated for his struggle with the fishes on the seas but he became the fun of the village fishermen on the shore. Though he was aged and well matured, he is unable to put up the words of the fellow fishermen of his village. In order to get away from this situation, Hemingway used the principle of escapism and dreams in this novel. Hemingway was a good dreamer of nature. In all his novels dreams played a vital role to bring about a good change in the climax of the story. Because of dream in this novel, a sudden change has happened which leads to the closer of the story and pain of the old fisherman. The climax of the story was well premeditated by Hemingway with the principal of escapism using the dream as an aid in this novel. It is astonishing that Hemingway who was man of writing his own experiences in his novels has changed his idea and turned towards the principle of escapism because of the condition of the story and the needs, desire, and situation of the protagonist Santiago. The old fisherman escapes from this aggravated climate and budes to the normal situation by again starting a virtuous and persistent dialogue with his apprentice and he finally starts to sleep without worrying about the words of fishermen of his village. Sudden change of character, dialogue, tone, body language, sense happens at the end of this novel. The reasons behind these changes corroborate the above said principal is determined in the novel in every aspect of incidents. The character’s inability to face the words of other fishermen was said with the evidence. The young character named Manolin was also very confident that they could not face the disorders in the life and he allowed his master to sleep in order to come out of the pain. Hence it is crystal clear that both the characters follow the principle of escapism to find a temporary solution for their problems. The solution is nothing but a sleep, wine and alcohol for Santiago: “Up the road, in his shack, the old man was sleeping again. He was still sleeping on his

face and the boy was sitting by him watching him. The old man was dreaming about the lions.” (64)

The old fisherman Santiago detailed his dream that dreamt at last about lions on the shore which was his ultimate thought of his life. He had seen these pictures of lions roaming on the sea shore during his young age. Though Hemingway was a man of realistic, he believed that a dream could postpone and reduce one’s ultimate problems in their routine life. At the beginning of the novel, Hemingway pictures the problems of the old fisherman and because of that he leaves the land and moves to the seas and at the closer of the novel the old man again undergoes physical and mental pain which were caused by his fishermen community and left the situation by getting back to his bed to sleep. Not only at the commencement and at the end of the novel did Hemingway exploit the technique of escapism but also in various places of the novel as explained in the above lines. Especially the protagonist Santiago and his apprentice Manolin stand as the best testimonials of the escapism found in the novel The Old Man and the Sea.

Escapism gives comfort to the major characters in the novel. It performs as refreshment to all the needs of a human kind. Moreover the protagonist Santiago was the one character who completely enjoys escapism to the core. Fishing trade is not an ordinary profession which can be employed by all rather it is an adventurous life-threatening profession. There is always a severe task in handling the ships, nets, fishes and the other things related to the fishing work. As mentioned by Hemingway, he explains the necessity of bed for the Santiago who was under the heaviness of the seas during the fishing hours. As soon as he escaped from the trauma of the fishing, his hunt was towards the bed to unwind him and to get away from the pain. Escapism makes a pronoun to acts as a noun by giving a special admiration: “And bed, he thought. Bed is my friend. Just bed, he thought. Bed will be a great thing. It is easy when you are beaten, he thought. I never knew how easy it was. And what beat you, the thought”. (60)

Escapism fails at one stage in the normal man’s life. One who tries to escape from the stress is not allowed to do so because of the social circumstances and the societal pattern. In this novel Hemingway shows this failure of escapism to the readers with the help of the major character Santiago. When Santiago likes to quit the profession of fishing, he was not allowed to do so. He was bonded with the societal chains of fishermen community. The uncovered truth about the escapism is that at any cost it won’t give a solution for the problem but it could make a pause for the problem. Taking a pause for the problems could reduce the speed of the problems: “Perhaps I should not have been a fisherman, he thought. But that was the thing that I was born for”. (23)

The interference of escapism is found in almost everyone’s life with no differences. On the whole the romantic poets were very much involved by the theory of escapism. As a result the budding writers are also encouraged by the school of thoughts in the literature irrespective of language period, culture and tradition. According to the writers of various ages, they said that “Escapism” is resulted with both good and bad consequences in all ages. Historically speaking, the escaping motif is deep in the American consciousness, but escapism of the old generation has its unique significance. The tendency of escapism was used in love, war, loss, problems, fear, insecurity, sadism, culture, social values, freedom, destructiveness, attachments and sufferings.

Thus Hemingway has proved his mettle as a seasoned practitioner of the craftsmanship of “Escapism” through the character Santiago in The Old Man and the Sea. Hence the technique of exploiting escapism is believed to be the crusader of pain, suffering, and loss.

References:

Hemingway, Ernest. The Old Man and the Sea. Bangalore: Harrows Publications, 2009. Print.

Keats, John: The Complete Poems. In Allott Miriam (Ed.), Longman Annotated English Poets. (Eighth Impression). (1995).

Greene, Philip. To Have and Have Another. A Hemingway Cocktail Companion, Tarcherperigee; Rev Exp edition, ISBN – 10:0399174907

Ivan Kashkin, August 19, 1935; published in Ernest Hemingway: Selected Letters 1919-1961, 1981, edited by Carlos Baker.