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ELEMENTS OF IRONY IN HEMINGWAY’S: A CLEAN, WELLLIGHTED PLACE

Lola Jalilova

Associate Prof., PhD,

Bukhara state university, Uzbekistan

lolajalilova7@gmail.com

l.j.jalilova@buxdu.uz

Fotima Ergasheva

2nd grade master student,

Bukhara state university, Uzbekistan

Abstract: Irony is commonly used in modernist literature and is a major characteristic of modern writing. Like other modern writers, Ernest Hemingway uses Irony to assist the development of their characters. In Hemingway’s short story A Clean, Well-Lighted Place, the author uses irony to develop the three characters the reader is introduced to. The three characters include an older waiter, a young waiter and an old man sitting in the shadow. In a cafe late at night, there are two waiters; the young waiter is restless to get home. Hemingway’s diction develops the young waiter to come off as selfish and in a rush against time.[1.13] As for the older waiter, he does not mind staying late at the cafe to serve customers because he shows an appreciation for a “clean well-lighted place.” Hemmingway makes irony from the young waiter not understanding the importance of providing people with a “clean well-lighted place,” when in fact he is concerned about getting home which would be his very own “clean well-lighted place.” There is also irony in the old waiter’s recitation of the Lord’s Prayer. The irony of this is that the prayer is meant to provide a sense of comfort like a “clean well-lighted

place” but replacing words in the prayer with “nada” which suggests that it offers no comfort.

Key words: nada, irony, “clean well-lighted place”, prayer

Discussion. Irony is a common feature of modernist literature. In Ernest Hemingway’s short story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place*, the author uses irony to develop the characters. In a cafe late at night, there are two waiters, one young and one old. The young waiter is anxious to get home, his dialogue shows him as selfish and only caring about himself. The older waiter does not mind staying late at the cafe to serve customers because he understands the importance of a “clean well-lighted place.” The irony stems from the fact that the young waiter does not understand the importance of providing people with a “clean well-lighted place,” when in fact he is anxious to get home to a “clean well-lighted place.” This irony creates the image of a selfish and ignorant young man.

In Ernest Hemingway’s short story *A Clean, Well-Lighted Place* he emphasizes that our lives are a whole bunch of nothing and that eventually everyone will be depressed and alone. Hemingway uses irony, as often seen in modernist literature, to characterize the older waiter who works at the cafe. The older waiter says the lord’s prayer but replaces many key religious words with “nada” taking away any hints that suggest that there is a higher being guiding us in life. Hemingway also uses irony when talking about the lonely old man sitting in the cafe. *“This old man is clean he drinks without spilling. Even now, drunk look at him”*. Usually when you think of a drunk you think of a disheveled incompetent person, this old man however, is quite the opposite he is well put together drunk. *“I am one of those who like to stay late at the cafe... with all those who do not want to go to bed with all those who need a light for the night”*. People on earth are left alone to discover the meaning of their existence by themselves but the older waiter is offering the well-lighted cafe as a place of refuge for people

to escape the darkness and loneliness of life and where people can just sit and not have to worry about life.

Irony is very commonly seen in modernist literature. It helps develop the story and give the reader a different style of the literature. Irony usually affects mostly the characters throughout a story. In Modernist writing it makes the character seem like a contradiction because it portrays the opposite of who they actually are.

We consider that the older waiter in “A Clean Well-Lighted Place” by Ernest Hemmingway is an ironic character. It is ironic how he re-writes the lord`s prayer. The irony here is that the prayer is meant to provide comfort but replacing a lot of the words in the prayer with “nada” which implies that it offered no comfort.[2. 54] The Old Waiter also tried to deny his loneliness and similarities with the Old Man by saying that he has insomnia rather than being lonely and depressed.

“A Clean, Well-Lighted Place” is one of Hemingway`s most acclaimed short stories, as much for its exquisitely sparse writing style as for its expertly rendered existentialist themes. Existentialism is a philosophical movement whose adherents believe that life has no higher purpose and that no higher being exists to help us make sense of it. Instead, humans are left alone to find meaning in the world and their lives. In “A Clean, Well-Lighted Place,” the older waiter sums up the despair that drives him and others to brightly lit cafés by saying simply, “*It is a nothing.*”

This search for meaning and these feelings of emptiness and aimlessness reflect some of the principle ideas behind existentialism. Existentialism is a philosophical movement rooted in the work of the Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard, who lived in the mid-1800s. The movement gained popularity in the mid-1900s thanks to the work of the French intellectuals Jean-Paul Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and Albert Camus, including Sartre`s *Being and*

Nothingness (1943). According to existentialists, life has no purpose, the universe is indifferent to human beings, and humans must look to their own actions to create meaning, if it is possible to create meaning at all. Existentialists consider questions of personal freedom and responsibility. Although Hemingway was writing years before existentialism became a prominent cultural idea, his questioning of life and his experiences as a searching member of the Lost Generation gave his work existentialist overtones.

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 actually is pretentious and vain.*” Manifestations of this principle of contrast in Hemingway’s short stories are persistent, rescuing 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; 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 normal and when pretended it may be self-assertive or self-deceptive.[3.28] 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 cafe 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 states them in the face. But it may also be self-deceptive as in the Elliot in “Mr. And Mrs. Elliot” who pretends to example “very happy” in situations 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. 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-conditions, typical of the present-day drift in the concept of irony. In “The Battler” for instance, when Nick is knocked off a American Short moving freight by an apparently friend brakeman he realizes the need to be tough. Among 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 expectations 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 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 nation and avoids any hasty finality. The finality in the form implied discriminations, affirmations even resolutions comes: but not before the author has taken into account the fuller context, the multiplicity of possibilities the compliment of issues involved; not too soon or too easy. All this makes the characteristic Hemingway`s view and method of resolving the discords of life into controlled art.

The younger waiter, therefore, betrays a sense of arrested awareness and his perceptions are restricted to nothing only his needs of and their fulfillment with admire, a job youth, confidence and money. His concerns are myopic, constricted and self-centered reckoning only in the immediate transient 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 employ loss of job wife does imply loss of wise youth does imply age, confidence death of confidence, md money loss of mom. He stands in sharp ironic contrast with the older waiter who is conscious of all these methaphoring and planning implications and which 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 death.

Conclusion. Story traditionally has a symbol of security and comfort as Carlos Baker indicates turned into a symbol of “not-home” and the clean well-lighted calm 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 forms his solidarity with all the night 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 stop when he ponders that he himself alone is 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 castled by nada although one wouldn’t ever be too sure of it. The dispassionate notations of the experience of “nada” couched in ironic dualities and symbolic nuances very much stay at the center-stage of the story.

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РОЛЬ ИРОНИИ В ЭСТЕТИЧЕСКОЙ И ХУДОЖЕСТВЕННОЙ СИСТЕМЕ ПРОИЗВЕДЕНИЯ

(«ФИНАНСИСТ»)

Жалилова Лола Жалиловна

кандидат филологических наук (PhD), доцент

Саакян Роза Юрьевна

магистр 2 курса, Литературоведения: английский язык ,БГУ

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