



American Society in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

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Ernest Hemingway is admittedly one of the most outstanding American writers of the twentieth century. He has been a colourful personality all through his life: literary lion of the twenties, the ambulance driver in the World War I was decorated for his bravery on the front, a deep-sea fisherman who won several trophies in fishing competitions, a boxer of no mean stature (and it is said that he could easily have become heavy-weight world champion), a big game hunter who spent months shooting wild animals in Africa, an excellent wing shot, a soldier of fortune during the second World War who had a miniature army of his own, Nobel Prize winner for literature and the boastful Papa. He was a brilliant columnist who covered major wars and conferences and interviewed people for important newspapers and journals in the United States and Canada. In spite of multifarious activities it is amazing how he did succeed in writing novels and short stories which in their own right could have won a place of him among the most important people of the United States. In the words of Archibald Macleish, he was "famous at twenty-five; thirty a master." After all he used "his imagination for good purpose." (kaushal 17)

The *Sun Also Rises* is Hemingway's best war book in a very real sense all of Hemingway's fiction is war fiction. A brilliant achievement in organizing post-war tensions, pressures, and situations, *The Sun Also Rises* offers a concentrated picture of the 1920s. The epigraph of the novel is considered the first significant novel by Ernest Hemingway, published in 1926. The epigraph of the novel, *The Sun Also Rises* were aimed by Hemingway at his own generation.

An attempt has been made in this article to depict American society in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun also Rises*. Of the total number of sixty-four short stories and sixteen vignettes written by Hemingway, more than half the number deal with war, love, alienation (and resignation), the last two facets of the same theme of man's ultimate acceptance of his situation.

Hemingway began his literary career as a writer of short stories and he published his first story, "Up in Michigan," in 1923 when he was not twenty-five. His first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, appeared in 1926 after Hemingway had published fifteen short stories which he continued to write and publish till 1957. The short story, therefore, may be said to have remained the favourite literary form for Hemingway throughout his literary career.

Hemingway's first novel was arguably his best and most important and came to be seen as an iconic modernist novel, although Reynolds emphasizes that Hemingway was not philosophically a modernist.[95] In the book, his characters epitomized the post-war expatriate generation for future generations.[96] He had received good reviews for his volume of short stories, *In Our Time*, of which Edmund Wilson wrote, "Hemingway's prose was of the first distinction." Wilson's comments were enough to bring attention to the young writer.[97]

No amount of analysis can convey the quality of *The Sun Also Rises*. It is a truly gripping story, told in a lean, hard, athletic narrative prose that puts more literary English to shame. Mr. Hemingway knows how not only to make words be specific but how to arrange a collection of words which shall betray a great deal more than is to be found in the individual parts. It is magnificent writing.

—The New York Times review of *The Sun Also Rises*, 31 October 1926.[98]

Good reviews came in from many major publications. Conrad Aiken wrote in the New York Herald Tribune, "If there is a better dialogue to be written today I do not know where to find it"; and Bruce Barton wrote in *The Atlantic* that Hemingway "writes as if he had never read anybody's writing, as if he had fashioned the art of writing himself," and that the characters "are amazingly real and alive." [18] Many reviewers, among them H.L. Mencken, praised Hemingway's style, use of understatement, and tight writing.[99]

Hemingway's war torn world has been compared to a Waste Land where one finds things a little too hot to be withstood and just to get over its grimness one finds an essay escape and drink or death through suicide. Like the existentialists Hemingway believed in the defensive parapets an individual could build around himself to afford him protection, and this defense is what the Hemingway code provides, the code which enables them to transcend their destiny and enable them to lead an authentic existence. The oasis in the Waste Land created by his characters is a manifestation of the Hemingway code, T. S. Eliot had also created this kind of an oasis, reserving it for the chosen few, leaving the rest of mankind alone to get destroyed amid rocks and sands.

The early Hemingway hero's movements towards the latter one is an existentialist movement forward where the hero sets out to transcend his immediate environs, and works out for himself a rigorously disciplined code, consisting of certain stoical virtues like perseverance and courage. Jordan and Santiago, for instance, stop thinking and put themselves, body and soul into action. They leave everything behind, far back of them, the need of think, the other needs. They do not rush their sensations and for most part of the time they remain forgetful of their situation.

Hemingway began to shape his hero, the macho figure desperately trying to redeem himself through self-knowledge, exemplifying that quality of courage Hemingway described as 'grace' under pressure.' Such a protagonist by the very nature of his circumstances defies moral judgments in terms of commonly accepted norms of behavior. His non-conformity, in fact, is a form of psychosociological imperative.

In the Hemingway world the characters, in their attempts to come to terms with others as much as with themselves, exist under a variety of tension. This naturally brings in the aspect of verbal violence in their relationships of love, fraternity, and camaraderie. The conflict of these people, seeking to find some value in the business of fighting, comes to surface in the words rather in actions. This is true of the early Nick, Jake or the later Frederick, Kashkin, Harry, Jordan and Santiago.

The major themes which have been investigated in the novels of Earnest Hemingway are war, alienation, love, resignation and affirmation. Hemingway does not depend on books on his imagination to create the matter of his writings. We know the fact that Hemingway is interested in the present and so he writes about things he has been, known or experienced himself. He writes honestly, directly and clearly.

Hemingway wrote about war, horror, death, disintegration of traditional values, religious, moral and ethical. He wrote about war not the violence associated with war alone. He also wrote about his personal experience . i.e., about war, violence, love, morality of human relationships and emotions. He wrote about nature, rivers, mountains, oceans and seas, about baseball, boxing, wrestling, fishing, bull-fights, big-game hunting, etc.

The Sun Also Rises is Hemingway's best war book in a very real sense of all Hemingway's fiction in war fiction. A brilliant achievement in organizing post-war tensions, pressures, and situations, *The Sun Also Rises* offers a concentrated picture of the 1920s. This novel is considered the first significant novel by Ernest Hemingway, published in 1926. The epigraph of the novel, the sun also rises was aimed by Hemingway at his own generation passeth away and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever”(Hemingway, SAR 1). The other is Gertrude Stein's re-echoed judgment “You are all, a lost generation”(1). The book's title, selected by Hemingway (at the recommendation of his publisher) is taken from *Ecclesiastes* 1:5: “the sun also ariseth.” Hemingway's original title for the work was *Fiesta*, which was used in the UK and Spanish edition of the novel.

The post-war men have on the one hand expressed their longing for a world that had come to an end or depicted the effect of violence on the lives of the post-war generations. T.S Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway are conspicuous in the writing of the twenties for they have highlighted the predicament of the modern man. Among the most persistent themes of the Twenties is the death of love as a consequence of the World War I. T.S Eliot writes in *The Waste Land*:

She turns and she looks a moment in the glasses,
Hardly aware of her departed lover;
Her brain allows one half-thought to pass:
“Well now that's done; and i'm glad it's over.”
When lovely woman stoops to foily and
Paces about her room again, alone
She smoothes her with automatic hand,
And puts a record on the gramophone.

Like *The Waste Land*, *The Sun Also Rises* focuses on failed sexual relationships as metaphors in the post-war human condition. Both poem and novel use man's sexual inadequacies as a sign of his moral and spiritual failings. The novel concerns itself with the themes of emotional paralysis and wastelandishness, its idiosyncrasies of unrepresentative locale and its restricted range of action to become a complaining and universalized metaphor for its era as well as ours.”

An expert from the moral history of the twenties, *The Sun Also Rises* is frank analysis of the post-war predicament, which involved all and sundry. Here “Everybody's sick”, (13) observes Georgette, the prostitute whom Jake Barnes, the protagonist of the novel picks up just for company's sake. Everybody's sickness in the world of the twenties might well be taken as one of the theme statements of *The Sun Also Rises*.

With the novel the phrase, 'The Lost Generation,' became an epithet for the disillusioned young people who had seen an entire world of ethical, moral and political values shattered in the chaotic butchery of World War I. Hemingway made the words the lost generation famous prominently displaying them on the title cover of the *The Sun Also Rises*. It is reported that Gertrude Stein had used these words by saying “you are all lost generation”

(1). Hemingway had reacted to this particular definition by saying that they were as solid as any other generation and the words “lost generation” were a piece of high bombast. This word however, was in many ways a misleading label for the young writers and critics who came out of World War I conceived of the hypocrisy and shallowness of western civilization. If such young people distrusted the sacred cows and scared causes of their elders, it is also true that they did not sit back and sulk over their own disillusion. An end to an illusion, after all, is not in itself a harmful thing-and may actually be a stimulus rather than a depression.

Some critics say that the novel is a moral failure, and their reaction to the Paris- Pamplona life-style is perhaps closer to Hemingway's original intention than most realize. And some people, who want *The Sun Also Rises* to be a hedonist's handbook to unbridled night life and sexual extravagance, misread the book. Once, Grace Hemingway, Hemingway's mother betrayed her son for his apparent abandonment of traditional values:

It is a doubtful honor to produce one of the filthiest books
of the year. What's the matter? Have you ceased to be
interested in loyalty, nobility, honor and fineness of life?....
surely you have other words in your vocabulary besides
“damn and bitch”-Every page fills me with a sick loathing
If I should pick up a book by another writer with such
words in it, I should read no more but pitch it in the fire.
And finally after two months Hemingway replied as clearly as he could:.....
I am in no way ashamed of the book, except in as much as I may
have failed in accurately portraying the people I wrote of, or
in making

In *The Sun Also Rises*, ‘a full length novel’, Mr. Hemingway could not escape such leading situations, and he had besides to approach them with a kind of seriousness. He fails. It is not that Mr. Hemingway is, in the terms boild; it is that he is not hard-boild enough, in the artistic sence. No one can dispute with a writer the significance he drives from his subject-matter; one can only point out that the significance is mixed or incomplete. Brett is a nymphomaniac; Robert Cohn, a most offensive cad; both are puppets. For the emphasis for themselves; he isolates one or two chief traits which

reduce them to characters. His preception of the physical object is direct and accurate ; his vision of character singularly oblique. And he actually betrays the interior machinery of his hard-boild about everything in the day-time, but at night it is another thing', says Jake, the sexually important, musing on the fuitile accassibility of Brett.

Examining the reasons for the novel's lasting success, one is compelled to consider first its extraordinary characters: they seem infinitely complex and haunt the reader long after the book is set down. In fact, despite the revolutionary style of *The Sun Also Rises*, which has commanded the attention of scholars and critics with its lean, precise prose, the deepest and most significant concerns of the novel begin with Hemingway's treatment of character. Through its dynamic characters, such as Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, and Lady Brett Ashley, Hemingway is able to demonstrate the enormity of the effects of World War I. The book presents a startling discourse on gender roles in modern times alongside considerations of topics such as modern sexuality, androgyny, and the endurance (or extinction) of traditional models of romance in the postwar world. It raises questions about identity, challenging conventional definitions of manhood and womanhood, and ruminates on the bounds of human nature, asking which parts of oneself, if any, may remain unchanged and how loss can affect one's core identity. Through its exploration of these topics, the novel is also able to speak about the complexity of modern relationships, both sexual and platonic, utilizing Jake's impotence as an allegory of the condition of the modern world.

World War I and the staggering amount of injury, death, and loss it inflicted on the generation that fought in it threw into question traditional notions of love and romance, challenged religious faith, and raised moral issues. An entire generation underwent an overwhelming loss of innocence, making it impossible for them to continue living as they had before the war. The changes were of such great significance that they were manifested in people's everyday behavior and appearance, with the war affecting the very way that people identified themselves. The issue of gender identity and its correlation to the greater human condition, which could no longer be denied, became a key focus for Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises*.

Within the novel, one finds that traditional gender roles are often overturned and definitions of gender blurred, making the characters representative of an androgyny that extends beyond the sexual. In other words, the sexual androgyny represented by the characters in the novel has its basis in gender--women act and even dress in a masculine manner, and men possess characteristics typically identified as feminine--and their androgyny performs as an allegorical representation of a larger cultural condition tangled up in the postwar spirit of uncertainty. This androgyny, defined by scholar Mark Spilka in his book *Hemingway's Quarrel with Androgyny* as "a mixture or exchange of traditionally male and female traits, roles, activities, and sexual positions," was the symptom of an existential crisis born of the postwar world in which old values were no longer functional and even those most basic parts of human nature had to be reevaluated. As Spilka points out, Hemingway would continue to grapple with the notion of androgyny throughout the entirety of his career, but in *The Sun Also Rises* "his interest in the androgynous makeup of men and women had begun" with the "mannish Lady Brett Ashley" and the "unmanned Jake Barnes" (1). In this novel Hemingway first presented androgyny as "an edenic garden that a man must lose or leave" (4). Indeed, Spilka demonstrates, the strangely worded "damned good time" that Brett and Jake cannot attain is not the kind of "damned good time" one might associate with the debauchery of the Jazz Age, but rather romantic love itself (2). While Spilka speculates that Hemingway's interest in androgyny may have, at least in part, been formed as a result of his own androgynous upbringing and Victorian forebears, he also recognizes the evolution of androgyny as a societal condition--a "wounding condition" or "bedeviling condition"--a side effect brought about by the postwar extinction of the romantic love that Brett and Jake crave and the death of old conceptions of masculine and feminine (3).

Indeed, as androgyny becomes a symbol of the modern condition, so too do the characters of the novel take on allegorical roles. Despite these roles, the men and women who inhabit *The Sun Also Rises* are remarkably complex characters who bring to life questions of how the most basic parts of an individual's nature may be altered by war and loss. They embody the shifts in gender roles that were exhibited in real life throughout the 1920s and reinforce the significance of modern problems such as the expiration of traditional notions of masculinity and femininity and the uncertainty of human nature.

Works Cited

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