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## Introduction

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**M**OST writers' first novels do not turn out to be their most important work. In Ernest Hemingway's case, *The Sun Also Rises* has gradually come to have just that reputation. After an intense four-year writing apprenticeship (to Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Ezra Pound, Ford Madox Ford, and others), Hemingway wrote his 1926 novel with a sense of surety, a knowledge of craft, and a belief that literature could create morality. He produced a document of the chaotic postwar 1920s and a testament to the writer's ability to create characters, mood, situation, and happenings that were as real as life.

Readers reacted to the novel explosively. "Here is a book which, like its characters, begins nowhere and ends in nothing"; "a most unpleasant book"; "raw satire"; "entirely out of focus." Whether critics saw Hemingway's style as the flaw or, more commonly, his characters and their rootless, sensual ways, they were ready to condemn his choices of both method and subject. As the reviewer of the *Chicago Daily Tribune* exclaimed, "*The Sun Also Rises* is the kind of book that makes this reviewer at least almost plain angry." *The Dial* reviewer called Hemingway's characters "vapid," as shallow "as the saucers in which they stack their daily emotion."<sup>1</sup> Even Hemingway's mother agreed that his characters were "utterly degraded people" and that the novel might better have never been written.<sup>2</sup> Edwin Muir, writing in *Nation & Athenaeum*, stated that the novel was skillfully written but lacked "artistic significance. We see the lives of a group of people laid bare, and we feel that it does not matter to us."<sup>3</sup>

But there were also the avid Hemingway readers, those trained to appreciate his subtle efforts, his omitted details, through experi-

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ence with his earlier short stories (*Three Stories and Ten Poems*, 1923; *in our time*, 1924; and *In Our Time*, the longer version, 1925). Cleveland B. Chase praised *The Sun Also Rises* for “some of the finest dialogue yet written in this country,” Hemingway’s “truly Shakespearian absoluteness”; Herbert S. Gorman, his creation of people “who live with an almost painful reality”; and Burton Rascoe, his impeccable style: “Every sentence that he writes is fresh and alive. There is no one writing whose prose has more of the force and vibrancy of good, direct, natural, colloquial speech. His dialogue is so natural that it hardly seems as if it is written at all – one hears it.”<sup>4</sup> Ford Madox Ford as well championed what he called Hemingway’s “extremely delicate” prose. Edmund Wilson found his style as well as his subject matter “rather subtle and complicated,” and Hugh Walpole referred to Hemingway as “the most interesting figure in American letters in the last ten years.”<sup>5</sup> Some of this critical attention was based on the sense that Hemingway was just at the beginning of his artistic promise. N. L. Rothman described his effective use of understatement to mask an inexpressible anguish, claiming that “there is a good deal in the writing of Ernest Hemingway that is being overlooked,” and H. L. Mencken warned the young writer that he had achieved his huge success through “technical virtuosity,” but that style alone could not maintain such a reputation.<sup>6</sup>

The most excited comments focus primarily on *style*. Hemingway burst on the modernist scene well acquainted with the current passion for innovation (we think of Ezra Pound, wearing his flamboyant scarf embroidered with the phrase “Make It New”). The modernist method was understatement, a seemingly objective way of presenting the hard scene or image, allowing readers to find the meaning for themselves. “Hard-boiled” was not exactly the right phrase, but it came close. No “sentiment,” no didacticism, no leading the reader: The modernist work would stand on its own words, would reflect unflinchingly its own world, and would smash through the facade of “polite literature” that had dominated the Victorian era and turn-of-the-century American literature.

Hemingway, born in 1899, had been practicing his art ever since high school, when he wrote shrewd and quasi-humorous pieces

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for the school paper. After graduation he chose not to go to college but began working instead on the *Kansas City Star*, where his notions about true sentences and clear writing had their birth. After less than a year, in May 1918, he volunteered for the American Red Cross ambulance corps in Italy. His World War I experience ended with his being severely wounded near Fossalta (over 250 shrapnel wounds in his legs and thighs). He returned home after hospitalization in Italy, and the following winter he convalesced in Petosky, Michigan, spending his time writing. Michigan was beloved territory to him: He had spent every summer since his first birthday at the family cottage on Walloon Lake, near Charlevoix, and his love of the lakes and forests was to be indelible.

Several years passed. Hemingway was working in Chicago, writing for himself (imitating Sherwood Anderson's *Winesburg, Ohio*, which had been published in 1919) and for *The Cooperative Commonwealth* (for a salary). After his marriage to Hadley Richardson in 1921, he went with his wife to Paris, partly to write for the *Toronto Star* but, more importantly, to live the life of the expatriate writer and to learn all he could about writing. His first published work was poetry. Then he wrote the tirelessly polished vignettes of *in our time*, which became the one-page interchapters of the 1925 *In Our Time*. Ezra Pound had praised these for their "clean hard paragraphs" and had gone on to link Hemingway with James Joyce and Ford Madox Ford.<sup>7</sup> The young writer's accomplishment, even before publishing a novel, was considerable.

Pressure on Hemingway grew; he wanted to become more widely known and to leave his apprenticeship status behind. During July 1925, when he and Hadley had returned from a second trip to Pamplona, Spain, for the bullfights and the running of the bulls, he began his first novel. The Hemingways, along with Duff Twysden, Pat Guthrie, Don Stewart, Harold Loeb, and Bill Smith, had tried to recapture the good feeling of their first visit to Pamplona in 1924, which they had made alone; but the relationships in the 1925 group were so divisive that the resulting tensions lasted for years. *The Sun Also Rises* is sometimes called a roman à clef because many of its characters are identifiable as real people: Brett Ashley is modeled on Duff (and was called Duff in the early

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drafts of the book); Robert Cohn on Loeb; Jake Barnes on Hemingway (and was called Hem); Romero on the bullfighter Cayetano Ordoñez. The work of fiction, however, far surpasses this somewhat limiting description of it as “gossip.”

Determined to write a masterpiece, Hemingway set out to write a first novel that he himself called “moral.” And *The Sun Also Rises* – despite all of its seemingly loose living – moves toward a highly moral, even noble, ending. In Brett’s relinquishing of Pedro Romero, a man she sincerely could have loved, comes her moment of truth. Its chilly truthfulness is emphasized in her abrupt phrasing, almost shocking in its terseness: “I’m not going to be one of these bitches that ruins children” (243). Jake, too, comes to realize how improbable his love for Brett has been; and even when she makes overtures to him after Romero has gone, he treats her wryly and sidesteps any further involvement. The concluding scene of the novel is famous for its understatement:

“Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together.”

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.

“Yes,” I said. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” (p. 247)

For the first time in the novel, Jake’s great love for the mysterious, forthright “new woman,” Brett, begins to diminish. What that lessening finally indicates is left open, however. Will Jake and Brett remain friends? Will they ever again play at being lovers? Will the group re-form back in Paris? Will they ever return to Pamplona? Most important, how will the future lives of these characters develop? And will they ever escape the brutalizing effects of the war?

Like most of Hemingway’s fiction, *The Sun Also Rises* steers clear of giving the reader the “meaning” of the book, neatly wrapped and summarized. The ideal modern novel was to involve the reader, to suggest myriad possible interpretations. The novel shares with many other great fictions this “open” ending, in which the reader is left to think about what the closing scene or scenes might indicate. Hemingway wants the reader to sense Jake’s new realism even while he remains helplessly caught in his love for Brett. He is not suggesting that Jake’s feeling for Brett has changed, that Jake

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dislikes her, or that the powerful chemistry that has led Brett to wire Jake, asking him to rescue her from Madrid, has ended. What has ended is Jake's belief that he and Brett will work through their problems and come to live happily, simply, together.

*The Sun Also Rises* is more than just a romance. If the whole plot were dependent on Jake's getting or losing Brett, the novel would hardly have kept readers coming back to it for sixty years. In the complications of the Jake–Brett romance lies Hemingway's remarkable ability to catch the temper of the era. Starved for affection, victimized by her former husband, Brett is a product of war-ravaged Europe. She must have physical affection, in quantity, for reassurance. And just as Brett is maimed by her experiences of World War I, so is Jake. His wound, however, is a physical one. As he looks in the mirror of his apartment, he thinks, "Of all the ways to be wounded. I suppose it was funny" (30). Even though Jake manages to feel sexual desire, the act of intercourse is physically impossible. In his dramatic staging of Jake's conflict, Hemingway succeeds in giving the reader an image of war damage that is inescapable and poignant. Whenever Jake is on stage, which is most of the time, his wound permeates everyone's awareness. And since the ostensible action of the book usually involves Brett's amours, Jake's injury is omnipresent.

If the mood of postwar America was disillusion and frustration, then Jake's physical incapacity is a striking image of many kinds of disability. The loss of promise after World War I was one of the chief reasons for the expatriation of America's writers and artists. Failure of belief in all of the traditional panaceas (religion, politics, economics, romance) led to the bleak "waste land" atmosphere so evident in T. S. Eliot's poem of that name (1922) or Theodore Dreiser's 1925 novel *An American Tragedy*. The mood of American and British literature alike was tentative, more subdued in tone than it had been for fifty years. The brilliance of Hemingway's novel was that it appeared to fit into that mood while actually contradicting it.

Hemingway worked carefully to achieve this ambivalent effect. He began with an epigraph that he attributed to Gertrude Stein: "You are all a lost generation." (By the time of his writing *The Sun Also Rises*, he was less enthusiastic about Stein's writing, and her

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friendship, than he had been during the previous four years, so there may be some malice in his linking her with this line.) His notebooks record that the phrase was in reality spoken to Stein by a garage mechanic, using the French (“c’est un generation perdu”). According to the mechanic, the lost generation was that between the ages of twenty-two and thirty: “No one wants them. They are no good. They were spoiled.” There is no question that war has damaged the lives and psyches of Hemingway’s characters, but Hemingway intends that there be some recognition of the value of that “lost” group who have survived the war, even if imperfectly.<sup>8</sup>

The quotation attributed to Stein comes first on the epigraph page and is immediately followed by the passage from Ecclesiastes from which the title is taken. *The Sun Also Rises* is as affirmative as the biblical passage and is in strange contrast to the idea of the lost generation. It is as if Hemingway were contradicting Stein, her friends, and the pervasive tenor of their comments about those people affected by the war. Characteristic of the way poets use fragments of conversation, scenes, and images in a poem, Hemingway is building the structure of the novel so that the reader is led through these juxtapositions to a full comprehension of the total grid of meaning.

The passage from Ecclesiastes begins with a calm, simple statement: “One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever.” (Hemingway was later to say that the hero of the novel was the earth, and his emphasis on the Spanish land, especially in the Burguete scene, sharpens that focus.) “The sun also ariseth” comes next and is followed by another list of harmonious natural elements: winds, rivers, the cyclic and returning patterns of seasonal movement. Considering the two epigraphs in tandem, no reader could stay focused for long on the “lost generation” image. The tone of the second epigraph is clearly positive; it comes second; it is much longer; it maintains its dominance.

During this period of his writing life, Hemingway was much interested in the *sound* of prose. He and John Dos Passos, a close friend who was also a novelist and travel writer, read aloud to each other from the Bible, particularly the Old Testament. The

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resonance, the incantatory rhythms, the sheer drama of the language in the King James version were in some ways a model for Hemingway's own writing. Though he was not rhetorical in the same ways, he understood the value of an incremental style. He consistently built his paragraphs, and his chapters, to achieve one overwhelming effect. Short sentences accenting longer ones, a vowel sound repeated subtly as well as obviously – in many ways Hemingway was conscious of the overall impact of his writing at every stage in a story or novel. The reader was at least partly led through a text by elements so carefully designed that their effect was unobtrusive.

So, Hemingway has worked hard to establish a contradiction from the very beginning of the novel. Is this a book about wastrels, the dregs of the postwar “meaninglessness,” or is it about the eternally seeking person who wants to carve out a set of values and a notion of integrity on his or her own terms? Some critics saw only the former in *The Sun Also Rises*. For the author, however, changing the title of the book from *Fiesta* (which it had been called in draft and in its first published version in England) to its final form emphasized its positive characteristics. Jake Barnes and his friends – all of them – are a group because they share the same beliefs and experiences. Except for Robert Cohn, whose differences are less heinous than Jake sometimes thinks them to be, the displaced Americans and Britons are moving through a festival period in their lives, punctuating their aimless existence abroad with an organized visit to Spain for the bullfights. For Jake Barnes, who is a journalist in Paris, this trip is his vacation. The fiesta atmosphere, then, and the unusual behavior of the characters are not the everyday canvas of their lives. It is as if Hemingway is suggesting that even on vacation, even far from the social coercions and normal contexts for their behavior, these characters manage to stay in control – even if sometimes on the ragged edge of control.

The organization of the novel shows how central Jake Barnes is to his community of friends. A key theme is the notion of community: These are people who understand each other, the rules they live by, and the reasons for their choices. Only someone outside that community will have difficulty with the social code. Count



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Mippipopolous may be a stranger to the group, but he understands the code and fits into the society. Robert Cohn, although he spends much time with the members of the group and thinks himself a special friend of both Jake and Brett, never manages to assimilate the rules. Jake, however, is clearly in charge – of the plans, the guest list, the activities, and the emotional nuance. He is the apparent hero of the novel, and his approval or disapproval sets the pattern for the other characters' reactions to things.

Hemingway had long been playing with the idea of creating a masterful new hero to counter the use of an antihero, or no hero at all, in much modern writing. (The *negative hero* Edith Wharton speaks about was so pervasive that the concept of the *hero* itself was almost a parody.) What he wasn't sure about was the method of expressing that heroism in such a way that the character and the context would be believable to modern readers. He had read Joyce's *Ulysses* in draft. Eliot's *The Waste Land*, with its characters of the fertile Fisher King – who has the power to bring dead lands back to life – and the modern men who are only shadows of the former kingly figures, was another important source for him. Sherwood Anderson had shown the literary world how to draw a strong male character who would seemingly play the role of the observer, but who in reality would be the central force for much of the action. And from Hemingway's reading of French and Russian writers, he had already seen how a character's psychological processes could be made to carry the freight of an entire novel.

Up to this point, however, Hemingway had been writing short stories, stories so short that editors hardly knew what to call them when they rejected them – sketches, vignettes perhaps, but not stories. In these (many of them collected in *In Our Time*), what hero there was never appeared in any heroic way. He too observed, avoided involvement, spoke seldom, and just as seldom acted decisively. When he was at war, as in the short interchapters of the book, he was a largely passive character. When he wrote about the bullfights, he was not even in the narrative.

*The Sun Also Rises* is in some ways an extension of the short stories in *In Our Time*, especially those that deal with war and with bullfighting. In the novel, the presence of the war is unescapable in the attitudes and conditions of the characters. We see nothing of



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battle, although Jake and Bill's fishing expedition is a clear contrast to whatever turmoil they had experienced in wartime. We do see a great deal of bullfighting, and with good reason: The bullfight for Hemingway was a new source of ritual. Its participants and its observers understood the tradition; they could judge for themselves the quality, the excellence, of the action. Unlike postwar America, Spain was adept at maintaining its traditions. The bullfight became a paradigm for the religious beliefs so shaken in the Western world; it was a religious rite, a "tragedy in three acts," as Hemingway called it, and the matador was as Christlike as any modern person could hope to become. He took on dangers unheard of except in wartime; he survived, helped in part by the ritual itself, the other participants, and the community of the bullring. The bullfight became a microcosm of the good world – one with established and sensible rules, honor, bravery, and a higher purpose – just as the matador became a paradigm of a hero. The war had created a culture without heroes (or if we are to find them among Jake and his friends, the word "hero" must be redefined). In the bullring, in contrast, heroes abounded.

Accordingly, Hemingway divided the novel between Jake Barnes and Pedro Romero. In fact, when he began the book, in late July 1925 (he had written a chapter during the Pamplona trip), it opened with the bullfighter, then called Niño. There are thirty-one pages that begin, "I saw him for the first time in his room at the Hotel Pamplona." The story then shifts to a retrospective point of view, with the narrator explaining that he and his friends had agreed that Niño was the best torero they had seen, that his style was "the finest and purest," that he was "a great one."<sup>9</sup> The ostensible plot of this early section consists of the ambassador and his party inviting Niño to dinner with them and Jake protecting the young matador by not delivering the invitation. The attention stays on Niño. Brett is among the friends he meets, but the scene is much less charged with sexual tension than it is in the novel as we know it.

If Niño/Romero becomes the focal point of the book by appearing at the beginning, the importance of Jake and his friends becomes secondary. They are all observers. Jake achieves prominence in the group because he is the aficionado, and in this early

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draft he is able to protect Niño from the voracious American party. But Hemingway did not really know the life of Spanish bull-fighters, so such an exclusive focus would have been difficult to maintain.

His next version of the novel opened with a long description of Lady Brett Ashley, intertwined with characterizations of Jake Barnes. "This is a novel about a lady. Her name is Lady Ashley and when the story begins she is living in Paris and it is Spring. That should be a good setting for a romantic but highly moral story."<sup>10</sup> Brett's marital history, with all of its brutality, occupies the second paragraph of the first chapter, and Hemingway works hard – perhaps too hard – at creating sympathy for her. She is clearly a positive, brave, imaginative, and loving heroine who is just as clearly the victim of war in numerous ways. The second half of the chapter is occupied with Mike Campbell, who is also positively presented.

Chapter II introduces Jake Barnes as the narrator. In his direct explanation of his role in the novel (as a "detached narrator" as well as Mr. Jake Barnes), Hemingway tries to use that mocking, quasi-humorous tone that he chooses for his *Esquire* columns during the 1930s, for *Green Hills of Africa*, and for some of his stories. It may not work, but it testifies to his intuition that making Jake palatable for readers might be difficult. This is the opening of Chapter II in the earlier version:

I did not want to tell this story in the first person but I find that I must. I wanted to stay well outside of the story so that I would not be touched by it in any way, and handle all the people in it with that irony and pity that are so essential to good writing. I even thought I might be amused by all the things that are going to happen to Lady Brett Ashley and Mr. Robert Cohn and Michael Campbell, Esq., and Mr. Jake Barnes. But I made the unfortunate mistake, for a writer, of first having been Mr. Jake Barnes. So it is not going to be splendid and cool and detached after all. "What a pity!" as Brett used to say.

"What a pity!" was a little joke we all had. Brett was having her portrait painted by a very rich American . . .

So my name is Jacob Barnes and I am writing the story, not as I believe is usual in these cases, from a desire for confession, because being a Roman Catholic I am spared that Protestant urge to literary production, nor to set things all out the way they happened for the