

The Sun Also Rises: An Experiential Travelogue of the Twenties

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Ernest Hemingway is admittedly one of the most outstanding American writers of the twentieth century. The literary lion of the twenties, he has been a colourful personality all through his life. In the words of Archibald Macleish, he was “famous at twenty-five; thirty a master.” *The Sun Also Rises*, widely considered as Hemingway’s best novel, is a brilliant achievement in organizing post-war tensions, pressures, and situations. It offers a concentrated picture of the 1920s.

The Sun Also Rises, which is frequently seen as a novel that describes the mood of an age, is a timeless travel novel. Set in Paris and Spain shortly after the end of WWI, the novel is read as a record of the Lost Generation, a term attributed to the aimless and decadent youth who survived the war. However, a close examination of the text reveals that the novel can also be read as an experiential travelogue. When *The Sun Also Rises* was published in 1926, F. Scott Fitzgerald famously dubbed Ernest Hemingway’s novel “a romance and a guidebook” (Aldridge 123). The novel was celebrated as a roman à clef that depicted an actual segment of Parisian expatriate society. By the time Hemingway began *The Sun Also Rises*, he was already a fixture in the Parisian expatriate literary community, and had garnered mention in Robert Forrest Wilson’s 1924 guidebook *Paris on Parade*. Hemingway was reputedly disdainful of tourists, yet the novel’s repetition of place names is organized into itineraries similar to those of travel guides contemporaneous to the novel. While not explicitly a guide-book, *The Sun Also Rises* can be considered as part of the tradition of travelogues such as *Pages from the Book of Paris*, *Paris with the Lid Lifted*, *How to be Happy in Paris* (without being ruined), and *Paris on Parade* that offer experiential guides to a lifestyle, rather than to monuments or museums. Charles Fenton remarks that Hemingway’s familiarity with Europe gave “authenticity of atmosphere” to his early works.

Hemingway depicts the fictional movements of his characters as experiential travelogue, making the expatriate artist lifestyle a tourist experience. Travel writing is a complex genre that binds biography and reportage and offers to convey information and description about the place being visited as well as into the perspectives of the writer. Travel narratives are structured around a travel narrator, who usually writes in the past tense, of some change or transformation that occurred as a result of his journey to a new place. Travel writing is important because it humanizes distant places. It uses a personal lens to delve into the nuanced realities of daily life away from home, finding human commonalities as it explores cultural differences.

The five central characters of the novel are living in Paris which is the citadel of the lost generation. Despondent and disenchanted, they try to forget the reality of the war by taking recourse to senseless hedonism. Each place described in the novel speaks volumes about its culture, beliefs, people, their values and mindsets. Travelling through Europe gives the characters an opportunity to see and learn new values of life, which only few characters are able to do.

The novel's initial setting is Paris. The protagonist and narrator of the novel, Jake was left impotent from an injury incurred while serving with the Italian Front in World War I. His dilemma lies in his inability to consummate his love for the insatiable Brett Ashley. Jake and his friends go from place to place dealing with crazy relationship triangles and drunken stupors. They visit the same bars, nightclubs and cafés that Hemingway frequented in Paris. This allows us as readers to feel like we are walking the streets of Paris right with Jake. Hemingway establishes a mood or an atmosphere; for example, he is very precise in his descriptions of Paris not, however, with lengthy passages but with the names of streets, places, and characteristic traits of Parisian life.

Hemingway tries to convey a feeling for the beauty of the city and the warmth and humanity of the daily living. In order to make the reader react favorably, he must make him at "home"; he must make him understand why certain Americans rejected residence in the United States and chose Paris. For instance, Hemingway is most attentive to the privacy of the individual in the city. All the characters come and go as they please and lead whatever lives they prefer. The Paris described in *The Sun Also Rises* is a tourist's Paris of the twenties. Cafés, restaurants, hotels, particularly of the Left Bank, are the setting. The mood and attitude of the main characters is that of people on vacation. They set out to do what people want to do on vacation: they want to have love affairs, they drink, go fishing, and experience new sensations.

The cafés and bars Hemingway describes have a special importance in the life of the expatriates. There is a comfortable atmosphere in the cafés at which Jake Barnes and his friends stop to eat and drink so often. Indeed, these elementary delights are constantly referred to by the novelist. The cafés and bars form meeting places where conversation, music, contact and drinking can take place. For Jake a café is "the best way to get rid of friends" since it is a very anonymous and neutral place. It is a place to move out of reality, to escape from the past. People do not want to talk or think of it. They live for the present, constantly searching for new and fresh sensations. Thus their conversation is reduced to enthusiastic small talk about their escapades.

However, in a larger sense, Paris is a reflection of the inner selves of Jake, Brett, and Robert. Each of the characters hopes to get something out of their time in Paris, but the city itself is ultimately a reflection of who each character is. Jake is looking for himself in Paris; he wants to

know who he is and what his personal life philosophy should be. Instead of actually working on his job as a writer, he experiences Paris by interacting with others and spending time in places like cafes. Part of the reason why Jake is unsure of who he is as a person is that he was injured in such a way that he can't have sexual intercourse anymore. He is lost but not unhappy about it. Paris is a refuge from who he used to be that allows him to explore these philosophical questions. Jake's methodical recounting of street names, cafés, and *quartiers* underscores his status as an *étranger*. Yet he is comfortably cosmopolitan in his "home town" of Paris and distinguishes himself from the tourists he passes (Griffin 173).

Robert, on the other hand, is disillusioned by Paris. At first, he enjoys it in the same way he enjoys his relationships with women. It's free, easy, and exciting. When he stays too long—like in his relationship with Brett where he doesn't understand that she's going to continue sleeping with others—he's less happy and his life isn't the way he imagined it. He is sour and dissatisfied. This dissatisfaction shows itself in Robert's unhappiness with Paris. For example, in a discussion he says that he's sick of Paris and doesn't realize that he'd be equally unhappy anywhere. Ernest Hemingway writes: "South America hell! If you went there the way you feel now it would be exactly the same. This is a good town. Why don't you start living your life in Paris?" "I'm sick of Paris, and I'm sick of the Quarter."

For Brett, Paris is an exciting, changeable place that lets her live out her sexual desires. She's always looking for something to satisfy her and isn't aware that she's unsatisfied. Paris gives her the same type of thrill because it's constantly changing and offering her new experiences to meet her needs. The way these three characters relate to the city of Paris reveals much about their values and their identities in the Paris segments of *The Sun Also Rises*. Hemingway chronicles a lifestyle that reads like a page from Reynolds's *Paris With the Lid Lifted*.

Book II's initial setting is still in Paris but will eventually move to Spain where different values are established. This contrasts those seen so far in Paris by the lost generation's lack of traditional values. Bill first refers to values in his comment about stuffed animals. He says their purchase is a "Simple exchange of values. You give them money. They give you a stuffed dog." The group decides to go to Spain to fish. Bill, Robert, and Jake go ahead to get equipment and rooms and plan for Brett and Mike to join them later in Pamplona.

The fishing trip within *The Sun Also Rises* provides a pilgrimage of rejuvenation to the novel's participating characters, Jake Barnes and Bill Gorton. Escaping the wasteland that is Paris, the two men "shove off," (VIII), to Burguete, Spain, where they fish for trout on the Irati River. The journey to Burguete is surreal and soothing. Bill and Jake board a crowded bus to ride to the small, rural town of Burguete. The bus is filled with Basque peasants (who inhabit a region shared by France and Spain in the Pyrenees Mountains). The Basques drink wine from

wineskins. They offer their skins to Bill and Jake, who in turn share their bottles of wine. The Spanish countryside is beautiful, and it is cool on top of the bus where Bill and Jake sit. The Basques teach them the proper way to drink from a wine-bag.

A Basque with a big leather wine-bag in his lap lay across the top of the bus in front of our seat, leaning back against our legs. He offered the wine-skin to Bill and to me, and when I tipped it up to drink he imitated the sound of a klaxon motor-horn so well and so suddenly that I spilled some of the wine, and everybody laughed. He apologized and made me take another drink. He made the klaxon again a little later, and it fooled me the second time. He was very good at it. The Basques liked it. The man next to Bill was talking to him in Spanish and Bill was not getting it, so he offered the man one of the bottles of wine. The man waved it away. He said it was too hot and he had drunk too much at lunch. When Bill offered the bottle the second time he took a long drink, and then the bottle went all over that part of the bus. Every one took a drink very politely, and then they made us cork it up and put it away. They all wanted us to drink from their leather wine-bottles. They were peasants going up into the hills.(83)

Hemingway describes vividly every detail of the journey to Burguete. His writing makes the scenes come to life and the reader feels like another passenger on that bus.

The bus climbed steadily up the road. The country was barren and rocks stuck up through the clay. There was no grass beside the road. Looking back we could see the country spread out below. Far back the fields were squares of green and brown on the hillsides. Making the horizon were the brown mountains. They were strangely shaped. As we climbed higher the horizon kept changing. As the bus ground slowly up the road we could see other mountains coming up in the south. Then the road came over the crest, flattened out, and went into a forest. It was a forest of cork oaks, and the sun came through the trees in patches, and there were cattle grazing back in the trees. We went through the forest and the road came out and turned along a rise of land, and out ahead of us was a rolling green plain, with dark mountains beyond it. These were not like the brown, heat-baked mountains we had left behind. These were wooded and there were clouds coming down from them. The green plain stretched off. It was cut by fences and the white of the road showed through the trunks of a double line of trees that crossed the plain toward the north. As we came to the edge of the rise we saw the red roofs and white houses of Burguete ahead strung out on the plain, and away off on the shoulder of the first dark mountain was the gray metal-sheathed roof of the monastery of Roncesvalles. (87)

When they arrive in Burguete, the fat innkeeper charges them a high price for their room because it is “the big season.” It turns out that Bill and Jake are the only people in the hotel. When they learn that the wine is included, they drink several bottles. Jake goes to bed, musing, “It felt good to be warm and in bed” (98).

Bill and Jake pack a lunch and bottles of wine, and head to the river. They walk through beautiful meadows, fields, and woods, and, after a long hike, arrive at the river. They place the wine in a spring up the road in order to chill it. Jake fishes with worms, but Bill tries fly-fishing. They both catch many fish, but Bill’s fish are bigger. Over their lunch, they joke about the friends they met in the war. Bill then asks Jake if he was ever in love with Brett, and Jake says that he was “for a hell of a long time.” They take a nap under the trees and then head back to the inn. They spend five days in Burguete, fishing, eating, drinking, and playing cards.

This episode comes as a pleasant relief from the shallow, unnatural, nerve-wrecking lives in Paris.

We stayed five days at Burguete and had good fishing. The nights were cold and the days were hot, and there was always a breeze even in the heat of the day. It was hot enough so that it felt good to wade in a cold stream, and the sun dried you when you came out and sat on the bank. We found a stream with a pool deep enough to swim in. In the evenings we played three-handed bridge with an Englishman named Harris, who had walked over from Saint Jean Pied de Port and was stopping at the inn for the fishing. He was very pleasant and went with us twice to the Irati River. There was no word from Robert Cohn nor from Brett and Mike. (108)

Hemingway often depicts nature as a pastoral paradise within the novel, and the fishing trip serves as his epitome of such, entirely free from the corruptions of city life and women. Doing away with modern modes of transportation, they walk many miles gladly to reach the Irati River. While fishing, Jake and Bill are able to communicate freely with each other, unbound by the social confines of American and European society. The men also enjoy the camaraderie of English Veteran, Harris. This is quite different from the competitive relationships that can develop between men in the presence of women. Bill is able to express his fondness for Jake openly without it “mean[ing] [he] was a faggot,” (VIII), and Jake has no qualms over his fish being smaller than Bill’s, in what could be interpreted as an admission of lesser sexual virility.

“We lay with our heads in the shade and looked up into the trees.

"You asleep?"

"No," Bill said. "I was thinking."

I shut my eyes. It felt good lying on the ground.

"Say," Bill said, "what about this Brett business?"

"What about it?"

"Were you ever in love with her?"

"Sure."

"For how long?"

"Off and on for a hell of a long time."

"Oh, hell!" Bill said. "I'm sorry, fella."

"It's all right," I said. "I don't give a damn any more."

"Really?"

"Really. Only I'd a hell of a lot rather not talk about it."

"You aren't sore I asked you?"

"Why the hell should I be?"

"I'm going to sleep," Bill said. He put a newspaper over his face. " (110)

The fresh air of Burguete provides clarity of mind beyond the scope of the Parisian lifestyle and it is evident within Hemingway's prose and style. Jake's diligence and dedication to each of the steps involved in fishing are indicative of his separation from his life and the woes that constitute it. Throughout the novel, Jake has a shrewd, practical outlook on life that is omitted here. His focus and attentiveness reveal the sensitive, reflective man that Jake is, free of inhibition. His thoughts undulating like gentle waves, Jake uses worms for bait as opposed to a fly, so he can peacefully drop his line and contemplate life instead of concentrating on the constant casting and jerking inherent to fly fishing.

Hence, Bill and Jake's fishing trip is a calm, beautiful experience, and a nice respite from the disenchantment present throughout much of the novel. The aimless, cynical decadence that characterizes their other activities is curiously absent during the trip. They drink, but not excessively as they do in Paris. They seem content simply to fish, swim, and relax, and they are able to appreciate the beauty of the scenery around them (something Bill is unable to do on his trip to Vienna). Hemingway was an avid fisher and hunter for his entire life, and his faith in the therapeutic value of nature is evident in his description of this trip. Jake and Bill drop their shallow facades and engage in real male bonding, enjoying an easy camaraderie far removed from the petty backbiting they engage in elsewhere in the novel.

Symbolic of the spiritual rest that this trip affords the men is the ease with which Jake is able to discuss his wound with Bill. The wound does not provoke the silence or uneasiness in Jake that it usually does. That's how a beautiful journey can heal one. Jake has been involved in the fast, nonproductive life of Paris, a wild life he has scorned. In Paris, drinks and food had been extravagant in a backdrop of clubs and drunkenness. These values are embodied in extravagant tastes of the Count who does whatever satisfies immediate cravings.

Life in Burguete is slow-paced with an appreciation of nature resembling a religious experience. Jake and Bill walk through old trees, with sunlight pushing through. Similarly, traditional values are peeking through darkness for Jake. This experience becomes a pseudo-religious awakening for him. For both Jake and Bill, a rebirth seems to have taken place.

The fishing trip contrasts that lifestyle with the simplicity of lunch—wine, eggs, and chicken—in a backdrop of nature. Jake is so in tune with nature he drops his hook in the river, and trout nearly jump on it. He lacks unity and is even angered by things he scorns in Paris, such as the homosexual lifestyle. This trip, rather being just another excursion, is a journey from the outer, materialistic world to the calm, spiritual world within where man becomes one with nature. With Jake and Bill, we also escape the wasteland of Paris for a while. It instills the belief in us that life could be simple yet fulfilling once again.

Much of the action of the novel takes place in Pamplona during the fiesta. Montoya respects Jake because he has a passionate awareness of bullfighting that most people, even some bullfighters, do not have. Like fishing, *afición* is a spiritual experience, almost religious. In Chapter 15, Pamplona explodes with the fiesta. This account of the fiesta by Hemingway is surely a treat for those who have never visited Spain. The book transports you to the fest with all its frolic and cynicism.

The first day of the fiesta, streets become crowded with people drinking and partying. Jake joins Robert and Bill at the cafe. As rockets explode to signal the beginning of the festival, masses of people converge on the square and cafe. All over, dancers and musicians celebrate. First, comes a man playing a reed pipe with children following. Next come dancers, men dressed in workmen's blue smocks with red handkerchiefs around their necks. The crowd forms a circle around Brett and begins to dance.

When the song ends, people take Brett into a wine shop and seat her on a wine cask. People are drinking and will not allow Jake to pay. Jake leaves to get a leather wine bottle. The next day, Romero steals the show. Brett, sitting between Jake and Mike, watches his body, movements, and form. Jake points out Romero's style is of the old school, which lends more credence to him as a bullfighter. The next day, Romero does not fight, and the following day there is just the fiesta.

The true focus of this reading, however, is on the character of Romero. His character is a pseudo-priest, the epitome of the intense sport that is honored by this celebration lasting seven days, a religious number. He is straight, direct, intense, clear, pure, and honest. Later, they see Romero has classic style and fights with grace and flare. But Romero also symbolizes Hemingway's code for living and writing. A person does not glide through life without experiencing or taking chances but rather he should, "let the horns pass...close each time." Accosting life like Jake rather than reading about it like Robert is Hemingway's code. Jake recognizes that knowing how to live is more important than the "bilge" of asking why things are because one should be more concerned with participating than with spectating. Jake's status as an aficionado is part of this code.

Through the impact Romero has on the characters and the readers, we come to realize that meeting new people along the course of our journey can inspire one. However, the characters' experience at Pamplona has a far greater significance when observed closely. Pamplona is important for each of these characters because it is where, under the influence of the fiesta, they each come to face their individual shortcomings.

Brett comes to Pamplona with one man (Mike) and leaves with another (Romero). Pamplona causes her to confront her own sense of self, and in particular her passivity in allowing herself to "go along" with whatever man is at hand. Her decision to follow Romero (and then to leave him) can be seen as another case of her trying to define herself through a man, but ultimately, it is a sign of her personal agency—she does seem to genuinely love him, unlike Mike, and she finally leaves him after she realizes that their relationship is untenable.

For Cohn, Pamplona is the place where he acts out all his personal insecurities. Driven by jealousy over Brett and enraged over her indifferent treatment, he beats up Mike and Jake and eventually leaves by himself to return to Paris. Cohn clearly is riven by the need to "be a man" and stand up for himself, on the one hand and his self-loathing and emotional neediness on the other. While events at Pamplona crystallize these aspects of his character, it's not clear if he undergoes any personal change as a result.

Jake, of course, is a great observer. He functions as a witness to events, but Pamplona (and the bullfighting he watches there) serves to help him formulate a way of living that preserves his integrity as a person. The "purity" of Romero's fighting is a kind of emblem for the sort of life Jake would like to live.

If Pamplona is a kind of world of fantasy where emotional honesty is possible, Madrid, where Brett summons Jake at the end of the novel, represents a kind of return to reality. The end of the novel, in which Brett laments that she and Jake could have been happy, is bittersweet in the extreme, nonetheless so because such sentiments seem to belie her own experience and

personality. Madrid, as the "real world," can be seen as a return to the kind of emotional disconnectedness these characters sought to escape in Pamplona.

Henry David Thoreau rightly remarked: "It's not worthwhile to go around the world to count the cats in Zanzibar." Rather than simply being a fun trip across Europe, the novel makes us travel through the life experiences of various characters, thus bringing face to face with ourselves it gives us a chance to understand and see ourselves in a new light and learn from the lives of the characters. John Leland's *A Guide to Hemingway's Paris with Walking Tours* offers the literary-minded traveler a Hemingway-inspired introduction to the city.

Thus, we may conclude that undertaking travel is to free ourselves beyond the shackles and boundaries created for oneself. It is to quickly encounter and embrace differences and otherness, alien to us. By travelling one gets to study and understand cultures, traditions, customs, and religions. The novel depicts how undertaking the right journey can transform one into a better self. It helps one in rediscovering oneself and realizing what one is truly meant to be.

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