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INERTIA AND IDENTITY CONFUSION IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

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Abstract

During the first postwar period (WWI), people have been left aside in disillusionment, uncertainty, and disbelief since the disastrous war has made people think that the world they live in can no longer correspond to their continual notions and values. This created a sort of 'lost generation' who has picked up the idea that the postwar world is topsy-turvy and lacks stability to settle down and to work things out. Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* narrates the postwar world with such characters as Jake Barnes, Robert Gohn, Mike Campbell, Bill Gorton, Brett Ashley, and Pedro Romero. With this in mind, this paper, considering the pre- and postwar world phenomena will focus on the process of inertia and identity confusion of these characters in the course of their lives.

Keywords: Hemingway, Identity, Masculinity, Femininity, Postwar Period.

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1. INTRODUCTION

As an American accomplished writer, Ernest Miller Hemingway was born into an educated family, the father a medical doctor, and the mother a voice and piano teacher on July 21, 1899. From the very childhood period, his father imposed him some masculine traits such as hunting and fishing. He became acquainted with the delicacy and intricacy of nature in the very early period of his life. It comes to mean that Hemingway was nurtured by his close nature in this period that would shape and make him reshape and remake his thoughts in the coming years of his life. Although Hemingway wanted very badly to join and serve in the army in WWI, he could only become an ambulance driver for the Red Cross in Italy in the course of the war in which he was wounded in both legs and for which he was seen and accepted as a hero. Later in his life, Hemingway ardently focused on his writing and moved to Paris with his wife to produce and create more. There, he met such expatriate writers as James Joyce, Gertrude Stein, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Ezra Pound. This circle of expatriates exchanged their ideas and discussed politics, arts, and literature of the era.

Hemingway's works such as *Farewell to Arms*, *The Sun Also Rises*, portray his unique wartime and near-death experiences. These masterful works, especially *Farewell to Arms*, represent the first-hand experience of the war and its physical and mental effects on people, the Lost Generation. Hemingway simply and clearly narrates brutality, severe chaos, destruction, death, alienation, fragmentation, and isolation. One can find out that Hemingwayesque narratives include both emotions and actions in short sentences and paragraphs. Favoring simplicity and clarity in his diction, Hemingway describes the aimless tormented souls of the Lost Generation, war-time experiences, and deep scars of the characters in his works.

World War I, the massive human loss, not only changed Europe destroying emperors and governments, but it also changed the meaning of such concepts as gender in the heads of disillusioned, despairing, and unsatisfied members of the 'lost generation'. The generation did not follow the strict gender roles and code of conduct of the old period, Victorian period. As Anita S affirms in her article 'Representation of Women in the Works of P.G. Wodehouse' that during the Victorian Period gender roles were separated clearly as if by boundaries. It was obvious to see a domestic woman in the house who was 'angel in the house, angelic in patience and self-effacement' (Anita, 2014, 55). However, after WW1, it was also obvious to see the mobility of gender roles in society and business life. Such writers as T.S. Eliot, Fitzgerald, and Hemingway discussed roles of gender in their novels and depicted not only the enormity of the effects of the war and also the deep psychological effects of it through their works such as *The Great Gatsby*, *The Waste Land* and *The Sun Also Rises* respectively. However, in this paper, I will center upon Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*.

2. DISSATISFACTION AND IDENTITY CONFUSION: MALE FEMININITY OR FEMALE MASCULINITY

Hemingway addresses how WWI created dissatisfaction and identity confusion in his novel *The Sun Also Rises* through Jake Barnes, Lady Brett Ashley, and Robert Cohn. The novel raises some significant questions about these people's dissatisfaction and identity confusion in the readers' minds. The novel firstly is the reflection of



Hemingway's belonging to the lost generation, and secondly, his exiles or expatriates who aimlessly wander about consuming, having sex, and moving from place to place and party to party. Gertrude Stein defines them as 'a lost generation' who seem to explore the meaning of their lives with these actions. On the other hand, the novel is the reflection of an ideal relationship between the lost generation and modernism. It implies that social and moral corruption after the WWI and rapidly developing modernism created a generation of loss. Curnett argues that those who were involved in the lost generation movement are called 'expatriates', who abandon their country because of not being satisfied and content with the social life and its codes of the country that they live in (Curnett, 2000, 79). Curnett also affirms that 'expatriation provided Hemingway a powerful metaphor for exploring the challenge of surviving the modern, postwar world' (Curnett, 2000, 79). Jake, Cohn, and Brett are such 'expatriates' who are unsatisfied and discontented with themselves and their social environment. Traumatized by WWI, Jake, Brett, and Cohn are desperately disillusioned and in pursuit of new ideas to embody.

The main reason why these people are constantly wandering about, drinking, partying and trying to make love can be related to both Hemingway's personal life, marrying to several girls and having sex with several girls or women, and the postwar world which ended up with wounds and deaths of thousands of people and which made these people rethink/reconsider the ideals or codes of the society. However, once analyzed in detail, it seems evident that Hemingway's and his exiles' or expatriates' lives are related to WWI which brought confusion and dissatisfaction. He directly states this idleness and lack of control in the book *The Sun Also Rises*;

"You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed with sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes" (Hemingway, 2006, 60).

It argues that expatriates (the Lost Generation as Gertrude Stein coined) have left their own native lands and are now in pursuit of peaceful mind and social environment in other lands. Fake man-made social constructions and fake European common sense have corrupted and destroyed their physical and mental states. Therefore, the members of the generation waste their time talking, not working and hanging around cafes. The main focus of the paper is to figure out the reasons for dissatisfaction and identity confusion of such characters as Jake, Cohn, and Brett's and to figure out why Hemingway is so focused on gender roles and masculinity in this novel.

The Sun Also Rises is the narration of the existence of a new-man and new-woman in the 1920s. To illustrate, Brett does not follow the ideals or norms of being a Victorian woman and traditional femininity, rather, she is more self-confident, outside the house, not angel in the house anymore, and she breaks the rules of the domestic woman in the house. She is out there to find love and has some fun with a hyper-masculine man, Romero. She says 'I am mad about the Romero boy. I am in love with him, I think' (Hemingway, 2006, 183). Jake, with his deep wound from the war, does not symbolize a dominant figure of masculinity of the period, which reinforces the idea that strict manly characteristics are tied to sexual potency and professional achievement, rather, he is more introvert, confused, tortured and feminine. During the fishing tour, Jake and Bill are having a conversation that implies the importance of



having a job. Bill says, 'You ought to have dreams... All our biggest businessmen have been dreamers. Look at Ford. Look at President Coolidge. Look at Rockefeller' (Hemingway, 2006, 124). In this conversation, it seems evident that Jake does not have the ambition to show his conventionally constructed and accepted masculinity, which demands professional strength for a man. Rather, he suffers from his manliness due to his injury. It implies feminine man and masculine women –an identity confusion. In her book *Female Masculinity*, Judith Halberstam addresses 'gender flexibility and fluidity' which affirms that gender can be 'imprecise' in a society that defines the roles (Halberstam, 2004, 948). One can infer that Jake's 'imprecise', flexible and fluid gender traits – masculinity crisis – and his inertia results from destructive social phenomenon, WWI that both destroyed the physical surroundings around the world and turned the psychological states of the individuals upside-down. Likewise, Jake had to challenge constructed masculinity norms and adopt more elusive and fluid ones. It suggests that both femininity and masculinity are social constructs. However, it suggests that these constructs are liable to reconstructed through such social phenomenon as WWI. Jake (as Hemingway through the first-hand experience of the war) deconstructs the Western patriarchal tradition that champions masculinity and masculine traits and underestimates the femininity and feminine traits. One can infer that Jake is aimless and confused within this tradition. However, one can also infer that Hemingway challenges these construct through his character Jake.

For the definition of gender identity, Michel Foucault states in his book *The History of Sexuality* that the industrial revolution, religion, and society formed 'a transformation of sex into discourse not governed by the endeavor to expel from reality the forms of sexuality that were not amenable to the strict economy of reproduction' (Foucault, 2004, 892). He asserts that society is planned to 'banish casual pleasures, to reduce or exclude practices whose object was not procreation' (Foucault, 2004, 892). This can be seen in the relationship between Jake and Brett. They both like or love each other emotionally, but not sexually since Jake has a wound from the war which poses a serious obstacle in his life and he feels troubled and says,

But I could not sleep. There is no reason why because it is dark you should look at things differently from when it is light. To hell there isn't! I figured that all out once, and for six months I never slept with the electric light off. That was another bright idea. To hell with women, anyway. To hell with you, Brett Ashley (Hemingway, 2006, 82).

Here, Jake struggles with his masculinity crisis, but he fails. Hence, Jake and Brett do not perform the rules defined and enforced by society; they cannot preserve their marriage which is also enforced by the same society. Therefore, one can infer from Foucault's quotation that Jake and Brett have identity confusion and confusion on their gender roles, which will prompt them to search for other entertainments, contentment or pursuits. Gayle Rubin states in her essay 'Sexual Transformation' that industrialization has affected genders deeply, and Rubin puts;

In spite of much continuity with ancestral forms, modern sexual arrangements have a distinctive character which sets them apart from preexisting systems. In Western Europe and the United States, industrialization and urbanization reshaped the traditional rural and peasant populations into a new urban industrial and service workforce. It generated new forms of state apparatus, reorganized family relations, altered gender roles, and made possible new forms of identity, produced new varieties of social inequality, and created new formats for political and ideological conflict. It



also gave rise to a new sexual system characterized by distinct types of sexual persons, populations, stratification, and political conflict (Rubin, 2004, 889).

Considering Gayle Rubin, it seems evident that in Hemingway's novel *Jake and Brett* are the victims of mechanization and urbanization. Jake Barnes serves as a soldier and Brett Ashley as a nurse. With the deep impact of WWI on both of them, they deviate from the established social norms and constructs imposed on them. Brett does also violate the conventional norms; rather, becomes busy with the modern sexual arrangements and becomes lost in the preexisting social system. Gayle Rubin implies that fast industrial attempts and urbanization reformed the rural and peasant population which later gave rise to change in gender roles. One can infer from such characters as Jake and Brett that they symbolize the new forms of identity which will later bring social inequalities, political and ideological conflict. Disintegrated and fragmented, Jake and Brett individually desire new identities, contentment, and remade realities. However, they cannot escape from each other though they travel around. Likewise, one can infer from Jake's quote that Jake and Georgette are well aware of their social, personal, and psychological plight. Jake blames and even curses the WWI for the negative effects on him and other people;

"She (Georgette) cuddled against me and I (Jake) put my arm around her. She looked up to be kissed. She touched me with one hand and I put her hand away."

"Never mind."

"What's the matter? You sick?"

"Yes."

"Everybody's sick. I'm sick, too" (Hemingway, 2006, p. 68).

Another discussion here is Jake Barnes or Hemingway's masculinity or masculine character. Considering Rubin's above-mentioned quote, one can infer that political and ideological conflicts caused by fast industrialization and urbanization, as one of the reasons for WWI, affect the idea of masculinity and femininity. In other words, rather than his sense of masculinity, political and social events have a huge effect on Jake's understanding of masculinity:

Undressing, I looked at myself in the mirror of a big armoire beside the bed. That was a typically French way to furnish a room. Practical, too, I suppose. Of all the ways to be wounded. I suppose it was funny (Hemingway, 2006, 38).

Dana Fore states in her essay 'Life Unworthy of Life? Masculinity, Disability, and Guilt in *The Sun Also Rises* that critics are more focused on Jake Barnes' identity, wounds, physical power, and masculine degeneration (Fore, 2007, 74). For the critics, Jake is psychologically weak and feminine. What Jake says when he faces with his body in the mirror alone in the room, he sees both his physical and psychological weakness. Another example that reflects his weakness is related to what he openly says that he cannot stand it, to think his life is going so fast and he is not really living it, and nobody ever lives a life all the way up except bull-fighters. The symbol of hyper-masculine character Pedro Romero who has heroic deeds smokes cigars and is a potent male character, as he states; 'oh yes. I always smoke cigars. It was part of his system of authority (Hemingway, 2006, 185). This is what defines masculinity of the period. Once traumatized, Jake is compared with Pedro Romero; he is not strong, has feminine deeds such as crying, and has a problem with his functioning genitalia.



Onderdonk says that Jake is 'sensitive, socially passive observer, given to tears and quiet resignation' (Onderdonk, 2006, 61). Concerning Jake, it seems evident that Hemingway discusses the definition of masculinity and/or discusses the disempowerment of masculinity in the modern world through Jake, the protagonist. On the other hand, Hemingway seems to depict male as 'less male or like a woman' and try to make a description of masculinity by comparing Pedro Romero, hyper-masculine character, with Jake and reflects the conceptual change of the descriptions of masculinity and femininity during this period. In the essay, 'Bitched: Feminization, Identity, and the Heminwayesque in *The Sun Also Rises*' Onderdonk writes;

Hemingwayesque protagonist necessarily comprehends many forms of identity besides his biological maleness and attendant social masculinity: he is also typically white, American, and of the better-off, better-educated class; he desires certain objects and follows demanding codes of behavior; he respects certain books and scorns others; he has distinct sensitivities and affective capacities; and he has certain political and philosophical affinities (Onderdonk, 2006, 67).

Hemingway's protagonist here wants to follow the demanding or enforcing codes for a man. One can infer from the quotation that Hemingwayesque protagonist is Hemingway's himself, and he, maybe, justifies himself through shameful passivity or disempowerment. One can also infer that Jake and Brett's dissatisfaction and identity confusion come from society, not from inside. Both have the idea that femininity or masculinity poses no problem for themselves, which implies that Jake feels like a man and his physical wound does not make him homosexual or make him feel like a homosexual. Rather, he knows the fact that societal norms require a man who has the ability of sexual intercourse, which confirms the masculinity and masculine power. On the other hand, Brett, too, has no problem with her femininity or feminine needs or her emotions, but she feels uncomfortable with the codes of femininity already defined socially. She, with her new fashion and behavior, rebels against these norms or codes. Conventionally constructed and accepted norms of masculinity force, Jake, to feel inferior, sexually weak and deficient, and he feels dissatisfied. One can argue that Jake's inferiority comes not from Romero's physical strength or conventional masculinity, but from constructed masculinity codes and norms of the society he inhabits.

CONCLUSION

The unending search for gratification, entertainment, partying in some parts of Europe, and subtlety of having a love affair and sexual intercourse between such characters as Jake and Brett, Brett, and Pedro Romero and others are the reflections of the negative effects of WWI on these people. It also reflects the collapse of socially accepted roles, norms, and ideals such as masculinity (how to be a man), and femininity (how to be a woman). The reformed gender identity after the disastrous WWI presents a new way of thinking about new masculinity and femininity that Hemingway puts forward in *The Sun Also Rises*. Fast industrialization and pace of urbanization shaped the traditional rural and peasant populations differently, and therefore, especially Jake and Brett, and other characters in the novel had to cope with the modern arrangements in the existing system. Even though Hemingway and other lost generation writers such as Eliot and Fitzgerald seem to champion the



conventionally accepted masculinity with Pedro Romero character, and femininity by giving norms or codes of the Victorian period, he raises some significant questions about masculinity and femininity in the readers' mind and makes the readers reconsider the fatal effects of the WWI. In other words, Hemingway in *The Sun Also Rises* revises and remakes societal constructions both for men and women. The modern readers, through this novel, remakes the future and rescues the history from misconceptions.

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