



ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S

The Sun Also Rises

A CASEBOOK

EDITED BY
LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

A C A S E B O O K

CASEBOOKS IN CRITICISM

General Editor, William L. Andrews

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Linda Wagner-Martin

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A C A S E B O O K

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Introduction

LINDA WAGNER-MARTIN



ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S 1926 *The Sun Also Rises* provided readers a startling example of the newly modern novel. People accustomed to fiction by Charles Dickens or Jane Austen, books in which a leisurely narrative told a recognizable story about well-described characters, found Hemingway's cryptic introduction of characters—people whose actions did not often seem to be purposeful—puzzling. And for a novel said to be about people who had survived the debilitating trauma of the First World War, *The Sun Also Rises* contained almost nothing about that cataclysmic event. Strangely, Jake Barnes's wound, the most apparent evidence of the war's damages, seems to have made him a strong and almost wise protagonist.

The Sun Also Rises was not the novel readers expected it to be. Its style was so unusual as to be just plain troublesome. How did one interpret the quick shifts from one scene to another; from the initial focus on Robert Cohn, boxing champion of his undergraduate years at Princeton University, to that on Pedro Romero, the admirable young Spanish torero? Where were the assumed lead characters of Jake Barnes, Brett Ashley, and Bill Gorton? If this were an American novel, as it was advertised to be, why did none of its action take place in the United States? And if it were a truly moral book, as its author Ernest Hemingway insisted, why did its plotline

consist of a great many sexual liaisons embedded in an even greater number of eating and drinking scenes? Considering that life in the United States had been operating under the laws of Prohibition since 1920, Hemingway's emphasis not only on the fact that his characters spent much of their time drinking but also on deciding whether or not a person was a good drunk or a bad one appeared to be teasingly irreverent.

Hemingway was lucky. Instead of being damned for its irreverence, not to mention its irrelevance to the Prohibition culture of the United States, his first novel was comparatively well-received. The reception of *The Sun Also Rises* was determined by the highly favorable response influential critics had given his slim earlier books. In 1923, his *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, several of which had already appeared in Harriet Monroe's premier magazine *Poetry*, had been published in Paris. In 1924, *in our time*, a pamphlet of one-page prose poems, appeared from Three Mountains Press, the conduit for Ezra Pound's book series. Reviewing *in our time* and *Three Stories and Ten Poems*, Edmund Wilson commented for *The Dial* in 1924 that Hemingway's prose was "of the first distinction":

He must be counted as the only American writer but one—Mr. Sherwood Anderson—who has felt the genius of Gertrude Stein's *Three Lives* and has been evidently influenced by it. Indeed, Miss Stein, Mr. Anderson, and Mr. Hemingway may now be said to form a school by themselves. The characteristic of this school is a naivete of language often passing into the colloquialism of the character dealt with which serves actually to convey profound emotions and complex states of mind. It is a distinctively American development in prose.¹

The young writer's fame was not only conferred by critics: African American writer Claude McKay recalled that "Ernest Hemingway was the most talked about of young American writers when I arrived in Paris. . . . *In Our Time*, that thin rare book of miniature short stories, was published, and it was the literary event among the young expatriates."²

In 1925, while a good bit of the international literary world was reading F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby*, Hemingway's short stories were published in *In Our Time*, the longer version of his 1924 collection, a version that kept the short prose pieces about bullfighting and the war as small interchapters between the fourteen short stories which Hemingway had managed to write by that time. Again, U.S. critics noticed. Paul Rosenfeld wrote in *The Nation* that "Hemingway's short stories belong with cubist painting, *Le Sacre du printemps*, and other recent work bringing a feeling of positive forces through primitive modern idiom. The use of the direct,

crude, rudimentary forms of the simple and primitive classes and their situations, of the stuffs, textures, and rhythms of the mechanical and industrial worlds, has enabled this new American storyteller, as it enabled the group to which he comes a fresh recruit, to achieve peculiarly sharp, decided, grimly affirmative expressions; and with these acute depictions and half-impersonal beats to satisfy a spirit running through the age."³

Above all things, Hemingway wanted to be seen as new. His mentor, Ezra Pound, wore the storied scarf with "Make it new" inscribed upon it through the streets of Paris; his other prominent mentor, Gertrude Stein, was even more visibly an icon of modernism—in both her persona and her art collection. As all younger artists had learned, being connected with the innovation of modernism was a bonus in the publicity-crazed 1920s: an era that used the 1913 Armory Show and Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theories as touchstones for the new was eager for writing that could be compared with a Duchamp painting. But what writers of all time had learned was that it takes only a few rave reviews in the right places to make a book into a best-seller. While Edmund Wilson did not like *The Sun Also Rises* as much as he had Hemingway's earlier fiction, his *Dial* comments paved the way for the novel to find an admiring reception.

Titled *Fiesta* in its British edition, *The Sun Also Rises* captured readers' imaginations. In it Hemingway had written about exotic settings and equally exotic pastimes. Few American readers had been to Spain: indeed, were it not for the fact that Gertrude Stein and her companion, Alice B. Toklas, had themselves earlier found the Pamplona festival, with its superior bullfights, Hemingway and his friends would never have made their pilgrimage. As he had with scenes and vignettes about World War I, Hemingway described the Spanish culture—its churches, restaurants, tables in the sunny squares, fishing streams, bus rides, hotels, and bullfights—with detailed authenticity. He still knew what made good journalism, and he was not above creating some of journalism's vivid effects in the genre of serious fiction. Hemingway wanted to publish a book that people would admire as well as talk about; he defined himself as a serious writer, not someone who wrote for the movies or for titillation. He did not mind if his books were not best-sellers. What he wanted was standing, respect, and the accolades of his friends, people who were themselves serious about their art.

The overwhelming first impression of Hemingway's 1926 novel, then, was that it was different. No one else had written about these topics and these settings. Only the Spanish knew Spain in this way. Even as F. Scott Fitzgerald helped him break into big-time commercial publishing in the

United States, by acting as a liaison to Max Perkins, Fitzgerald's influential editor at Charles Scribner's in New York, Hemingway knew that his writing would outshine the kind of cultural panorama that Fitzgerald usually built his novels around. Readers devoured Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise*, *The Beautiful and Damned*, and (to a lesser extent) *The Great Gatsby*, but they did so because his writing was romantically poignant, almost formulaic: did the right man win the girl? did college students really live like this on their elite campuses? Had Hemingway written about the same topics—the by-now familiar “jazz age” characters and situations, his work would have been marketed as a copy of Fitzgerald's. Hemingway learned from his friendships with not only Fitzgerald, but also Sherwood Anderson, Ford Madox Ford, Gertrude Stein, Ezra Pound, Glenway Wescott, Harold Loeb, John Dos Passos, and others that the only American writing that would make its mark would be writing that was innovative. His anger when his early short stories were compared with the work of either Anderson or Stein was his attempt to blot out—or at least disguise—their influence; he wanted to be a master, not an apprentice.⁴

Critically, of course, he was learning fast from everything he read, and from everyone in the art world as well as the literary. There are certain similarities between Fitzgerald's 1925 *The Great Gatsby* and Hemingway's 1926 *The Sun Also Rises*: the use of oblique characterization so that some characters remained shadowy; the creation of a beautiful and sexual woman protagonist (Fitzgerald's Daisy Fay exaggerated into Hemingway's Lady Brett Ashley); an observer-narrator who kept some of his blessed naivete (the Nick Carraway of *Gatsby* who became a more involved, and less naive, Jake Barnes in *Sun*); and reliance on description that gave the reader the atmosphere, and the geography, of place, as well as of class. While the East and West Egg residents were themselves conscious of the difference between real money and new money, and the Long Island setting gave Fitzgerald a way to achieve the glamour of the 1920s culture of success, Hemingway achieved the same kind of glamour by having his characters travel in Europe: taking in the *Fiesta*, with the exchange rate as it was in the mid-1920s, was possible for even less romanticized, middle-class people, for even people (like Jake Barnes) who had to work. But Hemingway could see what sold. He knew readers were intrigued by the mysteries of class and affluence, and he positioned *The Sun Also Rises* to appeal to the voyeurism that readers felt when they could share the excitement of the lives of the wealthy. Hemingway's novel, however, did not chronicle those lives. Except for Count Mippipopolous, no one in *The Sun Also Rises* could easily pay a bar bill. What Hemingway achieved in his novel was the aura of the

exotic, and he achieved that effect largely through placing *The Sun Also Rises* in France and in Spain.

Because Fitzgerald was impressed with Hemingway's early work, and was himself an impressionable kind of man, Hemingway chose to remain friends with him even after he had broken off his early relationships with both Anderson and Stein. Fitzgerald's championing of Hemingway's skills was invaluable.⁵ And it was Fitzgerald's Princeton friend, Edmund Wilson, who had given Hemingway his first rave review.

Fitzgerald, too, became the reader who provided for Hemingway the striking structure for his visibly modernist novel. Because they were friends and because Fitzgerald had secured the Scribner's contract for Hemingway, Hemingway asked him to read the manuscript of *Sun*, even though he had already submitted it to Max Perkins. Fitzgerald's response has become, rightly, famous. For Fitzgerald told Hemingway to omit the first chapter and a half of the draft version, the heavily romanticized biography of Brett Ashley (this change is the reason the book begins with Robert Cohn); more important, Fitzgerald asked him to change the tone, to get rid of what he called "condescending casualness." He went on to emphasize that "there are about 24 sneers, superiorities, and nose-thumbings-at-nothing that mar the whole narrative."⁶ Since much of the narrative is in the voice of Jake Barnes, Fitzgerald's comments about tone also were comments about Hemingway's protagonist.⁷ He continued in that vein to ask that Hemingway say less about himself—that is, the author figure, who was clearly egocentric and proud of it—and to let the book's action play itself out among its characters. The noninterference of the modernist author was thereby achieved. In *Gatsby*, Fitzgerald had achieved that effect by letting Nick Carraway tell the story; in *Sun*, nobody told the story. Hemingway's book was a step ahead: it was the modernist novel.

So Hemingway did cut and revise. Although it was difficult for him to accept criticism of any kind, he appreciated Fitzgerald's candor: he wanted his novel to succeed. In monetary debt to Fitzgerald and perhaps to John Dos Passos and Gertrude Stein, Hemingway was also tired of the fact that he and his family—his wife Hadley Richardson and their infant son, John Hadley Nicanor, to both of whom the novel was dedicated—lived almost entirely on Hadley's trust fund. It was time for Hemingway's fiction to pay off.

Critic Leonard Leff, in fact, sees Hemingway's novel, and his efforts to place it with a top U.S. publisher, as a calculated step in a careful campaign to make the author into a celebrity. The popularity of movies as well as of glossy fashion and arts magazines coincided with the rise of advertising.

Leff contends that Hemingway, even at this early stage of his career, “was acutely aware of audience” and had supplied Scribner’s with “re-touched studio portraits” of himself in unusual settings—on ski slopes, as well as in Spain—for the book’s publicity.⁸ (One of his reasons for leaving Liveright, his first publisher, was that he considered their advertising ineffectual.⁹) Leff also assesses the content of *The Sun Also Rises* to be aimed at the 1920s’ somewhat melodramatic emphasis on “sensationalism,” because the book’s characters were “fashionably indecent” yet its style was never difficult—remaining totally distinct from James Joyce’s modernist style.¹⁰

This recent and somewhat cynical view of why Hemingway chose to write the novel he did is at variance with much earlier criticism of *The Sun Also Rises*, which has always taken the frustrated love between Jake Barnes and Brett Ashley as the center, the deftly placed vortex, of the narrative. As Robert W. Lewis, Jr., wrote in his 1965 study, readers have been unified through “the common theme of suffering for love. . . . Brett and Jake are really sick with love. And thus the essential comedy of the whole story—of any romantic love story—in which the lovers claim a special role and ask for a special sympathy.”¹¹ No matter what else happens in the book, “the love never dies.”¹²

Love was, in many respects, still the answer to the increasingly technologized society of the twentieth century. People feared the impersonality of the binary, of the numbers-based lives shared by even the most stalwart humanists by mid-century. It was useful to find in the books we cherished the replication of people’s deepest-held values. So Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* became a novel about love, rather than about love’s debasement.

For the influential Lionel Trilling, Hemingway became the proponent of piety, if not of religion. As he explained, “In Hemingway’s stories a strongly charged piety toward the ideals and attachments of boyhood and the lusts of maturity is in conflict not only with the imagination of death but also with that imagination as it is peculiarly modified by the dark negation of the modern world.”¹³ Richard P. Adams agrees, finding in *The Sun Also Rises* (with which he compares T. S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land*) a searching but positive representation of humanity in the chilling throes of the war to end all wars. He reads the travels to foreign lands and the immersion in other cultures as rites of interrogation, emphasizing that San Fermin is a religious festival as well as a bullfighting one (or, rather, that the bullfight is part of that festival) and that the book is filled with churches, with the monastery of Roncevalles, and with discussions about prayer’s effective-

ness—or lack of it. Adams concludes, “in *The Sun Also Rises* Christian and pagan religious feelings work together in perfect harmony.”¹⁴

For Frederic Svoboda, the untwisting of the strands of place and theme in *The Sun Also Rises* leads the reader to the same comfort Hemingway finds in nature and the many dimensions of the natural, and therefore unspoiled, world. As he states it, “another aspect of nature’s importance may derive from the way in which the connection to nature also raises the stakes in Hemingway’s writing. The ironies of nature are always there: the earth reliably turning, however else the lives of the characters of *The Sun Also Rises* may descend to chaos.”¹⁵

Michael S. Reynolds sets the novel in the context of 1925, the year it was written, and claims that its much-vaunted modernity was largely the function of Hemingway’s style. As Reynolds sees the book, which he reads as a novel of World War I, “The war merely put a period on the end of a sentence that had been twenty years in the writing. The stable values of 1900 had eroded beneath the feet of this generation: Home, family, church, and country no longer gave the moral support that Hemingway’s generation grew up with. The old values—honor, duty, love—no longer rang as true as they had in the age of Teddy Roosevelt. For Hemingway and for the country, the loss was not permanent, but in 1926 it seemed that it was. If his characters seemed degenerate, if their values appeared shallow, so did the world appear, at home and abroad, in those postwar years. To read Hemingway’s indictment of his age as a paean to the ‘lost generation’ is to miss his point badly.”¹⁶ Working as extensively as he was in not only the John F. Kennedy Library Archive of Hemingway materials, but also in all collections pertinent to what would be his masterful five-volume biography of Hemingway, Reynolds had the proof of his statement ready to be published in the second volume of his biography. What he had found in the manuscripts of *The Sun Also Rises* was Hemingway’s specific statement about the “lost generation” epigraph. Reynolds quotes the unpublished note, referring to all the damage already done to the generation that fought—or at least lived through—the Great War: “There will be more entanglements, there will be more complications, there will be successes and failures. . . . My generation in France for example in two years sought salvation in first the Catholic Church, second DaDaism, third the movies, fourth Royalism, fifth the Catholic Church again. There may be another and better war. But none of it will matter particularly to this generation because to them the things that are given to people to happen have already happened.”¹⁷

The life of any piece of literature depends in part on the culture of its

readers—both the culture contemporary with its publication and initial response, and intermediate responses, and the culture of the present readers' lives. The aim of this collection is to bring together criticism from a range of years, giving today's readers a way to create a montage, a palimpsest of ideas that may help to give *The Sun Also Rises* a life relevant to the twenty-first century. Hemingway's novel has been historicized over and over, and a few of the essays that were influential in that mode of criticism do appear here. But the real reason for this casebook is to help the reader find the permanence of the literature, its luminous value rather than its past value. As a last part of this composite, a letter from Ernest Hemingway to his older sister Marcelline helps to set the crucial importance of the war—and his frighteningly serious wounding—in memory. On November 18, 1918, months after his being wounded and taken to various hospitals for various surgeries, Hemingway wrote from Milan, Italy, to Marcelline in Oak Park, Illinois:

Child, I'm going to stay over here till my girl [the nurse with whom he was in love] goes home and then I'll go up north and get rested before I have to go to work in the fall. The doc says that I'm all shot to pieces, figuratively as well as literally you see. My internal arrangements were all battered up and he says I won't be any good for a year. So I want to kill as much time as I can over here. If I was at home I'd either have to work or live at the folks. And, I can't work. I'm too shot up and my nerves are all jagged. . . . You won't know me. I'm about 100 years older and I'm not bashful. I'm all medalled up and shot up.¹⁸

By the time Hemingway created Jake Barnes and placed him amid his less serious companions in *The Sun Also Rises*, he had learned that the best way to heal injuries—and soothe nerves—was to hide, or disguise, them. But that they existed, at least for the author and his surrogate character Jake, gave the novel its weighty purposefulness. Laconic and steady as he was, for the most part, Jake knew what existing meant. And he also knew that it was not always pretty.

READING THE PLIMPTON interview with Hemingway, published in 1958 in the *Paris Review*, reminds one how keenly interested the literate world was in the American modernist writers. William Faulkner had won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1949; Hemingway received it in 1954. John Steinbeck was to win it in 1962, and Sinclair Lewis had been the first American novelist to be so honored in 1930. The prominence of these startlingly innovative writers, whose works had already been translated into count-

less languages, was an early sign of what would continue through the rest of the twentieth century: the absolute dominance of U.S. writers on the international scene.

The fallout of the dominance remains with us today. The novels of these Nobel winners—and their friends F. Scott Fitzgerald, Gertrude Stein, John Dos Passos, Glenway Wescott, Katherine Anne Porter, Djuna Barnes, and others—remain essential to any consideration of writing in the past century. It is for that reason that classes at the secondary school level, as well as in universities and community colleges, are frequently built around novels by, particularly, Faulkner and Hemingway. The work of the former illustrates the forceful comprehensiveness of the modernist reach: a text wide-ranging and allusive, a fiction that not only creates a world full of characters but creates the world itself. The work of Ernest Hemingway, in purposefully designed contrast, aims for the effect of non-art. “The Racing Form” referred to in the epigraph to the *Paris Review* interview is Hemingway’s joke, his personal stripped-down answer to what he sees as the over-intellectualization of a human being’s life in the chaotic modern world. But there is so much serious commentary from Hemingway in this interview that it is almost an essay written/spoken by the author himself.

Mark Spilka’s essay about the death of love in *The Sun Also Rises* was also published in 1958 and has been reprinted often. Carefully assessing human relations from a heterosexual perspective, the norm in 1958, Spilka finds in the book only damaged characters, “cripples” as he names them. The novel, then, becomes a metaphor for the damage of war in the culture entire, and Brett Ashley—who was often harshly criticized for her numerous sexual encounters—comes off no worse than the male characters of the book. Evenhanded in terms of gender, Spilka’s essay focuses on Pedro Romero as the true—and only—hero of the book.

Thirty years later, Wendy Martin contextualizes Brett Ashley differently. With the critical interest in cultural history, she convincingly shows that Hemingway’s portrait of Lady Brett was written almost to script from the “new woman” paradigm. The sociological information in Martin’s essay, “Brett Ashley as New Woman in *The Sun Also Rises*,” provides a way to read the primary characters apart from their romantic bonds. As Martin notes, “One of the important observations about sexual politics in the novel is that masculine eroticism confines women; therefore Hemingway implies that sex and friendship are inversely related. In traditional courtship situations, the woman’s power is the power to be pursued; once caught, she forfeits her opportunity to choose . . . by retaining the interest of multiple suitors, Brett keeps her options open, diversifies her in-