

Hemingway's Love Affair with Paris: A Study of "The Sun also Rises" and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro"

Abstract

This paper discusses Hemingway's novel *The Sun Also Rises* and his famous short story "The snows of Kilimanjaro," where Paris is remarkably presented in attractive colours. Paris is given different connotations in his work depending upon the requirement of the plot structure. There is hardly any writing done by him which does not reflect the influences of Paris on his outlook of life as well his view of literature. Both as a man and artist, Hemingway is indebted to the place a great deal. He is forever linked to Paris, despite only having lived there for a relatively few years. No other city in any of his travels was as significant professionally or emotionally as was Paris. For Hemingway there was never any ending to Paris.

Keywords: Love, Affair, Novel

Introduction

Investigating into Hemingway's relation to Paris, through a study of his various fictional and non-fictional description of its places and people, it is seen that Hemingway had developed a great liking for the place. He was greatly attached to the place, so much so that he misses the place throughout his life. Other writers have also written about Paris in the 20s, but no one could make it more memorable and immortal the way Hemingway has done it. Hemingway tells of his love for Paris as the place for a young writer to find himself as he himself remarks, "you belong to me and all Paris belong to me and I belong to his note-book and this pencil" (p.3).

Review of Literature

Hemingway is one of the major writers of the twentieth century who revolutionized the prose writing. His influence is even visible on the writers like Khushwant Singh. One of the most important books written on Hemingway in recent times is Eugene Goodheart's *Ernest Hemingway (Critical Insights)* published in 2009, another important book is *The Novels of Ernest Hemingway* (2002) by Ishteyaque Shams. Carlos Baker's *Ernest Hemingway: A Life Story* (1980) is another important book on Hemingway. The researcher has not come across any other latest book on Hemingway.

Aim of the Study

Europe always enchanted and haunted Hemingway. His novels are full of the stories about Europe and Paris. *The Sun Also Rises* is an important novel of Hemingway that is based in Europe. The paper is a study of *The Sun Also Rises* and "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" and traces the influence of Paris on intellectual development of Hemingway.

Paris offered Hemingway the most significant experience of his life. It was primarily taken as a symbol of modern life, particularly in comparison to the writer's home-country which continued to praise the Victorian-puritan ethos and values. The American Puritanism forced people to hush-up their vital feelings, emotions and desires. This repression led to "the hypocrisy of the American who goes to church on Sunday and bleeds his brother on Monday, who leads a sexually vicious life and insists on 'pure' books ..." (Hotchner 13). In such an atmosphere, the writer did not feel free and secure in their professions. Also, Hemingway's participation in the World-War I and his having seriously wounded was the turning event of his life as this mishap made him shed his illusion of immortality. It was at this stage Hemingway decided to go to Paris as "Paris was the only place for a serious writer (p.109) and provided not only the atmosphere of complete freedom Hemingway so much desired, but also a proper literary atmosphere, which would not have been

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available at the time anywhere outside Paris. Characterizing Paris as a “moveable feast”(Hutchner) he recognized it as a “necessary part of man’s education” (Hemingway, Paris Letter). Hemingway found Paris as a congenial place for the development of his talents. It was here that he came in contact with the leading literary personalities of the time. Like Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein, Ford Modox Ford, Scott Fitzgerald, James Joyce, T.S. Eliot etc. As Carless Baker has pointed out, “Ernest could make what he had seen in Paris” (Young)

Hemingway’s stay in Paris resulted in his writing of his most famous novel (*The Sun Also Rises*), which is a powerful commentary on the life of American expatriates living in Paris in the 20’s. In it, Hemingway’s consciously concerned with catching the historical mood of the time. The novel depicts the life of a set of American expatriates in the post World War I period, bringing the malaise and frustration of the so called lost generation. The novel opens in Paris with the narrator-hero Jake Barnes, portraying the heart of Paris in which large crowd of expatriates move around from one pleasure place to another, desperately trying to forget the disturbing memories of the war, which never leave them along. Most characters in the novel have been disillusioned and depressed by the war and are now trying to cope with the nightmarish experience.

Since the picture of Paris in the novel is confined to a particular place in the city and does not cover the city as a whole, the people we get to see in the novel also belong to a particular type, which is available in bars, restaurants and such other places. And even among these people the focus falls on those who have been victims of international war. Focusing on a particular spot in the city and on a particular set of people and that too in relation to the mood generated by the war, the writer’s obvious purpose seems to use Paris as a metaphor just as T.S. Eliot uses London in “The Waste Land.” As Eliot shows a series of slides to highlight the wasteland aspect of modern life so does Hemingway by portraying those aspects of Paris that are representative of the post-war life in the European cosmopolitan. Therefore, *The Sun Also Rises* has understandably been called the prose counterpart of Eliot’s *The Wasteland*. It depicts the barrenness of the post-war-Europe, especially the life of Paris, where drinking, occasional fornication, profane language, lack of religious belief and absence of sustaining values, are the prevailing echoes of the time. As Philip Young has observed, *The Sun Also Rises* is Hemingway’s wasteland. Here is the protagonist, Jake Barnes, gone impotent, his land gone sterile. Eliot’s London is Hemingway’s Paris, where the spiritual life in general and Jake’s sexual life in particular are alike impoverished. Prayers break down and fails, a knowledge of traditional distinction between good and evil is largely lost, copulation is more natural and cut off from the past chiefly by the spiritual disaster of the war, life has become more and more meaningless. To hide it, one drinks mechanically and always. Love is a possibility only for the two who cannot love. Once again homosexuality

intensifies this atmosphere of sterility. In Hemingway’s wasteland, there is fun, but there is no hope.⁷

The main characters, Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, Brett Ashley, the Count and Mike one seen engaged in a mere adolescent escapism. As Bruce L Greenberg has observed, “the post-war western civilization is basically sterile, and more explicitly, the particular society of Brett, Cohn, Bill and Mike is depicted as fragmented and directionless(Bracer). There is sense of sterility, both sexual and general, of aimlessness and emptiness, the failure and loss of value. They are running away from their past and do not wish to talk or think of it. They love the present, constantly searching for new and fresh sensations. In one of the scenes, which so brilliantly marks the novel, Jake, with a prostitute as a companion, watches Brett come in with a crowd of young homosexuals:

I could see their hands and newly washed wavy hair in the light from the door As they went in, under the light I saw white hands With them was Brett. She looked very lovely and she was very much with them. I was very angry. Somehow they always make me angry⁹

This world of homosexual as well as Jake’s inability to do anything about it is symbolic of the impotence of the age. Mark Spilka argues that “love is dead in *The Sun Also Rises*” war has made all the characters “incapable of love,” these characters have been rendered impotent by the war,” and they pass before us like “a pomade of sexual cripples.”

The disorientation of society in Paris- a leading modern city is further revealed in Jake’s conversation with the prostitute, Georgette, whom Jake picks up “because of vague sentimental idea that “it would be nice to eat with someone” (SAR, 14) like Jake, Georgette is also sick and sterile:

‘what is the matter? You sick?’

‘yes’

‘Everybody’s sick I’m sick too. (SAR 14)

The existence of fake expatriates in Paris is also important Robert Prentiss, the rising young artist, Mrs. Braddocks, Frances Clyne and Cohn-all are living a aimless life, wandering from one café to another, indulging into meaningless talks, disillusioned and depressed, isolated from their past. The following conversation between Frances and Georgette shows this:

‘Have you been in Paris long? Do you like here? You love Paris, do you not? Frances asked Georgette. She turned to Frances, sitting smiling ‘No, I don’t like Paris. It’s expensive and dirty’ ‘Really? I find it extraordinarily clean. One of the cleanest cities in all Europe.’ ‘I find it dirty’..... ‘But it does have nice people in it. One must grant that [SAR 16-17]

As Frederick J. Hoffman has observed, “The Paris scenes which begin the novel, in their description of expatriates in the bars, convey the

ugliness and hopelessness of defeat." Most characters in *The Sun Also Rises* have suffered in the war. They are sensitive recorders of the shock which they experienced. As expatriates they live in another country where all the values of the past exist only as in dead and empty forms. Note for instance, the following remarks from the novel; "you know what's the trouble with you? You're an expatriate. One of the worst type. Nobody that ever left their own country ever wrote anything worth printing. Not even in the newspaperFake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex [SAR 94-95]

For Hemingway this represents the kind of degradation that obtained the modern cities of which Paris is the most representative. Thus, the entire atmosphere of Paris is that of disenchantment and psychic disintegration. This mood has become a way of feeling and acting, in fact a social habit. The problem faced by all the character is how to cope with their disillusionment?

Hemingway brings out the metaphoric meaning of Paris, representing the modern way of life, by contrasting it to an opposing metaphor in Pamplona, which is modern counterpoint of the ancient pastoral and represents the pre-war western civilization, which is natural rather than artificial, an essential feature of which is a complete harmony with nature as against the complete alienation of the life in Paris. In Pamplona, Jake and Bill find relatively carefree and happy state of being in the country surroundings. Life is less complicated in Paris because the value system is materialistically defined. Everything has its cash values. There are no problems of abstract values and emotional responses that confuse relationships.

If the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* are representative of 20th century life in Paris: disillusioned, disintegrated, having no traditional roots, no faith in religion, no strong morals, it also shows some of the positive aspects of life in Paris, one of which is its secularism. None of the character seem to have a hangover of religion like they have in America, where Puritanism still has a hold on people. Another positive aspect of life in Paris is its cosmopolitanism where different nationalities move about without any mutual friction of any sort. There are writers, painters, journalists, tourists, inn-keepers, counts, bull-fighters etc. they belong to so many different nationalities, such as the French, the Spanish, the British, the Greek etc. Jake, the hero of the novel is an American journalist and his friends are mostly American and English expatriates. Paris is a modern cosmopolitan – its culture is marked by bars, cafes, restaurants, prostitutes, homosexuals, painters, writers and journalists Paris certainly offers greater opportunity for freedom of expression, greater scope for ingenuity both in life and art, which could not have been possible in the congested climate of America.

Of course, there are limitations in his portrait of Paris as his acquaintance with the city is limited to only certain area and people in it. It is limited also because of his need to make a strictly purposeful use

of his life in Paris. What we finally get in the picture of Paris in the novel is not merely a graphic account of that part of the city which was intimately known to the writer but also its presentation as a metaphor imbibing various dimensions of modern culture. Paris emerges in the novel not merely a place in France, not merely a "moveable feast" but also as a metaphor for a way of life which not only challenges the traditional outlook on life but embodies as well as the tentativeness of a generation that emerged from the dark clouds of the great international conflict. Thus Hemingway's love of Paris results in immortalizing the city. Paris may be the haunt of "the lost-generation", its charm remain irresistible Hemingway's description of Paris in *The Sun Also Rises* is limited but intense.

Another major Hemingway's work reflecting life in Paris is his famous short story, 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' while Paris is used as a locale and as a metaphor is *The Sun Also Rises*, it neither provides the location of the story, nor does it appear as a metaphor for a way of life. In 'The Snows of Kilimanjaro' Paris is recalled in the form of nostalgia by its protagonist, Harry. Remembering his life in Paris as a happy one, Harry feels, was the best period of his life both as man and artist, which has now become all the more attractive in contrast to the present situation in Africa, where he received a scratch on his hunting expedition, and which out of his negligence develops into gangrene and endangers his life. For Harry, Paris was the place of the liberty, integrity, opportunity-qualities which were once joyously owned but which one now lost altogether Paris is presented as the most attractive and comfortable place where the artist and his woman could lead their life in the happiest way. Contrasted to Paris is Africa where life becomes miserable for them, as is shown by the following conversation between Harry and his wife:

'I wish we'd never come, "the woman said. She was looking at him"you never would have gotten anything like this in Paris. You always said you loved Paris. We could have stayed in Paris or gone anywhere'¹²

Although for Helen, Africa is not a place to offer any comfort, for Harry Africa has a moral significance. To him it means the hope of moral regeneration.

"Africa was where he had been happiest in the good times of his life, so he had come out here to start again ... [SOK, 59-60]

Obviously, Harry associates Africa with the creative phase of his life, which he hopes to return now to attain his lost integrity. As in *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake revives himself after his dissipation in Paris, by going on a fishing trip with Bill to a remote place in Spain. We can see the similarities between Harry's reminiscences of Paris with Jake's life in the same city. Jake, in order to kill his loneliness, picks up a whore, Georgette, for supper in "The Ruedes Saints Peres". Similarly, Harry, too, remembers having picked up a girl and taking her out for supper. Further, Harry was like Jake, a journalist in Paris.

Although Harry is a development from Jake Barns, his disgust with himself is not direct consequence of Jake's experience in the post-war Paris. Between his life in Paris after the first world war and his present disgust with himself lies another span of his life in which he had chased a hedonistic existence. Harry's degeneration started when he sacrificed his life to hard discipline as a writer for the comfortable life among the rich and sacrificed his serious commitment to individuals for the life irresponsible ease. As Robert W. Lewis has remarked, "Harry's succumbing to the fleshy pleasures of riches and rich women was the very cause of his failure as a writer".¹³ Helen's wealth was the arm our that shielded him from risk, and paradoxically killed him. Harry tries to assuage his bitterness by making a scape-goat of his pleasant wife Helen. He blames her for his own aesthetic decay. His bitterness is seen when he says, 'Yes' ... 'your damned money was my armour. My swift and Myarmour.' (57-58).

Life was not easy or soft in Paris, but Harry lived there, not escaping it, not deceiving himself, not lying to himself. He was facing the better realities the complex life of Paris, and was trying to cope with it as Jake does in *The Sun Also Rises*. At that time, his attitude towards life was to experience, it and he acknowledged that there was so much to write. But he had become an insensitive and irresponsible individual plunging with hedonism, making him lose concern with the larger issues of life. That's why he has come to Africa in the first place to work the fat off his body and soul, to give up easy comforts in an attempt to regain his old form, and it is wry irony of fate that threaten to destroy him before he can reclaim himself.

Harry summons memoires of Paris to strengthen him "there was a log house, chinked white with mortar, in a hill about lake(SOK, 68). He recalls his destitute neighbor, the locataire whose husband was a bicycle racers also remember those drunkards who killed their poverty with drink, loved to recall that part of Paris where he lived" ... There were only two rooms in the apartments where they lived and he had a room on the top floor of that hotel where he did his writing (SOK, 70).

These reminiscences give a dense description of his place in Paris where he lived and these details show how he was really alive in those days in Paris in contrast to the present situation in Africa. Paris is here symbolic of life as against the Paris of *The Sun Also Rises* where it symbolized death-in-life. Obviously, the Paris city is given different connotation in different works depending on the requirement of the plot structure. The Paris phase of Harry's life appears sand-witched. The phase proceeding his life in Paris relates to the period of World War I in which Harry has participated and was victim of violence and faced death. The phase following his life in Paris relates to his dangerous hunting in Africa where he once again is facing death which seems imminent. Now sand-witched between these two dark phases, the Paris phase seems all the more bright as a way of contrast.

In essence, Paris in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro" is presented in more attractive colours than it is done in *The Sun Also Rises*. In the sense, there is a parallel between the two presentation in that, while in the novel, Paris as a modern city is contrasted to the primitive town of Pamplona; In the short story, Paris as civilized place is contrasted to Africa as a non-civilized place but whereas in the novel, the primitive Pamplona appears more attractive than the modern Paris, at least from the viewpoint of values which the hero and the author seem to uphold, in the short story it is the modern and civilized Paris which appears for more attractive than the primitive and uncivilized Africa. Here Paris is not "A Moveable Feast", nor a metaphor for *modern wasteland*, but a certain environment which offered opportunities and challenges for an authentic life and motive growth of Hemingway the man and the artist.

Apart from this long story, there are a few short stories like "My Old Man" and "Mr. and Mrs. Eliot" written during Hemingway's stay in Paris. Besides, Hemingway wrote an important non-fictional look *A Moveable Feast*, during the last year of his life in which he nostalgically recalls his life as a young and upcoming writer in Paris. The book is a sort of immortal tribute to the city of his liking the city where he lived with his first wife and then broke away with her, where he published his first work and made preparations for the next one.

Conclusion

Hemingway has seen Paris, its various places and people, more clearly in a truer light. He has described the various aspects of the city, its geography, its landscape, its climate, its attractions and a little bit of its history. And both as man and artist, he is indebted to the place a great deal. There is hardly any writing done by him which does not reflect the influences of Paris on his outlook of life as well as his view of literature. It became for his life time a reservoir of memories which he exploited over and over again for creating fictional and non-fictional work. Paris remain for Hemingway's life a city of youth, representing all the enchantments of young age.

End Notes

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