Life Reflecting Sport
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The second book of Ernest Hemingway's novel _The Sun Also Rises_ deals primarily with the group's journey, or pilgrimage, to Spain and their experiences in and around the fiesta and the bull-fights. It is also during this period that Jake Barnes begins to have a full understanding of his own perspective on life. Beginning with his solitude while fishing and culminating in the climactic events of the fiesta, which reveal the intricate relationships among his band of expatriates, Barnes makes a noticeable transition in attitude from one of sport and leisure to an attempt at establishing an identifiable real life. Drawing on his own somewhat tragic experience with the war, the tragedy of man against beast in the bull-fight, and his and others' growing frustration with Robert Cohn and his lack of stability of character, Jake Barnes undergoes a considerable change. This is a metamorphosis that will result in his coming to terms with his own reality, his love for Lady Brett Ashley, and his somewhat rootless existence as an American tourist/writer in Europe. As the novel's focus changes from one of sport and carousing in the first book to reality and introspection in the second, Barnes' earlier narrative attention to Robert Cohn becomes clear. Cohn represents the sporting side, the ungrounded, rootless aspect of these characters, while Barnes discovers that it is the bull-fight, the struggle of life that is of greatest importance, setting it quite apart from the world of sporting man against man in the boxing ring which Cohn comes to represent. The bullfight, the focus of this portion of the novel, is symbolic of the actual lives Barnes and his compatriots lead under the guise of sportmanship and entertainment.

To understand the way in which Cohn is viewed by Barnes and the rest, it is necessary to see why Barnes chooses to begin his narrative with the introduction of this seemingly secondary character. The opening line of the novel, "Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton" (11), initially implies that he is the probable focus of the novel. As the book progresses, however, it is discovered that not only is Cohn merely one member of a gang of America's lost generation, but a reviled and peripheral one as well. His existence in the novel serves clearly to establish a sort of attitude and character that eventually Barnes will seek to abandon. He is the primary player of book one, as the young matador is of book two. The fact that these two characters will literally clash at the climax of the novel is symbolic of Barnes' very dilemma. Cohn's very world is centered around sport, both literally and figuratively. It is not important that boxing is now behind him. He embodies the spirit of boxing in his very life. He is filled with bravado, taking a fighting stance against everyone he encounters. He dances around each character, especially Lady Brett, in attempt to win the game that they all play; he is determined to remain standing.

Even the choice of entertainment for the rest of the group in this portion of the novel is boxing. Reading Hemingway one expects fishing, bull-fighting, the rustic scene of man outdoors struggling with nature. Instead, these characters are found milling around from cafe to cafe and attending boxing matches. Like Barnes, they have not grasped any meaning of their own existence. Even Jake's commentary on the activity, "The Ledoux-Kid Francis fight was the night of the 20th of June. It was a good fight" (87), lacks the passion and aesthetic appreciation that is inherent in his observation of bull-fighting and his attempt to explain it to Lady Brett later in the novel. He moves through the first portion of the novel in a lackluster malaise and ennui that is indicative of the coldness of feeling so displayed by everybody in Paris.
Often, Barnes' frustration is manifested in dramatic displays of temper that reveal his growing restlessness and need for meaning:

I was very angry. Somehow they always made me angry. I know they are supposed to be amusing, and you should be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one, anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure. (28)

As he and the others move on to Spain, the novel seems to follow their passing into a completely new state of revelry. The group moves from the encounter with American tourists on the train to the less civilized, more primal feel of wine and merriment amid the company of the Basques on the dusty road. Jake punctuates the change through one of the few instances in which he is found alone in the novel. In an earlier chapter, out of growing tension and desire, he cries alone. Now, in the third chapter of Book Two, he finds himself in a cathedral, where, wishing he was the good Catholic that he used to be, he prays. Specifically, he prays for all of his friends by name, for himself, and he prays "that the bull-fights would be good, and that it would be a fine fiesta, and that we would get some fishing" (103). His prayers, it seems, will be answered, as each of these three, or a combination of all, will be what brings about his spiritual redemption. He needs to return to life, real life, real struggle and cease playing at living as he has before.

At this point, the novel not only centers around the Fiesta of San Fermin, the running of the bulls, and the bull-fight, but all of the action is metaphorically the bull-fight itself. This is where Jake and his associates either begin to live, to really face the challenge inherent in a life and death struggle, or they will be destroyed in the process. Since bull-fighting occurs in many of Hemingway's novels, it is imperative that one understands the way in which the author views this event. Death in the Afternoon, a book written some years after The Sun Also Rises, best describes Hemingway's distinction between bull-fighting and sport. In it he writes "The bullfight is not a sport in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the word, that is, it is not an equal contest or an attempt at an equal contest between a bull and a man. Rather it is a tragedy; the death of the bull [...]" (16). His distinguishing the matter as a tragedy, a contest to the death, is integral in acknowledging the respect that Hemingway, and subsequently his characters, lends to this custom.

Jake, for the most part, is the one character who truly recognizes bull-fighting for its element of sacrament. In this sport, he sees a spiritual element that is necessary to his comprehension of his own experience with war, and the state in which he has returned. As Jens Bjorneboe writes in his article entitled "Hemingway and the Beasts," the author has certainly found a profound metaphor in bullfighting:

One of [Hemingway's] main points is that bullfighting is not a sport. It is a tragedy, in three acts, where every slightest detail is determined in advance. Accidents, deaths exaggerated foolhardiness or visible fear and cowardice have no place in the arena, and destroy the esthetic effect of the drama. It is wrong for the bullfighter to die in the arena; it is the bull who must die. Along with the bull and the matador there is a third person on the stage: death enters with them, and the amphitheater is one of the few places where one can study Death up close. Not a visible masquerade-death, not a theater-death, but the living, invisible Death, the majesty itself. But he is to take the animal, not the matador. (3)

In this analysis, one can see the clear difference between bull-fighting and a mere sport such as boxing. The bull-fight is much more similar to the war that Jake Barnes has experienced. In that particular struggle, however, it is man against man, or man against the beast of man that causes war. Death still plays a living, breathing role, and as stated above, he is to take the animal, the beast. Man should return from war a man. Preferably, he should return a whole man, and therein lies Jake's greatest loss. He has not returned from the war.
He has brought with him a physical reminder of the beast, the soldier. Man has been defeated, unjustly, and the way in which Jake gets vindication is through the victory of the matador over Death and the bull in the bullring.

The time for fun, the sport of Paris, is over. Jake's prayers in the cathedral symbolically place him on a very real quest for some meaning, some understanding. There are no more jokes about his condition. He does not take his situation lightly. From this come two major changes in Jake's attitude and action. He must rid himself, as they all must, of Cohn, and he must continue to pander his love, Lady Brett, to a worthy alternate suitor. That suitor is now the soldier of the bullring, the matador Romero, not the sportsman Cohn. This is not to say that Jake acts consciously. He seemingly continues his usual cycle where Brett and drinking are concerned, but the motives have changed drastically.

Jake is not fully aware of his own discovery, it seems, until the very poignant scene in which he shares his passion, his afición, for bullfighting with Brett. He quite literally opens up to her, using the metaphor to reveal the man that he has for so long kept hidden behind sport, drinking, and listlessness. There are even a few moments of reflection in which Jake seems to let his narrative confess his true humanity to the reader. It would seem that, in this passage for example, he is not speaking so much about Romero, but himself as he intimates, "Pedro Romero had the greatness. He loved bull-fighting, and I think he loved the bulls, and I think he loved Brett" (Hemingway 220). From all of the characterization about Jake, he is easily recognizable in those lines. In the following pages of the novel, Barnes describes in detail the ballet like dance that he and Lady Brett observe the young matador participate in with the bull. His true role as an aficionado of bull-fighting is portrayed as he observes the masterful way in which Romero executes his undertaking, explaining, "It was not brilliant bull-fighting. It was only perfect bull-fighting" (221).

This pragmatic approach to defeating the bull, thereby honoring the code of Death in which the bull, not man, is sacrificed, is reminiscent of how a soldier might conduct himself tactically in combat. It may not be a brilliant fight, but it is perfect if man emerges, defeating death, defeating the beast. This analogy becomes clear when examining again how Hemingway observes that the presence of death is what separates the battle from the sport:

I am afraid... due to the danger of death it involves it would never have much success among the amateur sportsmen of America and England who play games. We, in games, are not fascinated by death, its nearness and its avoidance. We are fascinated by victory and we replace the avoidance of death by the avoidance of defeat. It is a very nice symbolism but it takes more cojones to be a sportsman when death is a closer party to the game. (Death in the Afternoon 22)

That is why Jake Barnes can relate to the matador in a way that he can't relate to Cohn. As a former soldier, he understands the avoidance of death as opposed to Cohn's mere striving to avoid defeat. Jake realizes the similarity between war and the bullring.

War, like the bull-fight, is an artificial situation. Its only necessity is in satisfying the bravado of those who wish it to occur. The matador doesn't encounter the bull in the street, and feel forced to deal with him, any more than the soldier might happen upon his battlefield enemy anywhere other than the designated battlefield. Perhaps this is where the running of the bulls is significant. It seems to provide the matador, and his spectators, with a reason for facing the bull. If this beast should die for no other reason, it might be a case of vindication for the men who are potentially gored as the bull makes his way through the Pamplona streets. In either case, the matador or soldier faces an impersonal enemy to fulfill a sense of duty for an unknown commandant.

This is Jake's identification with the young matador. Romero represents an earlier, more whole version of Jake. Barnes' behavior toward Lady Brett at this point reflects this similarity. Again, he continues his habit of pushing her
toward a comparable rival, yet this particular action has more significance than before. Realizing his own role as a matador, he must see Brett with a true fighter, a soldier like himself. He is no longer the sporting fellow embodied by Cohn. That entire persona is rejected in the actual ostracizing of Robert Cohn. And the very last two physical conflicts in the book represent the departure of meaningless activity from the life of Jake Barnes, as well as the shift toward something more significant. Cohn is forced out of the group. Before he goes, however, he will cause his share of damage. He brutally beats the young Romero, and even delivers a few good blows to Jake. Likewise, Jake may attempt this change, but not without the lasting effects his dabbling in aimlessness has brought about. Cohn, and the characterization that he represents, will never be forgotten. His presence is felt at Romero's last bull-fight, in which the real life struggle slowly begins to erase his image: 

The fight with Cohn had not touched his spirit but his face had been smashed and his body hurt. He was wiping all that out now. Each thing that he did with this bull wiped that out a little cleaner. It was a good bull... He was what Romero wanted in bulls. (223)

It is as if Jake, with his new resolve, will begin to transcend all that he has been before. That, at least, is his plan as he returns to Paris. He soon finds, however, that even amid the peace and the calm of the end of the Fiesta and his subsequent departure from Spain, he is dangerously near to returning to his state of ennui.

Despite his need for recuperation, then, he is motivated by Brett's telegram to return to his place of epiphany. He understands that France "[is] a rich country and more sportif every year. It would be the most sportif country in the world... He knew France. La France Sportive" (240). After all of his introspection, he is placed in the third book right back in a state of sport. Against all of his instincts he must return to Spain, where he found, however unpleasant, aspects of reality.

The cycle, then, is complete. The novel ends vaguely echoing the first encounter of Jake and Brett in a cab at the start of the story. The impossibly matched couple speculates fondly on the opportunity for union between them. However, the feeling that this union is not going to happen is prevalent. As the title suggests, very little change is found, no matter how detached, disjointed, or removed this generation feels it must become. Growth is minimal. Jake's realization is just that. It serves very little practical purpose other than his own discovery of true reality. He may not yet change. "The sun also ariseth," the passage reads, "and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose... All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again" (Ecclesiastes). Jake's journey may have been just that.

Works Cited

