

# Evasion and Restraint

## – The Analysis of the Religious Beliefs of Jake Barnes

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### Abstract

Hemingway's novel, *The Sun Also Rises* is about a group of young Americans and English expatriates in Paris trying to enjoy their lives after the First World War. The religious beliefs of the protagonist, Jake Barnes is discussed in the paper, who is caught in a dilemma that the old religious beliefs are broken but not disappear, while new beliefs are not established yet.

**Keywords:** Jake Barnes, Lost Generation, Protestantism, Catholicism

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 Introduction of the Novel

Nothing was ever the same after *The Sun Also Rises*. With the appearance of his first novel on October 22, 1926, Ernest Hemingway's life was forever altered. *The Sun Also Rises* is set in the bars and cafes of Paris and the bull rings of Pamplona during the Festival of San Fermin and the running of the bulls in the 1920s. The story is about a group of young Americans and English expatriates in Paris trying to enjoy their lives after the First World War.

This book made him, almost instantly, an international celebrity identified with an entire generation, torn by war and grieving throughout the Roaring twenties for their lost romantic idealism---the so-called lost generation. Hemingway came to be regarded as "the spokesman for American Expatriates; those disillusioned and disaffected artists, writers, and intellectuals who spent the decade on the Left Bank in Paris." (Nagel 87)

This paper approaches Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* from the religious beliefs of the protagonist---Jake Barnes, who is considered as the alter ego of the writer--- Hemingway, to prove my point of view. This paper sets out to explain one of the reasons that we call them the Lost Generation is that they are caught in a dilemma that the old religious beliefs are broken but not disappear, while new beliefs are not established yet. On the one hand, the cruelty of the First World War dissuades them from the old religious beliefs. On the other hand the old religious beliefs still exert a great influence on them which are deeply rooted in them and hard to get rid of, which they can by no means deny. The paper consists of four parts. The first part introduces the controversial criticism about the Lost Generation's religious beliefs. The second and third parts describe the attitudes of Jake Barnes towards the religious beliefs, the Protestantism and the Catholicism. The third part concludes the whole paper.

#### 1.2 Introduction of the Purpose of the Novel

The paper will focus on analyzing James Nagel's comment, for the analysis of these words is in line with the analysis of Jake Barnes' religious beliefs. "It is surely an over-simplification to see Jake as an uncompromised representative of lost-generation radicalism, for he exhibits much of the Midwestern values he sometimes satirizes. He is religious enough to pray frequently even throughout the pagan rituals of the fiesta in Pamplona, yet he mocks Protestantism and literal approaches to Scripture at every opportunity, particularly on his fishing expedition with Bill Gorton. He works hard, takes his profession seriously, and attempts to be just in his dealings with other people yet he enjoys the mocking of the American middle class that is Bill Gorton specialty." (91)

Through the analysis of the following parts the paper tries to illustrate that Nagel's comment cannot be

wholly justified. The phenomena he finds in Jake Barnes actually can be explained by the point of view of the paper mentioned above.

## 2. Jake Barnes and His Religious Beliefs

First, it is undisputable that Jake Barnes who bears the wounds of the war in a profoundly personal way to some extent typically represents the Lost Generation.

*The Sun Also Rises* reflects that the First World War has a tremendous impact on the traditional values and religious beliefs of that generation. They are brought up in the families worshiping God, believing freedom, democracy and achieving success and happiness through self-struggle. Answering the call of the President they devote into the War with romantic idealism. However, they feel cheated after experiencing the cruelty of the War. Death threatens their lives. We can know some truth from the description of the war written by James Nagel "Brett and the other women in *The Sun Also Rises*", which brought the devastation to Europe on a scale never before imagined. "Over eight million men had died in the trenches, countless others had been mutilated, and the consequences of the destruction were everywhere apparent. Young men, especially, bore the physical and psychological legacy of that experience, and this was a period in which they were, as a group, suspicious of the abstract ideals of courage, heroism, and Grand National purpose. Many of them felt uncomfortable in the idealistic and conservative society of the United States after the war." Hemingway witnessed all these tragic scenes as a participant of the war. However, his first novel described the aftermath rather than the cruelty of the war.

Rubinstein's comment echoes these cruel scenes. "The utter senselessness, ugliness, waste and brutality which Hemingway found on the Italian front in 1917 and in the Near East in 1922 he immediately felt to be the real essence of the life he had known in Oak Park Chicago, Kansas and Toronto. Honesty, decency, tenderness, dignity, and humanity, were occasionally practiced by individuals but they had no essential place in the society he knew or its institution." (480)

In his invaluable books on *The Novel and the World's Dilemma* the Marxist critic, Berry Burgum, says that without any overt justification in an understanding of the political world situation the "freedom from illusion" of Hemingway and some of the other expatriates was in conformity with the underlying facts, and provided them thus much of a sound basis for facing the ills of the world: that they were determined never again to be fooled by false promises. The old values and religious beliefs have deeply embedded in them which reflect in their behaviors and words. However, they are determined to desert old values and religious beliefs and relieve themselves from them. This dilemma accounts for some critics' view that there is meaning in their activities. In fact that is the remains of the old religious beliefs. And we can deduce that they are striving though painfully to shake off the restrains of the old beliefs.

Although we cannot say Jake is Hemingway, he is to some extent reflect Hemingway's thoughts, as I have mentioned above, the alter ego of Hemingway.

## 3. Jake Barnes' Attitude towards Protestantism and Catholicism

One of Jake Barnes' religious beliefs is his attitude towards Protestantism.

Although Jake Barnes unconsciously adheres to the Protestantism, he spares no effort to ridicule it. To some extent, the criticism that, "He works hard, takes his profession seriously," is right. In the novel the description of his work is rare, but the only one conforming to the Protestantism is as follows:

"He sat in the outer room and read the papers, and the editor and publisher and I worked hard for two hours. Then I sorted out the carbons, stamped on a by-line, put the stuff in a couple of big manila envelopes and rang for a boy to take them to the Gare St. Lazare." (Hemingway 20) This reflects Hemingway's Protestant belief, while it can be taken as the vestige of the old religion.

The church, as Wright suggested was the dominant influence in the town and in the Hemingway household. In 1918 Ernest had tried to reassure his mother about his religious: "don't worry or cry or fret about my not being a good Christian. I am just as much as ever and pray every night and believe just as hard as so cheer up! Just because I am a cheerful Christian ought not to bother you." (Meyers 5) Parker insists that Hemingway is hard-working, "he works like hell, and through it." (28). During his expatriate years in the 1920s, when Gertrude Stein called him ninety percent Rotarian, Hemingway confessed that he was still lousy with Christian precepts and inhibitions. His fictional hero Nick Adams also regretted the imposition of religious precepts: "You had this fake ideal planted in you and then

you lived your life to it.” Hemingway escaped from Oak Park in his youth and tried to replace it with Michigan and Montana, Paris and the Veneto. But he always retained his hard-working, self-reliant, conscientious, anxious and guilt-ridden Protestant heritage. (Meyers 5)

The old religious belief has become part of them. No matter how hard they try to get rid of it, the ghost of it is always hunting them. Nonetheless, their efforts to break away from it have never ceased.

Even Nagel admits that Jake mocks Protestantism and literal approaches to Scripture at every opportunity, particularly on his fishing expedition with Bill Gorton.

Another aspect convincing me of this is Jake’s Catholic belief.

Jake is certainly one of the most isolated and vulnerable figures in American literature, and he narrates out of his disillusionment and pain, his grief evident throughout. Through the analysis of the following passage, the Catholic attitude of Jake is quite clear.

“At the end of the street I saw the cathedral and walked up toward it. The first time I ever saw it I thought the façade was ugly but I liked it now. I went inside. It was **dim and dark** and the pillars went high up, and there were people praying, and it smelt of incense, and there were some wonderful big windows. I knelt and started to pray and prayed for everybody I thought of, Brett and Mike and Bill and Robert Cohn and myself, and all the bullfighters, separately from the ones I liked, and lumping all the rest, then I prayed for myself again, and **while I was praying for myself I found I was getting sleepy**, so I prayed that the bullfights would be good, and that it would be a fine fiesta, and that we would get some fishing. I wondered if there was anything else I might pray for, and I thought I would like to have some money, **and then I started to think how I would make it**, and thinking of making money reminded me of the count, and I started wondering about where he was, and regretting I hadn’t seen him since that night in Montmartre, and **about something funny Brett told me about him**, and as all the time I was kneeling with my forehead on the wood in front of me, and was thinking of myself as praying, **I was a little ashamed**, and regretted that I was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing I could do about it, at least for a while, and may be **never**, but that anyway it was **a grand religion**, and I only wished I felt religious and maybe I would the next time; and then I was out in the hot sun on the steps of the cathedral, and the forefingers and the thumb of my right hand were **damp** and I felt them dry in the sun.” (Hemingway 102)

So the comment that “He is religious enough to pray frequently even throughout the pagan rituals of the fiesta in Pamplona” cannot stand solidly, because during his pray, he “thinks of making money”, “gets sleepy”, recalls “something funny” and even himself “feels ashamed”. As we all know Hemmingway is meticulously careful about his words, yet in this passage, he is quite generous about the words, like “damp”, “dim” and “dark”, which form sharp contrast with the words “sun”, “dry” and “hot”. It is much easier to pulse the irony when Jake frankly acknowledges that he is “a Catholic”.

And Ernest Hemingway, from the original opening chapters to *The Sun Also Rises*, deleted before publication of the novel,

“So my name is Jacob Barnes and I am writing the story, not as I believe is usual in these cases, from a desire for confession, because being a Roman Catholic I am spared that Protestant urge to literary production, nor to set things all out the way they happened for the good of some future generation, nor for any other of the usual highly moral urges, but because I believe it is a good story...”

Until now I feel quite safe to conclude that Jake, in order to shake off the old Protestantism, even converts to Catholicism, which is condemned as the religion (according to Oak Park Protestants) of immigrants, servants and drunkards.

The Catholic Church has a tradition of prayer and stoic response to suffering, which can partly explain Jake’s conversion. However, in chapter 12, when Bill asks Jake if he is really a Catholic, Jake tells him he is, but only technically. Jake doesn’t feel comfortable claiming to be a full member of a group in which he doesn’t participate.

Like Jake Barnes, before *The Sun Also Rises* published, Hemingway abandoned his own faith and converted to Catholicism. Hemingway’s conversion to the Catholic Church is bogus and he attends Mass while committing adultery. “Hemingway’s insistence that he was perfectly willing to go to hell after death showed that he did not understand the concept of damnation and desperately needed instruction in the new faith. He did not mind being a Catholic as long as it was convenient.” (Meyers 5)

In war as well as in peace, Hemingway says clearly, the only possible meaning is the one with which an individual

himself can endow his single personal life if he is intelligent enough to “disbelieve all the values hypocritically professed by his society, strong enough to resist its assaults, and disciplined enough to follow his own code of behavior.”(Rubinstein 484) In 1967, Sheridan Baker in *Ernest Hemingway* said something to this effect, the Hemingway hero always has some sort of activity or pastime that serves to provide order to his life, bullfighting and fishing, especially. These activities serve as a sort of substitute for religion or any ideology. They are a form of ritual activity, a way of ordering time.

They discarded the authority of church, state and family, Hemingway similarly found there were three goods which really existed on his own authority after he had discarded all that he had been told was sacred or glorious or even civilized. According to Rubinstein, first there was the value of a certain kind of sense experience. All these simple sensory pleasures are, essentially, experienced only in the context of a fishing or hunting trip in relatively unpopulated and uncultivated country. The second good which Hemingway dislikes to naming must be called courage, which dictates stoicism according to Hemingway. The third one is solidarity while Hemingway would by no means call. “When a few men find themselves in a situation of mortal danger they can ordinarily depend upon him. As instinctive as the sense of self preservation, this sense of group responsibility is frequently enough routed by panic--but no more frequently than the individual’s own sense of self-preservation.” (485-486)

#### 4. Discussion

So this first novel foreshadows Hemingway’s following novels, like *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *the Old Man the Sea*. The heroes in them all display the “grace under the pressure” and fulfill the new beliefs Hemingway constitutes for them.

Through analyzing Jake Barnes’ religious belief, this paper attempts to justify that the Lost Generation is caught in a dilemma, which is the old religious beliefs are broken but not disappear, while new beliefs are not established yet. However just like the title of the novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, the heroes in Hemingway’s novels finally find their own beliefs.

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