

ALCOHOLISM IN ERNEST HEMINGWAY'S
THE SUN ALSO RISES:
A WINE AND ROSES PERSPECTIVE ON
THE LOST GENERATION

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THE SUN ALSO RISES is a remarkable portrait of the pathology of the disease of alcoholism. As a description of the alcoholic mentality, it has none of the high drama and tragic despair of works like *Days of Wine and Roses* or *Under the Volcano*, but this makes the story all the more realistic and compelling. Indeed, like the disease of alcoholism itself, the plot may be quite deceptive because it presents no images of addictive self-destruction on a grandiose scale.

The novel describes how Jake Barnes and his expatriate friends spend a good deal of time in Paris drinking and talking about drinking, how some of them make a hectic trip over the Pyrenees to Pamplona to go fishing and watch the bullfights, and how, after an astonishing series of affairs, foul-ups, and misunderstandings, they straggle back to Paris to talk some more and do some more drinking. A great deal of the novel is focused on liquor, discussions about liquor, hangovers, drunkenness, and finding more liquor (Gelderman 12). The following remarks are drawn from just five pages of *The Sun Also Rises*:

"You were quite drunk my dear."

"I say, Jake, *do* we get a drink?"

"He loves to go for champagne."

"Let's have a drink, then. The count will be back."

"You know he's extraordinary about buying champagne. It means any amount to him."

"I think you'll find that's very good wine, . . . we don't get much of a chance to judge good wine . . ."

"This is a hell of a dull talk. . . . How about some of that champagne?"

"You're always drinking, my dear. Why don't you just talk?"

"I like to drink champagne from magnums. The wine is better but it would have been too hard to cool."

"There, my dear. Now you enjoy that slowly, and then you can get drunk."

"She is the only lady I have ever known who was as charming when she was drunk as when she was sober."

"Drink your wine." (SAR 54-59)

It might be assumed that at least three of the characters—Jake Barnes, Brett Ashley, Mike Campbell—are only heavy drinkers; but there is a considerable difference between heavy drinking and the kind of self-destructive, alcoholic drinking that we read about in the novel. Indeed, Hemingway himself may have felt obliged to acknowledge the alcoholic focus of the story. When asked about its libationary focus, he appears to have grudgingly conceded that it was a "book about a few drunks" (qtd. in Dardis 163); but, as Tom Dardis notes in his excellent discussion of the writer's alcoholism, the drinking behavior described in *The Sun Also Rises* was pronounced and addictive, regardless of the motives (163). Hemingway may have thought that imbibing on such a monumental scale simply classified the inebriate as a sort of generic "rummy," but, as Dardis writes, he was ignorant of the fact that "alcoholism breeds its own kind of pressure, that of alcoholic depression" (163).

Of course, in defining Mike, Brett, and Jake as practicing alcoholics, we ought to consider exactly what it is that fleshes out the portrait of someone who is alcohol-dependent; that is, we might want to consider what it is that characterizes someone whose life is dominated by an obsession with liquor.

Most social scientists have concluded that alcoholics have a higher level of anxiety, dependence, and defensiveness. This is sometimes reflected in a remarkable degree of moodiness, impulsivity, hostility, and distrust (See, for example, Ward 168 and Weston, 39-40).¹ A good number of studies have also concluded that alcoholics have lower self-esteem, are more goal-oriented, strive more for a superficial feeling of achievement, and consistently exhibit an intense need for personal power (See, for example, Ward 169). Such problems may be manifested by the development of façades suggesting a great deal of uncertainty regarding sexual identity (Ward 176).

If we critique *The Sun Also Rises* with these criteria in mind, it should come as no surprise that Jake, Brett, Mike, and even Robert Cohn and Bill Gorton match the alcoholic profile in no small measure. Regardless of the setting or scene, the bars and the bottles are omnipresent and serve as a focal point for the bullfights, the eating, the peregrinating, the flirting and seducing, the fistcuffs, and even the fishing. Between Paris, Pamplona, and Burguete, Jake gets very drunk at least three times; Brett is known to get drunk twice; Mike is drunk everytime we see him; Bill is rarely sober; even Cohn spends a great deal of time in his cups—and all of this happens during the two weeks or so that we as readers follow the story. Drinking on this kind of scale cannot even begin to resemble normalcy and is most certainly a substantive foundation for addiction and obsessive dependence. Of course, as with most alcoholics, any talk about abuse is usually focused on “other” people in the group, or it is jokingly discounted as the “right” kind of drinking supporting the jolly, good nature of the inner circle.

A key aspect of the alcoholic temperament is the desire for control. There is hardly a single, major character in *The Sun Also Rises* who is not a compulsive manipulator. This passion for orchestrating circumstances in conformity with certain, wilful desires is well described in *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, a major publication of Alcoholics Anonymous:

When we habitually try to manipulate others to our own wilful desires, they [family, friends, society at large] revolt and resist us heavily. Then we develop hurt feelings, a sense of persecution, and a desire to retaliate. As we redouble our efforts at control, and continue to fail, our suffering becomes acute and constant. (53)

Jake and his companions are terrified that fate and circumstance might shatter their façade of civilized deference. Sometimes, they barely make it from day to day; sometimes, they appear to be trying to just make it through the next hour, a common enough problem among a great many alcoholics. These people lack the skills and the sanity to break their addiction to self-sufficiency and their destructive loop of unmanageability. Instead, they seek refuge in broken relationships, in changes of scene, in drunkenness and the illusion that, however meager, they can find some pleasure in their brief interludes of time and place. There is a great deal of fear here, fear of self-understanding, fear of emotional and physical inadequacy, and—very important—fear of each other.

Jake is the terminal man. Having been emasculated in the war, he has gotten tangled up in a vicious cycle of emotional self-mutilation. Regardless of whether he is alone or in company, he is resigned to the belief that he is powerless to change anything. So he secludes himself in a mantle of self-pity and hopelessness, chooses to withdraw into a Faustian tragedy of self-denial, and consigns himself to hopeless despair rather than do anything about his problem.

Jake has found a perverse kind of sainthood in the conviction that he is unique (a trait common among unrecovered alcoholics). His suffering has qualified him for a rather peculiar dementia which is likely to be manifested in bleak moods of social hatred and self-pity. Jake is something of a masochist, and his emotional starvation may well be a corollary of low self-esteem. As a consequence, he is inclined to discount his own worth and his right to any substantive fulfillment or happiness, and this may well account for his catastrophic perspective on his relationship with Brett. More often than not, he gets drunk or ends up alone in a hotel room or in his flat, staring at the ceiling while grouching about the hopelessness of his condition and the impossibility of establishing any kind of enduring connection with Brett. Thus, in his refusal to break out of his self-destructive loop, he persists in remaining self-condemned before the fact:

My head started to work. The old grievance. Well, it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian. In the Italian hospital we were going to form a society. It had a funny name in Italian. . . . That was where the liaison colonel came to visit me. . . . he made that wonderful speech: "You, a foreigner, an Englishman" (any foreigner was an Englishman) "have given more than your life." What a speech! I would have like[d] to have it illuminated to hang in the office. He never laughed. He was putting himself in my place, I guess. "Che mala fortuna! Che mala fortuna!"

I never used to realize it, I guess. I try to play it along and just not make trouble for people. Probably I never would have had any trouble if I hadn't run into Brett when they shipped me to England. I suppose she only wanted what she couldn't have. Well, people were that way. To hell with people. The Catholic Church had an awfully good way of handling all that. Good advice, anyway. Not to think about it. Oh, it was swell advice. Try and take it sometime. Try and take it. I lay awake

thinking and my mind jumping around. Then I couldn't keep away from it. . . . I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping. . . . Then all of a sudden I started to cry. (31)

Like many alcoholics, Jake is convinced that his self-imposed martyrdom is terminal. He has set down the terms of his life with uncompromising severity because he is convinced that his wound is different, his front was a "joke," and he has given "more" than his life for Italy. So he feels hopeless about Brett, tries to resign himself to circumstance, and thinks about not thinking.

Like Jake, Brett is self-victimized by her catastrophic thinking and her remarkable penchant for charades and seduction. She discounts her title—Lady Brett Ashley—but seems to parade it at every opportunity. She is a voluptuary of prodigious dimensions who has learned well the game of disguising her fear of womanhood in the sexual control of men. And through it all, she canonizes herself as noble and self-sacrificing. It is a pretty little game she plays, but her strategies are riddled with drunken fakery. If viewed from a psychological-addictive perspective, Brett personifies the generic female alcoholic with a remarkable prejudice for manipulation and orchestration. She seduces; she complains; she plays the kitten; and then she runs. She targets the emotions of any man who will have anything to do with her, hopeful that he will somehow restore the integrity of her womanhood. And she knows no boundaries in her hunt. Just about anything male is fair game; any assertion of power might affirm that she is not a victim of circumstances herself. If seduction can lead to a trophy, she will seduce; if abandonment can lead to an assurance of her skill at breaking hearts, she will abandon; and if sheer, mind-boggling mental torture will do the job, then tempt and attack she will.

Mike is a masochist and village clown. He uses his money and his connections to control others, to martyr himself, and to confirm that, after all, he is little more than a drunk. If he is given a chance and enough liquor, he will attack anyone weaker than himself, a typical enough behavior of any fear-ridden alcoholic. Then, if parried too strongly, he will shake off the bully boy image and be a "good fellow." Mike has failed at just about everything—his prospects for marriage, work, sex—and he knows it and even seems rather proud of it. He adopts the pose of an idle playboy and jolly intoxicant. In truth, he is neither interested in sobering up nor skilled enough to break away from himself or his surroundings. His title and what little money he has left are sufficient to keep him mildly functional despite his drinking; his self-esteem is meager enough to keep him from even thinking about sobering up and making any real changes.

Although Cohn does not at first appear to have some of the drinking problems of his more bibulous companions, it is ironic that he provides a vivid example of some of the capricious personality flaws that are commonly perceived in the standard profile of a practicing alcoholic. Indeed, because of his insufferable emotionalism, his addiction to self-pity, and his codependent proximity to Jake's retinue, he seems to manifest the standard characteristics of a "dry drunk" or "prealcoholic" personality (See, for example, Ward 181-82). Such individuals are commonly recognized around alcoholic circles because they behave like practicing alcoholics, even though they do not appear to have an addiction to or an obsessive need for liquor, as such. Indeed, they provide a striking example of the fundamental distinction between people who are "dry" and people who are "sober."²

In any case, when Cohn does get drunk, he behaves like a lap dog who is trapped in insecurity and loneliness; and, like so many of his kind, finds euphoric power in illusions of masculinity. Of course, that euphoria can easily collapse in a stream of apologies and tears of self-pity, as in the drunken fight with Romero.

For Jake and his companions, then, liquor can fuel the appetites and rebellious instincts, but it cannot defuse fear. Drinking isolates the characters and fragments their relationships, culminating in rebellion, anti-social behavior, and an addiction to social fakery and make-believe. Even their conversations are maddeningly incongruent. We sense that each character talks to himself through a muddled backwash of trivia and banality. Connections are short, focused on externals, and filled with non-sequiturs. Most of the talk is centered on bullfights, food, the quality of the wine, the festival at Pamplona, affairs, or banalities of an insufferable texture; but we never know how anyone *really* feels or even if any intelligence or sensitivity supports this masquerade of maturity and self-sufficiency. Consider the following scene when Jake sees Brett in Paris:

A taxi passed, some one [sic] in it waved, then banged for the driver to stop. The taxi backed up to the curb. In it was Brett.

"Beautiful lady," said Bill. "Going to kidnap us."

"Hullo!" Brett said. "Hullo!"

"This is Bill Gorton. Lady Ashley."

Brett smiled at Bill. "I say I'm just back. Haven't bathed even.

Michael comes in to-night."

"Good. Come on and eat with us, and we'll all go to meet him."

"Must clean myself."

"Oh, rot!" Come on."

"Must bathe. He doesn't get in till nine."

"Come and have a drink, then, before you bathe."

"Might do that. Now you're not talking rot."

We got in the taxi. The driver looked around.

"Stop at the nearest bistro," I said.

"We might as well go to the Closerie," Brett said. "I can't drink these rotten brandies." (74)

The confabulation between Jake, Bill, and Brett is simple enough and casual enough—seemingly concerned about bathing, kidnapping, bistros, and rotten brandies; but the connections never seem to progress beyond bromides. When these people meet, they seem preoccupied with making arrangements to meet again sometime; if they talk for any length, conversations are cluttered with superficial evaluations of the quality of the booze, the problems of hygiene, and the complications of meeting and/or not meeting again. In one scene, they go to the Lilas; they order whiskey; they talk about travel and promise to meet "later." During the "later" at the Select, they talk about Brett's hat, Michael's nose, and a few other trivialities. Then they break up, go to a fight, meet again the next day back at the Select and start drinking and palavering all over again.

These people are on dangerous ground; communication is restrained and indeterminate: they talk about talking; they talk about "other" people and "other" circumstances; they talk about liquor, about affairs, and travel—zealously avoiding personal references which might unhinge the charade of emotional stability which they have barely managed to erect. Each expects the other to be a mind-reader and to interpret his own obscurity. Each expects the other to provide some understanding of unasked questions and to affirm his integrity and his self-worth. But words don't match actions; actions don't match claims; and fantasies and hopes are totally out of sync with what is possible.

Because alcoholics like Jake, Brett, and Mike are likely to embellish their feelings of intimacy with crisis-driven emotions, any possibility for true intimacy may trigger illusions of selective dependence. None of these people seems to have any real understanding of the meaning of love or friendship—in the deepest sense of the word. In the case of Jake and Brett, both are inclined either to deny that they have any kind of connection or to define the relationship in fanciful or catastrophic terms. The consequences of such perceptions are disastrous because neither party is capable of fulfilling the fantasies or ideals of the other with the rigorous consistency that seems to be demanded. In describing

the problems of intimacy as they relate to the alcoholic, *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions* notes:

The primary fact that we fail to recognize is our total inability to form a true partnership with another human being. Our egomania digs two disastrous pitfalls. Either we insist upon dominating the people we know, or we depend upon them far too much. If we lean too heavily on people, they will sooner or later fail us, for they are human, too, and cannot possibly meet our incessant demands. In this way our insecurity grows and festers. (53)

An aggressive, manipulative, and self-centered impulse is thus a primary aspect of the alcoholic perception and the alcoholic's relationships with others. Perhaps this is why Jake and Brett articulate fantasies and hopes that exceed the sphere of normalcy, and perhaps this explains why they have chosen to draw judgements that are grounded in chemically induced, self-centered perceptions. Admittedly, there is some talk about the "problem," but these people seem incapable of sincerity, except to complain or commiserate with a superficial regard for any workable solution. Jake drones on about the "old grievance"; Brett tells him she's been "so miserable" (24); the two of them discuss "that hell" after a rousing kiss in the taxi; they agree to "shut up" about Jake's wound; Brett complains that she has to "pay" for what she's done; Jake tells her not to be a fool (25-26). It seems that any opportunity for a genuine conversation about the pain, the frustrations, and the limits and possibilities imposed by circumstance is frustrated by denials, evasions, unanswered objections, tentative groping, or simply a refusal to consider the matter any further.

As far as Jake and Brett are concerned, it is assumed that genital affection is the only option in a male-female relationship; and, denied that possibility, there is no other recourse but to whine about unkind fate, refuse compromise, and dismiss the possibility that sexuality may involve a great deal more than coitus and penile fascination—as any paraplegic would be most glad to explain. In any case, it is blatantly obvious that Jake would rather withdraw into his own misperceived loneliness, absolve himself of any opportunity for a solution, and get drunk.

Jake's congenital preoccupation with evading any substantive consideration of his circumstances is vividly illustrated in his relationship with Bill Gorton. When Jake is with Gorton, his closest friend, he appears to be having a good time—indeed, the experiences and conversation seem a long way from the stan-

ard, alcoholically dysfunctional context of so much of the rest of the novel. However, a careful analysis of his behavior might suggest that the friendship is severely limited—indeed, badly strained—by his fear of personal exposure.

Certainly, when the two go fishing in the Pyrenees, the descriptions and the scene are appealing enough. Jake and Bill take a long walk, bait their hooks, discuss where to fish, toss out their lines, get a nice catch, pack it, eat lunch, drink wine, and discuss eggs and drumsticks. Later, having gotten “cock-eyed” on wine, they have a brief conversation about Jake’s “problem”:

“Say,” Bill said, “what about this Brett business?”

“What about it?”

“Were you ever in love with her?”

“Sure.”

“For how long?”

“Off and on for a hell of a long time.”

“Oh, hell!” Bill said. “I’m sorry, fella.”

“It’s all right,” I said. “I don’t give a damn any more.”

“Really?”

“Really. Only I’d a hell of a lot rather not talk about it.” (123–24)

And that’s the end of it. Bill says he’s going to sleep—and he does.

Jake has apparently decided that intimacy must necessarily be predicated on genital voyaging. As a consequence, his prospects for any kind of connectedness to Brett—or anybody else for that matter—fluctuate with maddening irregularity. “I’ve had plenty to worry about one time or other. I’m through worrying,” he says early in the novel (11). Even so, it seems that he has a remarkable penchant for continuing to worry, deny, and rationalize throughout the remainder of the story; indeed, his drunken escapades are an epic study in self-destruction, complaint, and evasion. He tells us at one point that he’s gotten a “little drunk,” not in any “positive sense,” as he calls it, but “enough to be careless” (21). When he’s with Brett in a taxi in Paris, they kiss and discuss how his wound is “funny.” “I never think about it,” he lies. He bumbles on to insist that he’s “pretty well through with the subject,” having considered it from various “angles” (26–27). Of course, he feels like “hell” every time he stops being through; and, indeed, the entire novel is full of liberally sprinkled affirmations that he has quit thinking about his problem.

In trying to deal with circumstances and frustrations, then, Jake and his circle only seem to know how to run from their problems. In this sense, they are

typically alcoholic. Indeed, an escapist impulse and an addiction to evasion and denial are hallmarks of the alcoholic perspective. They dash from Paris to the Pyrenees, from the Pyrenees to Pamplona, from Pamplona to Madrid. They dare not stay in any one place too long, and they certainly dare not find any substantive connection with each other. Instead, they are continually setting up the next drama, the next argument or barroom brawl, or the next shattered romance or fouled relationship.

Jake is a seasoned runner who feels powerless, and he hates it. He sets up a party, a trip, an evening; he scurries off to a bar, a hotel, or a sporting event of some sort; his friends congregate, dish out the dirt, cry, joke, confess. And Jake listens—and he says almost nothing. He has found a hook: silence invites talk; talk invites him in. And he doesn't have to do a thing in return. He is the father confessor who has something on everybody and whose own life is a ludicrous mystery. Except for Bill Gorton—whose own status and understanding of Jake are somewhat questionable—no one really seems to know very much about what Jake is really thinking or what he really feels; and this very quality is his attraction: he represents the possibility of a connection without a commitment, a friendship without the gift of intimacy.

Brett too is an accomplished runner. She runs from a defunct marriage; she runs from Jake when he starts getting too close; she runs to Romero; and, having seduced him, she runs away and returns to poor Jake—and always with a drink, or two, or more for support. For Brett, change as a means of resolving fear is not an inside job; change is something imposed on others for the sake of her own insatiable appetite; and, when she fails, as she invariably must, she founders in self-pity, gets drunk, and crashes Jake's apartment to mourn the cruelty of circumstance and to cry on his shoulder. And then she promptly punishes him because she allowed him to penetrate her shell. Early in the novel, when she drags the Count over to Jake's apartment, she comforts the poor sot, tells him she's leaving, takes him out and dances with him, and concludes the evening with a full measure of bittersweet adieus and farewells. "Good night, Jake. Goodnight darling," she purrs. "I won't see you again" (65). The crescendo ascends a pitch higher. They kiss, she pushes him away, they kiss again, and finally she stumbles away to her hotel.

Brett's oscillations are superficial and insubstantial; half the time, she refuses to consider her options. "Isn't there anything we can do about it?" she wonders (26). Then, having asked the question, she denies the possibility of an answer and chooses to suffer in silence. In one scene, typical of many, she com-

plains, "Let's not talk. Talking's all bilge" (55). Back in Paris at the end of the story, she shows up at Jake's apartment, admits that she's broken up with Romero, and concludes, "Oh, hell!" . . . "Let's not talk about it. Let's never talk about it" (242).

Mike is a runner and escapist of a somewhat more decadent complexion. He runs from his infantile preoccupation with being helpless; he runs from his friends and from "friends" who are not friends. He runs from his anger at being "used"; he runs from his dismal failure as a prospective husband; and he runs from his fears that he may be, after all, little more than a drunk. When we meet this jolly English tippler, he's tight; his nose is bloody; and he wants to get laid by Lady Brett who is "a lovely piece" (80). In Pamplona, he gets drunk, fights with Cohn, and seeks refuge in Brett's room. He's pathetic and decent in a weird sort of way, but there really isn't much to redeem this bankrupt, overindulgent patrician—except in his role as a victim of circumstance and the peripheral benefits of codependence.

Like most practicing alcoholics, Jake and his friends are rebels. They don't seem to recognize boundaries; they are hell-bent on testing and bending the rules; and they are obsessed with denying their connectedness with the normal order of things. While Jake spends some of his time writing, preparing for his vacation, ordering his tickets, and undertaking a few other mundane, everyday affairs; we can hardly regard such behavior as substantive evidence of normalcy—indeed, he is in truth generally removed from the mainstream of life. We know very little about his family back in the States, his relationship with Brett is a disaster, and his work doesn't seem to amount to much. At the "office," he reads the papers, smokes, and sits at the typewriter (writing, I assume). Later, he goes out to watch a politico, has lunch, goes back to the "office later"—to do what, God knows (36–40). Mainly, we are told that he stumbles off to his hotel, to the Rotonde, to his flat; he has some drinks, he hails his friends, he goes to the races, has a scene, or in quiet moments he feels just plain crummy.

This is a world of eating and visiting, of race tracks or of "turning up" some place after a four day blackout—Bill rubs his forehead to describe his loss of memory during a binge in Vienna (70). It is a world of boxing matches, horse cabs, stuffed animals, and bars where no one is especially interested in returning to the States (or to England) and where the idea of a family—in some cases, even marriage—seems to be out of the question. Playing, drinking, and seducing are far more important than work; and risk-taking and "running" command a high priority. What is more to the point, however, is the fact that we, as

readers, have hopefully seen enough insanity, enough emptiness, enough self-destruction and self-reproach to discredit the friendships, the values, the drinking, and the lives of these characters. Those who regard the bullfights, the fishing, and the festival at Pamplona as the central focus of the novel could be missing the point. *The Sun Also Rises* is not simply a novel about sterility or the “code” or about rebellion or running in meaningless circles. Critical as these themes may be, they skirt some important questions about the integrity of the kind of courage, or should we say lack of courage, that Hemingway has tried to portray. While the ring may indeed be a dramatic proving ground for Romero, its values can have little real or workable impact on Jake or any of his friends, except in their role as spectators—and spectatorship automatically excludes involvement. For Romero, the ring may demand grace, self-mastery, and control; his actions may be a pretty thing to watch. However, Jake and his friends need none of this. They have already attempted far too much control of appearances, and they give those appearances far too much power as a means leading to an affirmation of self. As spectators, they have learned too well how to pretend grace and mastery of circumstances which do not involve them and over which they, in truth, really have no control at all.

When Jake and his companions make judgments and translate themselves to the morality of the bullring, they are transferring the wreckage of their lives to a harmless, irrelevant arena—insofar as they don’t have much prospect of being employed as bullfighters or demonstrating grace under pressure to a few thousand fans and aficionados. Because they have degraded themselves as spectators without insisting on the kind of courage they need to confront their own problems, they serve as little more than sterile witnesses to a fabricated tragedy.

Brett, Cohn, Mike, and Jake appear unaware that the true battle-ground of the self, the personal “bullring” of their fears and their wounds and their addictions, lies in how they perceive themselves and how they deal directly with their misfortunes and circumstances. Whatever enjoyments or pleasures or health they find, whatever balancing of life’s risks and rewards they realize, will only be possible with an honest and fearless inventory of their own conduct, not a superficial fabrication of a code of courage and sensuality that has little to do with the business of living. However, for these alcoholics, such an inventory would be devastating. It would require a great deal more honesty than they are capable of demonstrating, and it would require too heady a dose of the very courage they claim to admire.

On the surface, then, the Hemingway “code” appears to provide a strict set of rules and values defining how the experiences of life, how courage itself, can be maximized. In this particular case, however, that “code” is degraded by the behavior of Jake, Mike, Brett, and Cohn. It promises order and meaning and resolution, but it can’t deliver. The fishing scenes, the mountain idyll, and the friendships are also red herrings. Jake seeks some kind of serenity and some inner balance and wholeness when he goes fishing with Bill Gorton. But the search doesn’t work—it can’t work. Again, what Jake seeks has to come first from himself; it cannot be generated from a material setting or escapist impulses. In running from himself—in running to a trout stream or the mountains—he is doomed, for he can only find peace in learning to understand and accept himself for what he is. Fish, drink, and run as he does, Jake has yet to learn to accept the fact that there is a great deal that he cannot change; and he has yet to find the courage to change what he can. So the trip is a bust. His nerves are shattered by the arrival of Cohn, by the drinking, by his loneliness and resentment, and by the pain of his wound.

The Sun Also Rises is a portrait of degeneration without solutions. It is a portrait of estrangement and emotional adolescence and “running”; and it is a portrait of a bankrupt value system that depends far too much on appearances and dramatics. It is a novel about spiritual bankruptcy, codependence, and people who enable each other to withdraw and become emotionally impotent because they support each other in erecting a meaningless façade of self-sufficiency and bathos. In the final analysis, it is a novel about people who feel compelled to fabricate a code of conduct that has very little to do with living and even less to do with their own integrity. As such, it is a portrait of what can begin to happen when emotionally damaged people seek refuge from themselves in the desensitizing and addictive effects of liquor where ignorance, insanity, escape, and waste are manifested in abundance.

NOTES

1. The inventory of behavioral characteristics which identifies an alcoholic is quite similar, regardless of who is setting up the description. For example, the Christopher D. Smith Foundation asks, in part, whether the lack of a drink leads to tension and whether drinking is used to relieve tension, to escape worries, to escape guilt, to resolve feelings of inferiority or shyness. It further asks if drinking makes the subject irritable, unambitious, detached, self-centered, and resentful (See Smith Foundation, 212–13). The definitions forwarded by such institutions most certainly can provide us with an excellent profile for use in any analysis of the behaviors and perspectives of Jake, Mike, and Brett.

My own observations, experiences, and studies have led me to believe that:

- a. The practicing alcoholic suffers from low self-esteem that will very likely be disguised in a mask of grandiosity. That is, most alcoholics have a massive, all-absorbing ego accompanied by an inferiority complex which threatens to undermine the core of their self-esteem.
 - b. The practicing alcoholic is likely to feel powerless over events, over the behavior of others, and over the conduct of his own life.
 - c. This feeling of powerlessness can lead him to try to erect a fantasy of control over people, places, and things.
 - d. It can lead him to rebel against any symbol of authority, whether perceived or real.
 - e. It can lead him to the illusion that, because he has his external life seemingly under control, he himself is under control.
 - f. Thus, he will try to manipulate people and circumstances, and he will try to "use" others in the expectation that they will somehow make his world congruent with his needs.
 - g. It also seems to me that the practicing alcoholic suffers from a great deal of repressed anger. This anger is a mask disguising his fear about his value as a human being and his inability to control events external to himself; it is a defense, a response to the belief that his most intimate needs cannot or will not be satisfied. Of course, the anger is likely to be directed against those held responsible for withholding gratification.
 - h. Such anger can become depression—anger turned inward—or sullenness and emotional rigidity. It can also erupt violently when the inability to control exterior events becomes obvious and he becomes frustrated.
 - i. The practicing alcoholic also has difficulty in understanding and sharing his feelings. As a consequence, he feels lonely; and, indeed, he is often a loner and has difficulty making any kind of stable or long-term commitment to others.
 - j. Finally, it is not at all unusual for the practicing alcoholic to see life in black and white terms. He cannot compromise: small problems and momentary setbacks may frustrate him and appear catastrophic. He may then become childish and self-pitying, and, ultimately, seek release from his feelings in the euphoric and desensitizing effects of liquor.
2. Among recovery groups such as Alcoholics Anonymous, there is considerable discussion and attention given to the problems of individuals who have chosen not to drink any more, but who insist on behaving much the same as a drunk. That is, they manifest feelings of loneliness, anger, resentment, perfectionism, control, denial, and intolerance in much the same manner as if they were drunk. Such people are commonly referred to as "dry drunks."

WORKS CONSULTED

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