

# The War Within: Internal Struggles In Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

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## ARTICLE INFO ABSTRACT

This article will examine how the novel *The Sun Also Rises* depicts the unseen wounds and scars caused by World War I. Ernest Miller Hemingway stands as a premier first-hand chronicler of life entwined with war, owing to his direct encounters with conflict and his avant-garde approach to articulating these encounters. Not only did the war change the borders of many countries, it also changed the lives of the people who lived there immensely. The "Lost Generation" comprises those who emerged from World War I, marked by disorientation and aimlessness due to the war's aftermath. Stories of hopeless lives and helpless loves are woven throughout the book, mirroring Hemingway's personal experience with the fallout from the war. The characters, who represent the war's fallout, show how empty life was during that time. Set in the 1920's, the narrative follows expatriates whose moral compasses are adrift. Their lives lack purpose, leading them to wander aimlessly between locales in search of meaning. This paper uses existential philosophy to show how the war hurt people emotionally in ways that can't be seen. Existential philosophy is a way of thinking that asks how to live a meaningful life in a world that often seems confusing and pointless.

**Keywords:** Unseen Wounds, Disorientation, Aimlessness, Hollow Existence, World War I, Expatriates.

## Introduction:

Ernest Hemingway, an acclaimed American novelist and Nobel Laureate, embodies the Lost Generation through his Parisian expatriation in the 1920's. Within the pages of *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway vividly describes his unique experiences during battle and close calls to death. Preferring simplicity and clarity in his language, Hemingway captures the wandering, anguished souls of the Lost Generation, their wartime ordeals, and profound scars within his literary creations.

Hemingway's novels are often categorized as war literature, delving into the themes of conflict and its immediate harrowing effects on individuals. Furthermore, Hemingway's personal background as a World War I veteran and ambulance driver for the Italian army enriches the foundation and themes of his works. Hemingway's work reflects his association with the lost generation, as well as his depiction of exiles or expatriates who float aimlessly, delighting in hedonism and wandering from location to location and celebration to celebration. As per Gertrude Stein's observation, they constitute a "lost generation," exploring life's significance through these pursuits. Stein remarks, "This is what you are. That's what you all are," adding, "All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation" (Hemingway 38).

The novel's title, *The Sun Also Rises*, drawn from Ecclesiastes, embodies the notion of the lost generation. Just as the sun rises only to return to its origin, the character's pursuits lack ultimate direction. In essence, the novel conveys the idea that action lacks a meaningful destination.

"One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever...The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose... The wind goeth towards the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.... 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 1:4-7).

The hopes and aspirations of countless individuals were shattered by the devastating impact of World War 1. Unlike other wars, this one was unique. This war observed the use of terrifying weapons such as poison gases, machine guns, and tanks along with the dirty, disease-filled trenches where the soldiers spent months. Although many people died during the World War, those who survived were in no way less than dead. People

who returned from the war had already seen too much destruction and death, due to which they couldn't fit anymore in the society. Historian Paul Fussell writes, "The war changed everything. It was the beginning of a modern world filled with irony, doubt, and the loss of certainty" (Fussell 86). Hemingway through his novels portrays a generation scared and disillusioned by war, where events appear as a repetitive cycle of insignificance.

This novel illustrates a war-ravaged generation struggling to sustain faith and hope. If someone said they were "lost," it didn't mean they had no future. It meant that this group had lost its way emotionally and spiritually. Characters experience multiple deaths, adapting to some struggles while evading others. Amid calculated bravado, they display bitterness and disenchantment. Hemingway captures an immature, self-unaware aspect, marked by escapism from the past, living for the present amid chasing novel experiences. All seek solace, forsaking the past for the present. In this novel, the characters possess resources for leisurely travel. It illustrates the tragedy of their lives, marked by endless cycles of consumption, indulgence, and romance. As critic John W. Aldridge said, "They were a generation no longer able to find meaning in traditional values, yet not equipped with anything to replace them." (Aldridge 17).

During the war, a new kind of thinking emerged, known as existentialism. The general idea of this philosophy was that life had no definite meaning, so people must create their own meaning, even if the world appears absurd or unfair to them. Existentialism philosophy taught that even without a clear purpose, life could still be valuable. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre were among the thinkers who held that although an individual should be free to choose, they should also accept full responsibility for their choices. As Sartre remarked, "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself" (Sartre 22). This philosophy is evident in the novel as Hemingway shows that life after war is confusing and painful, love doesn't always work out, and people often feel lost and unsure, but still, even after all this, there is beauty in honesty, courage, and quiet strength in the people.

Hemingway is trying to portray a world where the old values have been broken down, and what people are now searching for is something real. The novel unfolds through the perspective of Jake Barnes, an American Journalist in Paris and a World War I veteran. He introduces fellow expatriates leading aimless lives. His narration gives us a look at people like Robert Cohn, an expatriate non-veteran veteran, and Lady Brett Ashley, the woman he likes. The action moves from France to Spain. People's lives are shown to be shattered, with too much drinking and no sense of purpose. On the surface level, their life seems very exciting to us but underneath, they are all empty. Hemingway's portrayal epitomizes the Lost Generation, illustrating post-WWI disillusionment, loneliness, and the absence of hope. Jake's emasculation due to the war symbolizes the broader physical and mental wounds. The character's actions reveal their inner turmoil, capturing the era's spirit.

As a member of the lost generation, Hemingway draws from his personal encounters for the novel. The protagonist, Jake Barnes, presents an expatriate's life, though he dismisses it as mere idleness. The distinction lies in his journalism career, mirroring Hemingway's own. Similar to the author, Jake and his friends share a penchant for frequent drinking. Hemingway explicitly addresses this inertia and absence of authority in this work.

"You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed with sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafes" (Hemingway 120).

A significant consequence of WWI is the erosion of faith be it in God, humanity, or traditional establishments. The horrors of war challenge belief in an all-knowing, all-present deity, weakening the notion of a benevolent God. The novel illustrates individuals blaming God for the conflict, while others grapple with the contradiction of a kind God amid such destruction.

The novel depicts how war disrupts individuals in unforeseen ways, eroding friendship's value. Even close bonds no longer ensure mutual trust among characters, highlighting war's profound impact on interpersonal relationships. A bleaker example of this friendship loss is evident in the dynamics between Jake and Cohn. Jake maintains a surface-level friendship with Cohn but frequently disrespects him. He even admits to hating Cohn. Similar tensions underlie other character's relationships. Despite constant partying and merriment, they remain solitary amidst the crowd. Trust eludes them in friendships, causing them to transition between relationships. Promises are made with little intention of fulfillment, as they recognize the lack of trust. This cycle perpetuates, fostering an atmosphere of transient connections.

The war profoundly damages the character's psyche, leaving them bereft of belief and finding life devoid of meaning. To cope with this distressing reality, they engage in purposeless escapism like sex, drinking, and more. Yet, these pursuits only leave them unsatisfied, joyless, and hollow, underscoring the lingering impact of war. The novel also addresses the significant theme of trauma, highlighting its enduring impact on individuals and their ongoing struggle to cope with its effect over the course of their lives. The characters, notably protagonist Jake Barnes, grapple with post-war psychological trauma. Restlessness, insomnia, purposelessness, and disillusionment plague them, showcasing the profound effects of war. The scars extend beyond the physical, deeply affecting their mental well-being.

Despite their extensive travel, smoking, drinking, and pursuit of female companionship, Jake and his friends remain perpetually discontent. Their aimlessness prevents them from finding true joy. Jake recognizes their futile attempts to find happiness, as he realizes that their actions cannot alter the harsh reality of their lives. When Robert Cohn expresses a desire to escape to South America, Jake reminds him that one cannot escape their current circumstances. Jake says, "Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn't make any difference.

I have tried all that. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There is nothing to that" (Hemingway 19).

In the novel, characters often suppress their trauma, but moments of revelation occur, especially when under the influence of alcohol. Preferring gambling, bullfighting, and European travel, they avoid confronting the war. Jake and his friends rarely discuss the war directly, yet its underlying influence is palpable- a potent force felt but unseen. Their efforts to forget inadvertently let the Great War's impact steer and dominate their actions. While wartime individuals openly discuss their experiences, those in the post-war era prioritize forgetting the war to a great extent.

The ceaseless pursuit of pleasure, revelry across European locales, and the intricate nature of love affairs and liaisons-like those of Jake and Brett, and Brett and Pedro Romero- mirror the detrimental aftermath of WWI on these individuals. This portrayal also signifies the erosion of societal norms, roles, and, ideals, encompassing masculinity and femininity.

### Conclusion

The novel delves into contemporary gender roles, modern sexuality, and the survival of traditional romance after the war. It questions identity, defying conversational notions of masculinity and femininity, and contemplates what remains unchanged in the face of loss. Through these themes, this story reflects the intricacies of modern relationships, employing Jake's impotence as an allegory for the era's challenge. World War I disrupted love, faith, and morals, ushering in an era of innocence lost and reshaping individual behaviors and identities.

Having witnessed the Great War's ruinous power first-hand and bearing its scars throughout his life, Hemingway's depiction of war's toll is unparalleled. Ernest Hemingway distinctly illustrates that the cataclysmic aftermaths of the Great War and its consequences have equally devastating effects on individuals. The novel intricately depicts that in times of war, the devastation extends beyond lives lost; it engulfs everything good. World Wars bring about profound global transformations, altering the fabric of societies and their aftermath. The Great War shatters pre-war ideals of simplicity and innocence, rendering them distasteful to post-war individuals. The character's experiences affirm suffering as both physical and psychological. War erodes faith in ethics and spiritual values, leaving emptiness in its wake – life's meaning and values become ransom to war's aftermath.

The lost generation lived more than a hundred years ago, but their experiences still speak to us. We are still living in a world full of trauma, emotional pain, and war and in these circumstances, we still ask the same questions: What is the meaning of life? How do we find a connection in a disconnected world? The lost generation played a crucial role as they taught us that it is okay to feel lost sometimes. It's okay to question what we have been taught. What matters the most to us is how we keep trying to live honestly, keep on searching relentlessly, and keep on looking for moments of beauty, truth, and connection.

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