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An Observation on the Structure
of
The Sun Also Rises

MASAO NAKAMURA

I

No sooner had Ernest Hemingway published his first long novel, The Sun Also Rises, at Scribner's in 1926, than the work won him great fame. What made the work gain so much reputation and overwhelming support? What was the source of the charm? The first reason can be said that he described exactly how the people of the lost generation were.

"You are all a lost generation."

——Gertrude Stein in conversation

This quotation is printed on the inside of the front cover. For the first time Gertrude Stein called them 'a lost generation.' They were young men who had spent their youthful days in the midst of World War I and had had their minds and bodies injured seriously.

According to The Oxford Companion to American Literature, they are defined as follows:

Lost generation, name applied to the disillusioned intellectuals and aesthetes of the years following the First World War, who rebelled against former ideals and values, but could replace them only by despair or a cynical hedonism. The remark of Gertrude Stein, 'You are all a lost generation,' addressed to Hemingway, was used as a preface to the latter's novel, The Sun Also Rises, which brilliantly describes an expatriate group typical of the 'lost generation.' (1)

As stated above they are characterized by the consciousness of the severance from 'former ideals and values,' which was extremely intense among the young
people who were from the victorious country, the United States of America. They had painful experiences on the battlefields far from their country. Returning to their own country, they could not help finding themselves to be perfect strangers there. They felt they had been severed from their fatherland and traditions, and went abroad in order to desert them. Most of them went to Paris and formed an expatriate group typical of the 'lost generation.' They were frightened at the illusion of death which they had had on the battlefields, and at the same time they were impatient to recover the happiness that they had lost during the war. Day and night they drank as much as possible, repeated petty quarrels, and indulged in sensual pleasures.

All the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* more or less have had their minds or bodies injured in the war and show us what 'a lost generation' is like. That's why the readers of those days regarded this novel as the Bible of their generation.

In this essay I would like to inquire into the structure of *The Sun Also Rises*, referring to a characteristic of American novels.

II

It is well-known that Ernest Hemingway joined a volunteer ambulance unit in France, then transferred to the Italian infantry until the close of the First World War. It is in 1926 that he published *The Sun Also Rises*. (2)

Hemingway and his contemporary writers, such as John Dos Passos, William Faulkner and Francis Scott Fitzgerald, were confronted with World War I before they came of age. They were seriously affected by the war, and then, in the 1920's, they published one of their important works one after another. They break away from the literary tradition of the 19th century in America and produce their own new literature. Consequently American literature grows up to be a cosmopolitan one.

By the way, Gertrude Stein must have said to Ernest Hemingway directly, "You are all a lost generation." 'Gertrude Stein in conversation' shows it to us. It is true that Ernest Hemingway lived in the 'lost generation,' but it does not necessarily mean that he was a member of 'the generation.'

Before *The Sun Also Rises* was published Hemingway had already written a
novel, *The Torrents of Spring*. His motive for writing this novel is not always clear. But it can be said that the novel must be a satire on Sherwood Anderson and Gertrude Stein. *Dark Laughter*, which Anderson wrote, is used in *The Torrents of Spring*: Part 1 as "Red and Black Laughter." Stein's *The Making of Americans* is changed into "The Passing of a Great Race and the Making and Marrying of Americans" as the title of Part 4 in the novel. (3)

The above-mentioned facts tell us that *The Torrents of Spring* is a Parody of these works by Sherwood Anderson and Gertrude Stein. Philip Young says about it as follows:

*It* (*The Torrents of Spring*) *appeared in 1926, and is a parody of Sherwood Anderson's novels in general, and of his* *Dark Laughter* *(1925)* *in particular. It is a moderately amusing performance, especially if one will first take the trouble to read or reread the specific object of attack; there were ridiculous elements even in Anderson's "better" novels, and Hemingway goes unerringly to them. But this book, dashed off in a great hurry, has never had as many readers as Hemingway's other books, and it has no relation to anything else he has written—except that in it he was declaring himself free of certain egregious weaknesses in a man who had at one time influenced him.* (4)

There must be other meanings in this novel. But, anyway, we can see in it the figure of young Hemingway who surpasses Sherwood Anderson.

What I really want to say here is why Ernest Hemingway satirized Gertrude Stein like this. It is reported that he did not like to be called 'a lost generation.' So, can't we say that this parody was his protest against her, who said to him, "You are all a lost generation"? (5) Indeed, he lived with the people of the lost generation, but he was not a member of their generation. He must have been a cool observer of the generation. Philip Young reports: he (Hemingway) has said that he regarded the line "You are all a lost generation," which he used as an epigraph, as a piece of "splendid bombast,"... (6) This fact makes his standpoint clear.

III

An Englishman thinks as he walks; a Frenchman runs after having thought;
and a Spaniard thinks after having run. —— I don't know who told it for the first time. I don't think these words indicate their characteristics quite exactly, but everyone cannot help admitting that there is some truth in this saying. Can't we grasp a characteristic of American novels in the same way?

It is no easy task to grasp their characteristic compared with European novels. American novels have many important elements. Notwithstanding this there must undoubtedly be a characteristic of American novels. The following are extracts from an article about it in *The Rising Generation*. (7)

In Europe, roughly speaking, novels saw the light in the 18th century, and were completed as art in the 19th century. Then, they had already created live characters, who were to develop into such characters as those in the novels of Balzac, Thackeray, George Eliot, etc. But it can be said that there are no such characters in American novels. Why? Because it is supposed that they have not so long a tradition as European novels, as to be able to create such characters. Their tradition started as late as in the 19th century. Setting it aside, in American novels there is no character who has a very lively personality.

Characters in American novels, in most cases, are simple and abstract. They are characters who stand for some type or an abstract idea, not living. Herman Melville's Ahab in *Moby Dick* may be considered to have a very severe personality, but as compared with Emily Brontë's Heathcliff in *Wuthering Heights*, he is simple and abstract. In short, about American novels, it can be said that the whole of a novel is made up as a diagram to express an idea, and the characters are set in it as means to explain the diagram.

The above is mainly said about symbolical novels in the 19th century. This applies to the literature of realism, too, which began at the end of the 19th century and remains the main current in this century. It is needless to say that the literature of realism (naturalism) makes much of social environment. The writers of naturalism regard literature as data on society. Men are like worms, and being thrown into their environment, they go to ruin without resisting against it. The central subject of this literature is the influence of the environment upon a human being. Take *Maggie* by Stephen Crane, for instance. The author, in spite of the title, lays greater stress on the description of 'the environment of the slums' than of 'the heroine Maggie.' Sinclair Lewis's *Babbit*, which is the name of the hero, is not described as a person of marked
individuality, but his life is related as a model of a vulgar business man who lives in the country in the Middle West. Babbit exists only as a type. In _The Grapes of Wrath_ by John Steinbeck, the exodus of the Joads is told in order to give expression to the tragic destiny of the people who were visited by a sandstorm. They are not described as individuals, either. It is more proper for them to be called puppets of an idea than living people.

What on earth have American novels tried to express through the above-mentioned characters? Why have they described only such characters? It is not merely because they have not so long a tradition as European novels. In the United States of America there were complicated nature and society, which overcame the people and were strong enough to extinguish the individuality of each one of them. Consequently the people were swallowed up in such a society after all. This was the reality of American society, and American novels, not only symbolical novels in the middle of the 19th century but also those of realism, have tried to describe it.

Generally speaking, the creation of lively characters marked the climax in the 19th century, and characters have been crumbling little by little in the 20th century. But English novels still put emphasis on the description of an individual. On the other hand, American novels try to describe the society—the circumstances or environment around an individual, and it can be said that an individual becomes significant as a background of the society. This is a characteristic of American novels.

In the above extracts, there are some crucial points to consider about American novels. What interests me most is that the whole structure of a novel is made up as a diagram to express an idea, and that characters are set in it as means to explain the diagram. Here the relation between a diagram and characters in it can be replaced by that between society, or circumstances, and individuals in it. And then more importantly American authors lay special emphasis on the description of the society or the circumstances around an individual. Consequently in American novels there is no character who has a very lively personality compared with characters in European novels.
The writers of the lost generation severed themselves completely from their seniors—Theodore Dreiser, Sinclair Lewis, etc.—both in thoughts and choice of words.

Hemingway is indeed a representative of them. But from the viewpoint of his style we cannot help admitting the influence of his seniors upon him. He says as follows:

'All modern American literature comes from one book by Mark Twain called Huckleberry Finn.... All American Writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since.' (8)

The styles of his seniors, such as Gertrude Stein, Sherwood Anderson, Mark Twain, and Stephen Crane, have some influence upon him, though I do not quote here from his works to prove it. In a sense the tradition of American literature since the 19th century flows into him and crystallizes as the famous style of his.

In the same way a characteristic of American novels since the 19th century that I quoted in section III I want to find out in The Sun Also Rises.

Ray B. West, Jr. says as follows:

It seems clear that the two most significant American writers of fiction in the first half of the twentieth century are Ernest Hemingway and William Faulkner. Whether their reputations are based primarily upon their novels or upon their short stories is not important. Undoubtedly their popular reputations are based upon their novels. Critics have persisted, however, in calling attention to the excellence of their short stories. In fact, it is probably in the realm of the short story that the supremacy of these two authors is least in question. Their art, interesting and important as it always is, falters occasionally in even the best of their novels—and the best (such works as A Farewell to Arms and The Sound and the Fury) come nearer to being extended short stories than they do to approaching the limits of the novel form. (9) [italics not in the original]
What Ray B. West Jr. says suggests a key to solving the structure of Ernest Hemingway's novels, though I don't touch upon those of Faulkner's here.

Now take The Sun Also Rises, for instance. This novel is divided into three books, each of which we can regard as an independent story. Hemingway creates brilliantly the world after World War I in The Sun Also Rises by combining these stories ingeniously. According to Walter Allen, even In Our Time, Hemingway's first volume of short stories, is a new type of a novel, too. (10)

V

The following quotation from Ecclesiastes in the Authorized Version of the Bible is found below Gertrude Stein's remark.

"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 toward 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

The title, The Sun Also Rises, is derived from here. This paragraph is preceded by the famous words, that is, "vanity of vanities; all is vanity," which, it seems to me, produce a nihilistic atmosphere all over the novel, though Hemingway says that the point of the novel is, as the Biblical lines say in part, that "the earth abideth forever." (11)

This novel is related by a journalist named Jake Barnes from Kansas City in the United States of America. He went to World War I and was wounded on the front in Italy. Unfortunately, as a result of it, he became impotent. Now he is in Paris and works in a newspaper. But he mostly roams about the pleasure resorts at night and often drinks and plays with girls. His friend Bill Gorton, who is also from the States, criticizes him, saying, "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 by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafés.” (12) A portrait of Jake described by Bill shows us how the lost generation or the expatriates are.

Brett Ashley is a thirty-four-year woman from England. She is very fascinating. During the war she lost her own true love. Now she doesn’t like her husband, and so she is getting a divorce and is going to marry Mike Campbell in Scotland. He has had his mind injured bitterly in the war. Her past is tragic, too, on account of the war. Brett and Jake fall in love with each other, but, owing to his imperfection, they are unable to complete their love.

Robert Cohn, a Jewish writer, is chasing Brett importunately. Once he was a middleweight boxing champion. Now he is staying in Paris with his second wife, but as soon as he meets Brett, he loves her deeply. His insidious personality makes his love tenacious. He decides to divorce the wife and chases Brett. Such expatriates' lives are brilliantly described in Book I.

As mentioned above Jake is impotent. He has given more than his life. (13) But he regards the fact as funny. (14) The following is the scene in which Jake and Brett ride in a taxi at night in Paris without any destination. They are having a talk about 'what has happened to him.'

"It’s funny," I said. "It’s very funny. And it’s a lot of fun, too, to be in love."

"Do you think so?" her eyes looked flat again.

"I don’t mean fun that way. In a way it’s an enjoyable feeling."

"No," she said. "I think it’s hell on earth." (15) (italics not in the original)

Even if he tries to call it funny, it is still a serious problem for both of them. She says, "I think it’s hell on earth," and he, in his room after saying good-bye to her, all of a sudden starts to cry, and says to himself, "It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing." (16) He expresses his nihilistic feelings by funny.

As seen in the above scene the word funny appears often in Book I, and it seems that the nihilistic feelings in this novel are concentrated on this word. Moreover, all the scenes in Book I except Chapter V are set in the evening or
at night, and as the background of the word funny they are very effective to give us the nihilistic feelings.

All the scenes in Book II are bright, and present a striking contrast to Book I. They go to the fiesta at Pamplona in Spain. It is held day and night for seven days and the bull-fight is the main event. First of all, Jake and Bill start from Paris and on the way to Pamplona they delight in fishing for trout at Burguete. The following is a scene where Jake and Bill go fishing.

Beyond the fields we crossed another faster-flowing stream. A sandy road led down to the ford and beyond into the woods. The path crossed the stream on another foot-log below the ford, and joined the road, and we went into the woods.

It was a beech wood and the trees were very old. Their roots bulked above the ground and the branches were twisted. We walked on the road between the thick trunks of the old beeches and the sunlight came through the leaves in light patches on the grass. The trees were big, and the foliage was thick but it was not gloomy. There was no undergrowth, only the smooth grass, very green and fresh, and the big gray trees well spaced as though it were a park. (17)

Reading these paragraphs, we can imagine the scene clearly as if we were there. Nature described here is not injured at all in the war. 'The trees were very old' and 'big,' and 'the foliage was thick but it was not gloomy.' Besides, 'the sunlight came through the leaves in light patches on the grass.' How wonderful pure nature is! Book II is full of beautiful scenery, including this scene. Not only nature but also a human being is the object of Hemingway's affection. We can't help smiling to see the exchange of good wishes between them and Basques or Spaniards. The scene on the bus for Burguete is very pleasant. A Basque imitates the sound of a Klaxon motor-horn so well that everybody laughs. They drink quite merrily and cheerfully. Nature is pure and beautiful; Men are healthy and cheerful. Can we call these scenes nihilistic?

Jake and Bill reach Pamplona, where they meet Brett, Cohn, and Mike from Scotland. Then, the fiesta starts. Cohn still chases Brett importunately. In the midst of the excitement of the fiesta, she is fascinated by the purity of a
bull-fighter named Pedro Romero, and he is captivated by her, too. Being broken-hearted, Cohn leaves there. A young bull-fighter Pedro Romero is a true man and a brave hero for Brett. It seems that she is going to desert her fruitless life and enter a new life worth while to live with him.

Brett was radiant. She was happy. The sun was out and the day was bright.

"I feel altogether changed," Brett said. (18) [italics not in the original]

The sun is shining in the world of Book II. Instead of funny in Book I, the words the sun or sunny are often used in Book II, and these words, which are not found in Book I, show us the happy and healthy side of life. Anyway, the nihilistic feelings, which are so strong in Book I, can't be drawn from Book II.

Book III begins as follows:

In the morning it was all over. The fiesta was finished. I woke about nine o'clock, had a bath, dressed, and went down-stairs. The square was empty and there were no people on the streets. A few children were picking up rocket-sticks in the square....The white-paper announcements of the unloading of the bulls and the big schedules of special trains were still up on the pillars of the arcade. A waiter wearing a blue apron came out with a bucket of water and a cloth, and commenced to tear down the notices, pulling the paper off in strips and washing and rubbing away the paper that stuck to the stone. The fiesta was over.

I drank a coffee and after a while Bill came over. I watched him come walking across the square. He sat down at the table and ordered a coffee.

"Well," he said, "it's all over."

"Yes," I said. "When do you go?"

"I don't know..." (19)

This scene shows us vanity after the fiesta. An old saying goes: "Upon the full tide of pleasure steals sadness." Now in the same way we can say that upon the full tide of pleasure steals vanity. Anyway the fiesta was over. These opening passages suggest the atmosphere of Book III. Bill and Mike left there,
but only Brett goes to Madrid to live with Romero. Jake comes back to Spain once again and stays at San Sebastian, where he receives a telegram from Brett announcing that she is in trouble and wants him to come to Madrid. He goes in haste, and finds that Romero has already left there.

"Darling! I've had such a hell of a time."
"Tell me about it."
"Nothing to tell. He only left yesterday. I made him go."
"Why didn't you keep him?"
"I don't know. It isn't the sort of thing one does. I don't think I hurt him any."
"You were probably damn good for him."
"He shouldn't be living with any one. I realized that right away."
"No."
"Oh, hell!" she said, "let's not talk about it. Let's never talk about it."
"All right."
"It was rather a knock his being ashamed of me. He was ashamed of me for a while, you know."
"No."
"Oh, yes. They ragged him about me at the café, I guess. He wanted me to grow my hair out. Me, with long hair. I'd look so like hell."
"It's funny."
"He said it would make me more womanly. I'd look a fright." (20)

Her hair was brushed back like a boy's (21), which fact has a serious meaning. It is supposed that her boyish hairdo, not womanly, stands for her decision to cut herself off from her tragic past. She cannot grow her hair out, for it means her compromise with the past which destroyed her happiness. Instead of growing her hair out, she made him go. Jake knows her truly, so he cannot imagine her with long hair. Consequently he cannot but say, "It's funny." It cannot be helped. The nihilistic feelings spread over the whole scene. The word funny is the key to the understanding of Book III, though it seldom appears here.

"I'm thirty-four, you know. I'm not going to be one of these bitches
that ruins children."

"No."

"I'm not going to be that way. I feel rather good, you know. I feel rather set up."

"Good."

She looked away. I thought she was looking for another cigarette. Then I saw she was crying. I could feel her crying. Shaking and crying. She wouldn't look up. I put my arms around her.

"Don't let's ever talk about it. Please don't let's ever talk about it."

"Dear Brett."

"I'm going back to Mike." I could feel her crying as I held her close. "He's so damned nice and he's so awful. He's my sort of thing."

She would not look up. I stroked her hair. I could feel her shaking.

"I won't be one of those bitches," she said. "But, oh, Jake, please let's never talk about it." (22)

This is Brett. Now I remember in Book I that Jake, after saying good-bye to Brett, all of a sudden started to cry, and said to himself, "It is awfully easy to be hard-boiled about everything in the daytime, but at night it is another thing." Daytime is sunny; night is funny. She cannot perfect her true love with Romero, either. But her attitude toward Romero is what Ernest Hemingway sets store by, though I do not intend to refer to it in detail here.

They ride in a taxi and sit close together.

"Oh, Jake," Brett said, "we could have had such a damned good time together."

Ahead was a mounted policeman in khaki directing traffic. He raised his baton. The car slowed suddenly pressing Brett against me.

"Yes," I said. "Isn't it pretty to think so?" (23)

This novel ends with such a conversation. Jake and Brett seem to return to the beginning of the story. Sheldon Norman Grebstein says: "The final scene of the novel in the moving-then-stopping taxi highlights the symmetry of its design by repeating the crucial taxi scene in Book I, while both scenes together emphasize the anguish of Jake and Brett's relationship and the pointlessness of all their
wanderings. Just as neither taxi has a specific destination, the passion of the protagonists, aroused by the proximity of their bodies can find no satisfying outlet.” (24) He hits the mark admirably. The structure of this novel is symmetrical.

As mentioned above, the structure of this novel is made up as a diagram—Book I is nihilistic; Book II, healthy or happy; and Book III, nihilistic. In other words, Book I is funny; Book II, the sun or sunny; and Book III, funny. Besides, each of the characters set in this diagram is not described as the independent personality. All the characters are merely types to express very tragic people after World War I, though only Romero is described as the antithesis to the nihilistic feelings. Here in The Sun Also Rises we find a characteristic of American novels of which I wrote before.

The healthy and pleasant scenes in Book II are still vivid in my mind, I confess. But, of course, I cannot wipe out from the novel the nihilistic feelings, from which Ernest Hemingway starts as a writer.

Notes:

(2) Ibid., p. 364.
(4) Philip Young, Ernest Hemingway (Tokyo: Kenkyusha, 1961), p. 9. Copyright 1959 by the University of Minnesota
(6) Young, op. cit., p. 11.
(9) Ray B. West, Jr., The Short Story in America (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1952), p. 82.
(11) Young, op. cit., p. 11.

P. S. This essay I wrote several years ago when I started to read the works of Ernest Hemingway. This time I added a little, but most of it is what it was. I am glad to publish it as one of my memorials.