THE TWILIGHT OF MODERN HEROES IN *THE SUN ALSO RISES*

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Résumé

Après la première Guerre Mondiale, les héros militaires américains se retrouvent désœuvrés à Paris et sont surpris par les mutations rapides de la période d'après-guerre qui a remplacé les héros authentiques par les hérauts de la consommation dont les attributs sémiotiques n'arrivent plus à rimer avec les notions de performance, virilité et d'efficacité. C'est la crise du modèle héroïque hérité de la modernité.

Mots clés: héros, sémiotique, modalité du faire, crise, performance, modernité

Abstract

Following World War I, military heroes roam about Paris and are surprised by increasing change in the post-war period that has substituted authentic heroes by heralds of consumption whose semiotic modalities no more run parallel with notions of performance, virility and effectiveness. It is the crisis of the heroic model inherited from modernity.

Keywords: heroes, semiotics, modality of doing, crisis, performance, modernity

Introduction

No attentive observer of American sport, artistic and political scenes can fail to notice the hero-worshipping drive inherent in US culture. The rationale behind such a passion for heroes may have stemmed from the necessity for the young nation to have its own models of exemplariness so as to create some kind of ideological cement for immigrants hailing from many parts of the world. While heroism has survived in many American texts, post-war traumas and the rise of consumption economy have, inter alia, undermined many writers' belief in heroic narratives. This disbelief permeates some novels by Hemingway and tends to deny the possibility for modern heroes to be on top of the world. While "heroization" is a modernist process underlying the formation of a rational, winning imperialistic and heroic bourgeois, in *The Sun Also Rises*, the hero becomes an ordinary figure on the ground zero of semiotic performance. In this paper, we shall first of all try to analyze the problematic presence, designation and qualification of the protagonist; then, we shall focus on the crisis of heroes' performance modalities which leads, in the end, to the aesthetics of banality and zeroization.

I Problematic Presence, Designations and Qualifications

Through this title we are making reference to Philippe Hamon's[1] seminal book on the semiotic theory in which he coined the idea of "semiological status" of characters. His theoretical assumption was premised on actants' enjoying an exclusive paper existence and being analyzed at best in a linguistic environment as signs with signifiers and signifieds. This implies that their analysis should be conducted using linguistic tools. The semiological status of heroes serves this purpose as it is built on a range of linguistic tools that make it possible to identify the distinctive nature of heroes. Hamon assumes that given the said distinctiveness, heroes should be studied using three concepts: differential distribution and autonomy, differential qualification and designation and differential functionality. The "differential" nature of these tools derives from the fact of applying each of them to heroes in comparison to other characters from whom they distinguish themselves. In this sub-part of our work, we intend to focus on the first two processes, that is to say differential distribution and autonomy (which we refer to as presence), qualification and designation because they reveal the signifier of the character whereas the concept of differential functionality is mainly based on the analysis of semiotic modalities and the hero's position in the acting scheme. The concept of differential distribution and autonomy refers to a modality of presence, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantity of occurrences that an actant enjoys may show that she/he is privileged with more focal attention in order to distinguish her/him from others.

Contrary to the above-mentioned definition, in *The Sun Also Rises*, the protagonist is rather characterized by a quest for anonymity. There is a contrapuntal construction in the incipit, when the first-person internal narrator rather focuses in chapter one and two on the life of Robert Cohn instead of Barnes' who is the protagonist: he recounts Cohn's first successes at school, his successes as middleweight boxing champion, the precociousness of his marriage, then his life in Paris as a writer who is successful with New York female readers and critics. The narrator puts this as follows:

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[1] Philippe Hamon, « Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage », in *Poétique du récit*, with. G. Genette and T. Todorov as editors, Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1977, pp.115-180.

"That winter Robert Cohn went over to America with his novel, and it was accepted by a fairly good publisher. His going made an awful row I heard, and I think that was where Frances lost him, because several women were nice to him in New York, and when he came back he was quite changed." p.8

The counterpoint is that the narrator, Barnes, hints at change in his friend on account of successes going to his head. While Jacob Barnes is invisible in the US, being exiled in France, Robert's life is marked by visibility and congratulatory comments from the literary public and its normative institutions influencing the consumption of literary masterpieces.

On the contrary, Jacob Barnes is absent from these vital initial chapters of the book, giving the reader the illusion that the novel is going to be about Robert Cohn. In addition, Jacob Barnes is rarely seen alone in the novel. He always wants company. He does not enjoy any autonomy. As a narrator telling his own post-war life, it is surprising that he should be at times more interested in others than in his own predicament. He talks about himself through a comparison with others. There is an implicit comparison in the above quotation inasmuch as one perceives Barnes as a foil to Robert, the latter playing the role of the hero of a success story while the protagonist does not enjoy such a limelight. As a narrator, Barnes remains but a speaking voice and an "eye" gazing at the actions of others.

Later in the novel, Barnes is seen in Paris, after World War I, scouring the streets, hotels, cafes, nightclubs and beaches of Paris and Pamplona. It is worth underlining that while the protagonist is seen in all these areas, he remains outnumbered by the over-presence of such successful people as American tourists, the American ambassador, priests, bullfighters, war veterans, Count Mippipopolous, Robert Cohn and escort girls.

Being surrounded by happy-go-lucky groups of successful people with hectic schedules, Barnes' unproductiveness as a writer sounds like an exception in the group. He is appended to these people, hence his lack of autonomy. Contrary their resolute attachment to and immersion in the prevailing heroic narratives of the twenties, Barnes is standing far from such stories. If there is another factor that mainly underscores the problematization of Barnes's aspiration to a status of hero, it is certainly the notions of designation and qualification.

Contrary to certain novels in which one notes a conventional pre-designation of the hero, in *The Sun Also Rises*, there is no such initiative. The list of signifiers used to refer to Barnes does not set him above other characters. One may not even have a strong emotional relation with him. Below is taxonomy of designations and qualifications referring to the protagonist:

Designations and Qualifications	**Context and Explanation**
Barnes	Family name, multiple occurrences.
Jake	Pseudonym used in lieu of Jacob, with multiple occurrences.
Jacob, "You have a hell of a biblical name" p.22	Christian name, it is an anaphoric and messianic signifier. Jacob is not a void signifier but rather one that is now devoid of meaning.
Burns	This is a motivated pseudonym; he burns as a result of the post-war period being one of disillusion.
Sick, p.16	This is how he refers to himself when asked by

	Georgette on
Little girl, p14	Georgette teases him in chapter 3 saying "Little girl yourself" p.14, but she amplifies without her knowing the castration complex of Barnes
"the worst type" of expatriated newspaper man p.115	Bill Gorton makes a distinction between being a journalist and a writer. His reception of Barnes' novels, as a New Yorker, suffices to understand why Barnes is not a successful writer in the USA.
Impotent, pp.30-31	"Undressing, I looked at myself in the mirror of the big armoire beside the bed. (…) Of all the ways to be wounded, I suppose it was funny." p.30 "Well it was a rotten way to be wounded and flying on a joke front like the Italian." p.31
"Bum", p.115	Bill believes Barnes and his likes are but tramp, vagabonds in Paris; he stresses their unstable life, bumming about cafés, hotels, entertainment areas…
"Obsessed by sex", p.115	This is a reference to the fact that Barnes cannot find any lasting strength to write because of his unsatisfied love with Brett, given his impotence.
"Lazy", p.115	Bill Gorton thinks his expatriate compatriots do not work. They lounge about in the Basque region and laze away their time around cafés.
"You drink yourself to death" p.115	What Bill means here is that while expatriates have Dionysian inclinations, true Americans are characterized hard work, asceticism and Apollonian measure.
"Rotten catholic" p.97	He cannot pray anymore: "while I was praying for myself I found I was getting sleepy (…) I regretted that a was such a rotten Catholic, but realized there was nothing I could do about it" p.97
Ambulance driver	Barnes mentions this in a few conversations, implying that he was not a soldier; most notably, he was wounded while hiding to eat in a trench.

The signifiers in the above table can be grouped in the categories of disjunction (obsessed by sex, impotent, expatriate, little girl, sick), disbelief in metanarratives (rotten catholic, a hell of a biblical name, burns, Barnes) and anti-heroism (ambulance driver, drink yourself to death, lazy, bum, expatriate, little girl). Disjunction and suspension of belief in metanarrative serve to amplify Barnes's anti-heroism. The signifiers of the protagonist do not have any laudatory implication. This may be reinforced by Jacob's avoidance of military designations and qualifications; though he is a war veteran, his evocations of the war do not have any status-enhancing function: they do not add any value to his deeds, contrary to Count Mippipopolous who took part in several wars and so displays his wounds as if they inked up on a corporeal papyrus to be read by all those who meet him.

On the contrary, each time Jacob refers to the war, he insists on its impact on him rather than on the impact of his presence at the war front. The loss of his virility in a trench eating when an enemy bomb surprised him bears witness to his being far from the arena of bravery. The

Italian Chief of Staff[2] thinks he defended the group heroically: he ironically thinks he is all bandaged on account of a great military act of courage in the trench.

Another evidence of the flattening of the heroic signifiers lies in the avoidance of his name "Jacob" both on the strength of its presupposing value and of the historic responsibility it devolves on him. Jacob is a Biblical name that creates messianic expectations while he has stopped believing in any aspiration to collective salvation. Just as he cannot save anyone, so is he unable to secure his own salvation. As a Catholic, his faith is damaged beyond repair though he still considers Catholicism as a "Grand religion" p.97.

Furthermore, Barnes ridicules modern American heroes who hang around Europe either in the contradictory form of spendthrift and starving Pilgrim fathers mockingly called "specimens of normality" p.86, "Knights of Columbus Tourists" p.86 at Mme Lecomte's restaurant, or in the post-war economic form of thriving American capitalists enjoying allegedly befitting excursions after months of hard work; the reference to Columbus Tourists echoes the primal heroism of Columbus who ventured in unknown areas to discovers America. However, in the novel, his name is associated also with that of hungry Pilgrim Fathers buying most of the food at the restaurant for themselves while others are waiting for them. Just as he does with the Christian metanarrative, the narrator trivializes the heroic matrix on which all established the US documents are built. His expatriation helps understand to what extent he now refuses to give his support to US messianic projects as he did during WWI; that is precisely where his disagreement with Bill lies.

Bill Gorton reproaches Barnes with being lazy and attached to fake European values. He uses other signifiers that either focus on castration like "impotent", "sick" p.15, or others having a moral function such as "bum" p.116. As a matter of fact, when Barnes introduced Georgette as his fiancée to his fraternity of expatriates, the lady denied that fact. Doing so, Georgette was least susceptible of being cognizant of Barnes' sexual impotence. Her reaction came as another denial of Barnes' aspiration to virility. Gorton also calls him a "bum" because he is always on the move, through the meanders of the Parisian streets, never working, not even coming up with a page to be published neither in Paris, nor in New York; contrary to him, other people have been successfully publishing, like Menken and Robert Cohn. Such a contrapuntal characterization transforms Barnes into a foil with the objective of enlightening other people like Gorton, the Count, Cohn and Georgette, to list but these few.

Indeed, foil-based characterization techniques mostly ground on a binary logic. Compared to Gorton who is a hard worker, Barnes is lazy. In addition, the protagonist is a war victim, as is confirmed by his motivated signifier "Burns". While the Count is a war hero, Brett and Georgette seek refuge from war memories in intensive sexual activities, Jacob remains in place believing there is no alternative to his fate. His impotence is physiological and cannot be cured. Barnes rather develops a victimizing posture, an attitude that is far from being status-enhancing. The protagonist's rejection of hero-lauding stems from this very theoretical ground. He is rather hurt when he comes across any reference to heroes like the statue of the "Inventor of the Semaphore" p.41 next to Boulevard Raspail, the memorial of the fathers of pharmacy and the statue of the Lion of Belfort on Denfert-Rochereau Street. Contrary to these heroes, the protagonist is a bohemian as per these words by Gorton:

[2] "That was funny. That was about the first funny thing. I was all bandaged up. But they told him about it. Then he made that wonderful speech: "You a foreigner, an Englishman … have given more than your life." What a speech! He was putting himself at my place. " p.31

> "Nobody that ever left their own country ever wrote anything worth printing." "You're an expatriate. You have 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." p.115

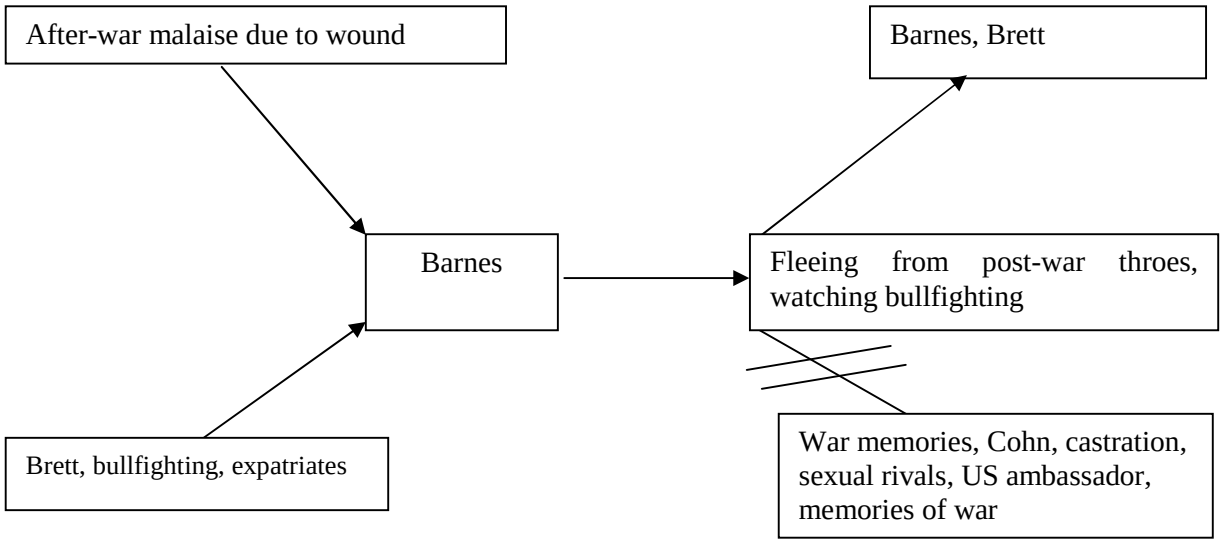
In the above quotation, Gorton is rather making a comprehensive moral portrait of the protagonist which encompasses most of the points identified in the table: lack of productivity and virility, Dionysian propensity and lack of focus.

The signifiers of this Hemingway protagonist challenge the readability of the text. Though he is not nameless, variations in his signifying apparatus are exerting for the reader. His refusal of heroic signifiers points to his distanciation from their ideological matrix. In addition, their anaphoric nature runs the risk of fixing the floating outlines of the attitude to adopt in this thriving post-war consumerism. If historical agency is paralyzed in a historical name, then the name-bearer only has to bear with it, in a fatalist way, a situation Barnes certainly does not want to fall in, that is why he rejects designations and qualifications that refer to historical heroes. Just as the above list points to a crisis on the ontological axis, so does it anticipate the functional crisis we are going to explain now.

II The Crisis of Heroes' Performance modalities

While the notions of differential autonomy, distribution, designation and qualification aim to identify the being of the hero, differential functionality rather lays emphasis on the deciphering of his actions in relation to other characters. In *Fundamentals of Story Logic: an Introduction to Greimassian Semiotics* (Philadelphia, USA, 1992), Therese Budniakiewicz and John Benjamin explain that Greimassian analysis of stories assumes the polemic nature of any narrative, especially heroic ones. Narratives are polemic because there is a competition between forces having oppositional quests. This approach is interesting especially when studying protagonists' contributions to the dynamics of the story. The success of a given actant on the axis of power is not only indicative of an agonistic superiority. That superiority should be recognized by society for the protagonist to become accepted as hero.

From what precedes, it follows that the cult of distinction inherent in heroism stems from the assumption that narratives are a field of forces organized in such a way as to create a victor and a loser. This is what the acting scheme mostly reveals through its binarity, as indicated by its application to the novel under discussion:



Right from the incipit, there is a discussion between Cohn and Barnes during which the former offers to fly with Barnes to Southern America for tourism and entertainment, but the latter refuses arguing that he has tried all that[3] without any avail. This helps us understand the antithetic targets of both characters. Cohn has never been to a war; he does not know what kind of symbolic wound is imprinted on Barnes's body. Without wanting it, he turns the quest of the hero - that of escaping from the war and its consequences - into a lewd issue, like Gordon's and Brett's quest for the carpe diem. The protagonist met Brett when he was hospitalized and a love story started. It is true that both run from the war scene, but they could not create the expected idyll, due to Barnes's incapacity to assuage Brett's sexual desires. Brett finally took to Count Mippipopolous and Mike Campbell who are both financially and sexual responsive to her desires.

Leo Löwenthal would term the above sexual partners of hers "consumption heroes"[4] owing to the quantitative nature of their quest. Running from the war and deluding themselves that the purity of love would supersede the "dirts" p.19 of the war, as Georgette would put it, ends up prolonging the nightmare. With the departure of Brett to an abler lover, Barnes finds comfort in watching bullfighting, as an aficionado. His favorite bullfighter, called Romero, is drudging in the economy of consumption to become a heroic product, like Mike Campbell, the Count and Romero himself.

Barnes's quest may be divided into two statements according to the indications given by Therese Budniakiewicz and John Benjamin: the stasis and process statements. The first is the one presenting a state and the latter is the one developing the transformational doing of the actuator. In *TSAR*, the stasis statement is characterized by want. The narrative shows him first as an actant that has abandoned a former quest for freedom and democracy in Europe for the benefit of the West. After the showdown at the war front, he now comes up with a more modest quest: his personal happiness in the post-war nightmare. When this too fails, he takes to bullfighting by proxy. All these three narrative programs are defeat-prone. In terms of types of quest, the protagonist moves from a transitive quest (liberating the West) to a reflexive one (liberating oneself). Contrary to these two quests built on agency, the attachment to

[3] "Listen, Robert, going to another country doesn't make any difference. I've tried all that. You can't get away from yourself by moving from one place to another. There's nothing to that." p.11
[4] Quoted by Zima in *Manuel de sociocritique*, Paris: Picard, 1985, p.57

bullfighting by proxy will reveal a crisis of agency and performance combined with an ever-present defeat.

The modality of wanting virtually makes of Barnes a subject that willingly accepts a conjunctive quest (conjoining Barnes and his value object); the transformative statement justifying his confrontations with other semiotic subjects opposing his quests (Brett, castration, the US Ambassador, War memories and fear) always leaves him defeated.
Defeat revirtualizes the status of the protagonist because he does not pass the qualifying test. If, in the first military quest, he did embark on a confrontation (qualifying test) to reach his goal, in the remaining quest he is rather limited by his physical handicap and therefore passes the quest on to bullfighters. These successive transitions from one type of quest to another not only underscore his lack of tenacity but also build on an axiological crisis. He moves from collectively shared values supporting his transitive quest to individual values comforting his self-centered interests. These types of quest (quest for love with Brett and attachment to bullfighting) are significant milestones in the plot.

First, it is worth mentioning that his affair with Brett starts at the war front, when he was brought from the front to the hospital[5]. They left the front together and arrived in France. However, being impotent and unable to meet her sexual needs, she left him for multiple lovers (Mike, Romero, the Count). In this quest, Barnes is limited by an opponent he cannot defeat: his impotence is a permanent physiological problem. At his moments of despair, he articulates these words to Cohn who still believes there is hope in that post-war society: “No one lived their life through except bullfighters.” p.10 Barnes renounces historical agency and leaves it to bullfighters. With these words, an aficionado was born with a next quest: attending bullfighting as a passion whose meaning is deep: it is the problem of history being re-enacted in a ritualized way.

The first point here is the perception of bullfighting as a ritual, re-enacting historical violence but in a way that is less brutal than military violence. While military violence is massive, generalized and irrespective of norms, bullfighting is ritualized, limited to the torero and his bull only in an arena. Ritualized violence is limited in space and time, based on adherence to strict rules. More than the mere fact of killing the bull, it is a way of ritualizing the progress of civilization, based on the control of the natural forces.

In addition, the battle between the bullfighter and the bull may be associated with Theseus and the Minotaur. The animal (Minotaur) embodies the immensity of natural forces whereas the bullfighter stands for human weakness, compensated by the cunning and superior rationality of Theseus and Ariadne. In the novel understudy, Romero too incarnates this superiority of human reasoning over blind killing force. His quest is that of the hero with a civilizing mission, as his name indicates: Romero evokes Romulus, Rome. Both designations may revert to Rome which defined herself as Center and others (bulls) as periphery. The consumerist interventions of Brett and the American Ambassador, and all the marketing tools around the bullfighting event, have transformed it more into a spectacle than into a place for the perpetuation of the above age-old ritual for renewing people’s fidelity to a liberating gesture.

The next remark about this is the transition from the role of “actor” in one’s quest to that of “spectator” of others’ quest. There is a displacement of Barnes from the center of historical

[5] “Yes, I said. She was a V.A.D. in a hospital I was in during the war”, Barnes points out on page 38.

performance to its periphery. In this sense, Barnes refuses to be other's heroes like Romero, that is to say a hero to be "consumed". This stance hints at a criticism of hero-worshipping in society. The fact for Brett to keep the "ear" of the bull killed by Romero and later to woo him and win his heart is a sign of Romero's escape from the axiological field of Barnes; as a winner, Romero cannot live in amity with losers. According to Barnes, Romero is now being used by the US Ambassador for contest bullfighting and out of fatigue he can no more preserve the purity of his art. He fights for others and no more for reproducing a pure anthropological gesture of founding hero. Forgetting about this is a sign of crisis.

From another perspective, being swallowed up in the consumerist business of the Pamplona carnival, this heroic ritual is no more based on the promotion of axiological interests but it gives in to the pressure of making quick money. It is the consumption economy that is progressively taking control of the ritual. Now, Romero plays for those who pay to watch. Barnes reproaches him with this square paradigm shift that has turned him into a star, deriving his fame from the mere fact of killing a bull. The public does not come to understand but to watch the killing of the bull. They confuse the outcome and the process of bullfighting.

The public does not understand that the traces drawn on the ground by the bull and the torero serve to mark a territory, both a polemic and politicized place. In a consumerist society characterized by just-in-time delivery, what is important is the quick killing, not the sociological and rationalist "I and Other" dialectics and geometrical territoriality made up of vertical frontiers not to be crossed by the Other. The semiotics of bullfighting reveals the binarity of a society that opposes things and people for a better categorization. Hence Romero, the hero is opposed to Barnes the anti-hero. At this point, the problematic nature of binary oppositions is revealed; is Barnes an anti-hero because he does not succeeded in his quest while Romero does succeed all the time? Can an antihero really be disqualified from any aspiration to heroism because of failure?

Barnes's quest cannot only be analyzed from the perspective of its outcome since the modality of wanting is never abandoned by him. In this logic, he preserves the modality which brings into being the actuator – quest relation. It is in the act of transforming this virtual situation into an actualized one that he fails. The modality which he fails to conjoin himself is that of "being able to". He cannot face the challenges of adversity and move forward to reach the decisive and glorifying steps. As a consequence, his semiotic status is constantly revirtualized. What remains is desire without satisfaction, disjunction and status quo ante. This is precisely symptomatic of defeat, lack of performance in an economy exclusively concerned with product and outcome as measure for performance. Barnes resists the seduction of a performance-based economy.

Contrary to the Count, Romero and Brett who do not realize their reduction to the state of tradable, competent and performing consumption hero, Barnes refuses "any economic interest" p.99 arguing that "it would be like betting on the war." p.99 The modality of wanting has to do with desire which is not measurable in economic terms. By resisting distinction, Barnes also turns down the invitation to the agonistic showdown because the polemicity inherent in most conventional heroic narratives is alienating. This explains his attachment to banal life.

III Banality and Zeroization Aesthetics

In a paper entitled "Héros et héroïsation : approches théoriques " in *Cahiers électroniques de l'imaginaire*, n°2, 2003-2004 by Laurence Van Ypersele, the hero is defined as follows: « c'est un demi-dieu ou un surhomme. Il appartient, écrit Violette Morin, à une classe de surhommes dans laquelle chacun projette ses rêves et puise ses modèles » p.1 In this definition, the hero has preterhuman qualities and is superior to ordinary human beings and serves as a model.

The above definition is based on modern perceptions of the hero as an extraordinary person. This definition of heroism is alienating for Barnes as it detaches the hero from his humanity. Instead of being a superman, Barnes wants to remain an ordinary man, involved in the human banalities of eating, dancing, walking, drinking, falling in love and crying. It is mainly the reason behind this sentence expressed at Madame Lecount's restaurant: "When do us protestants get a chance to eat, father?" p.88 The question also implicitly ridicules the aspiration of Catholic pilgrims invading the place to asceticism. The iconoclastic drive of the narrator does not spare any institution, as this discussion between Bill and Barnes indicates:

"First the egg," said Bill.
"Then the chicken. Even Bryan could see that."
"He's dead. I read it in the paper yesterday."
"No. Not really?
"Yes, Bryan's dead."
Bill laid down the egg he was peeling.
"I reverse the order. For Bryan's sake. As a tribute to the Great Commoner. First the chicken, then the egg." p.121

The exchange between the two characters is a kind of riddle aiming to tell which of the egg and the chicken was first created. Bill starts the riddle and leaves the statement incomplete for Barnes to complete it. Barnes finds it so easy that "Even Bryan could see that" p.121 The main issue for us here is the association of things that do not match at all. Bryan is a US political figure that does not apparently have anything to do with chicken and egg issues. The death of Bryan announced a day before in the papers does not even prevent him from going on with his iconoclastic exercise; he rather twists the riddle's syntax starting it by chicken and ending it with egg, as a tribute to Bryan who was renowned for his oratorical talent. This particular reversal of syntactic order and rigor is pervasive in their exchanges in Pamplona.

For example in Pamplona, Mike says: "I am just start ing. I'm go ing to get a lit tle sleep" p.210 He produces sentences with no syntax. The chaos in syntax is certainly for him a replica of the chaos prevailing in post-war society. When syntax is not chaotic, it is polysemic; when Bill asks Barnes to "get up" the latter replies as follows: "What? I never get up." They are making fun of his war wound. The word "get up" stands for various meanings here: standing up and erection. Like Barnes, Brett is given to starting sentences that remain incomplete. The Count makes this remark to her while Barnes is serving them wine: "You're always drinking, my dear. Why don't you just talk? I should like to hear you really talk, my dear. When you talk, you me you never finish your sentences" p.58 Though she is drunk, she replies indicating this: "Leave 'em for you to finish. Let anyone finish them as they like." p.58 The answer provided by Brett may mean that she refuses repressive and right or wrong syntax. On the contrary, she considers conversation as a free exchange with no censor imposing his judgment

to speakers. She wants her sentences to be a collaborative and interactive work, which is exactly what she cannot get in her sexual relation with most men. If anyone is left to finish her sentences as they like, then the interpretation of meaning is open to more possibilities. The democratization of meaning production is a metaphor for the death of the heroic interpreter of text. Inasmuch as everybody can interpret a text, no one is distinctively endowed with heroic interpretive capacities.

There is a paradigm shift from the seriousness of heroic distinction to the banality of the nonsensical discourse of nonentities downed by the war; the heroic altar is now open to all, drunkards, prostitutes, impotents and their likes. Giving banality the dignity of esthetic beauty is contrary to heroism because it is a flattening of the heroic deed. It ends up getting down to the zero level of distinction, hence our calling it a process of zeroization.

If heroization demands progredient identification with/to the hero as an exceptional man, zeroization runs parallel with regredient dis-identification from new consumption models as a resistance to alienation. The "zeroic figure" is a critical posture compared to the ideological heritage of the "heroic" one. If the hero in the novel is "quelqu'un" as Barnes's concierge will put it, then the zeroic character is "anyone". He is not an antihero if anti-heroism includes this binary and moral contradiction of transforming the antihero into the antonym of the hero, one being negative and the other, positive. We do not want to use the categories of "non hero" versus "hero" postulated by Stephanie S. Halldorson[6] on account of their implicit binarity. Most tellingly of all, Zeroization implies a different process and it pervades Hemingway's novels, he who is identified as a "He-man" by Carlos Baker[7] by making reference to his novels and short stories. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Barnes does not certainly have this narcissistic attachment to such a powerful masculine "He-man". He is rather closer to a "zeroized" man. This neologism is borrowed from Hélène Strohl and Anne Petiau[8] who point to Michel Maffesoli as the theorist that adapted the said cryptographic concept to sociology in order to underscore the leveling and formatting of heroic signifiers under the pressure of standardization and mass-consumption in capitalistic societies. Standardization democratizes the heroic sign by making it accessible to all. The idea of heroism loses depth and meaning inasmuch as it has now become only a word, and the hero has turned into an anonymous everyman with the crisis of distinction. The depopulated heroic arena gives in to the flattened zeroic crowd in which no one identifies such traditional heroes as General Grant and Lincoln, who are both turned into zeroized signs, that is to say, two-dimensional or flattened surfaces in the book. As the following pronouncement shows it: "That was what the civil war was about. Abraham Lincoln was a faggot. He was in love with General Grant. So was Jefferson Davis. Lincoln freed the slaves on a bet. The Dredd Scott case was framed by the Anti-Saloon League. Sex explains it all." p.116

This statement evokes a milestone in US history: the Civil War, as the period when the nation was divided along slavery lines into free Northern and slave Southern parts, leading to war and the victory of Federal forces over slave states. Abraham Lincoln freed the slaves by issuing the Emancipation Proclamation. Since then, his name has thenceforth gone down in

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[6] Stephanie S. Halldorson, *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp.1-8.

[7] *Hemingway: The Writer As Artist*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, Nov 1, 1972.

[8] Hélène Strohl and Anne Petiau state that for Maffesoli, zeroization is the culture of indifference as opposed to modern culture that is marked by difference and assumed linguistic perfection : « À la lumière du fait que la modernité a apparemment culminé dans l'apothéose du langage, la réaction à la modernité ne pouvait se manifester que par cette zéroïsation symbolique, marquant la fin d'une culture dominée par la différence en instaurant l'indifférence. » in *Dérive autour de l'œuvre de Michel Maffesoli*, Paris : L'Harmattan, 2004. p.65.

US history as a hero and a model to be followed. Contrary to this broadly admitted truth, the quotation from expatriates above reinterprets the same historical events by simplistically zeroizing both the explanation of the Civil War and the Dredd Scott case, arguing that the readability principle of these important events is libidinal and financial interest. By saying that Abraham was a homosexual in love with Grant and adding that he freed the slaves on a bet, the quotation implies, inter alia, that he was an effeminate man who wanted to show his virility and heroism by freeing the slaves on a sudden impulse. There is also this hint that the Emancipation Proclamation was a promise the US President did not give much thought to, he just drafted it as a bet on his demiurgic capacity to do so. The narrator implicitly means he can do and undo history depending on his caprice. There is also an implicit de-memorialization of Lincoln as an icon in US history. The narrator wants those facts to be ordinary, flat and banal. The trivialization of Lincoln is a call for a suspension of belief in all the glorifying narratives behind the documents and memorials teaching his heroic deed to posterity.

In addition to the executive power, another US institution is ridiculed: the judicial system. The narrator rather puts this system in the shredders of zeroic criticism when the judicial forum that adjudicated the Dredd Scott case is said to have made it under the influence of alcohol. The expressions “That was what the civil war was about” and “Sex explains it all” have an etiological function; they tend to explain why these important decisions were made. The drunken narrator and his lubricious internal interpretive community pride themselves on understanding the intricacies of complex issues and identify their semantic implications through the certitude of assertive sentences. This iconoclastic discourse tends to ridicule US institutional icons. By doing so, Barnes and his group purposefully articulate a discourse lacking restraint as a response to the repressive nature of a civilization built on the restriction of interpretive possibilities, pleasure, the renunciation to happiness and the cult of distinction.

On the strength of the same critical posture, Barnes refuses any ambition. Bill Gorton does not agree with him and urges him using these ideas: “All our biggest business men have been dreamers. Look at Ford. Look at Coolidge. Look at Rockefeller. Look at Jo Davidson.” p.124 Bill wants Barnes to identify with economic success stories, while the latter does not believe in success being measured by the fact of reaching one’s goal and deluding oneself with the naturalization of a historical process of which a milestone is taken for the terminus.

Barnes remarks that after the war, consumption economy is increasing fast. This is actually perceptible in the soar of purse-proud tourists in the Paris and Basque interludes. Everything becomes marketable, exchangeable, even values. This is mainly why the Count says: “Enjoying living was learning to get your money’s worth.” p.148 In this type of economy, while veterans like him cannot enjoy a heroic status, the Count can because he has enough money. The concierge who discovered the Count’s relationship with Brett, added that Brett is “quelqu’une!” p.53 His heroism is equivalent to an accumulation of conjunctive modalities, a process which runs parallel with the acquisitive dimension of the consumption economy hero’s purchasing power.

Compared with these inflated heroes, Barnes is rather a flat one, dispossessed of such accumulative power and inflating semiotic modalities. He loses his faith in God, since his attachment to Catholicism can only be understood from a “technical” perspective. This too exemplifies the loss of substance, his technical Catholicism being the fact of bearing the name “Jacob”, a name that makes him uneasy. Barnes mocks American puritans by saying that they are “specimens of normality”, “Goddamn puritans” p.86 He also emphasizes the greed of those brethren who take themselves for instances of exemplariness at Mme Lecomte’s. The

narrator alludes to their greater attachment to flesh and earthly pleasure than to ascetic norms. Their materialistic collusion with market economy is implicit in their designation of "Knights of Columbus Tourists". The festival in honor of San Firmin at San Sebastian is another instance of the erosion of serious ideals and the flattening of heroism.

During the festival, there was a procession, divided in two groups: one at the front end made up of the clergy and brethren holding the effigy of the Saint and another group at the symmetrically opposed end including RIAU-RIAU dancers with Brett sitting on their wine barrel. They made a circle round Brett, and started dancing around her; this carnivalistic moment in the seriousness of the procession not only transforms the confessional event into a secular spectacle. It also symmetrically opposes the masculine religious hero to the secular heroin of their bacchic event. Brett enjoys more focal attention than the patron saint and wins the support of the public of tourists watching the event. This is an indicator of the paradigm shift taking place in the post-war society.

The church is now an institution of the past, just like its lexical field: glory, sacrifice, asceticism, measure, and honor… which Ray West calls "empty forms"[9]. Ray West helps us understand that the lexical field of post-war society is full of "forms" that used to have some sort of Euclidean volume. The volume postulates a third dimension and the capacity of the form to contain meaning, to preserve the economics of an interiority (private sphere) that is a rare treasure with a high exchange value. With the replacement of the pre-war heroic soldier by purse-proud consumerist heroes, heroism is zeroized like a formatted disk. What remains is the signifier (surface) minus the signified (essence), echoing the burns of Barnes at the war front: they serve as the metaphor of the draining of the essential life-blood of a one-time hero. The leaking out blood is the semantic drain that results in the zeroization of the sign.

Conclusion

The signifiers *TSAR* uses to describe the protagonist do not reveal him to the reader as a hero; they rather immerse him in a world so confused and destroyed by heroes that he is even reluctant to reveal his status of veteran, believing people will realize his contribution to that regressive WWI violence. Barnes is a man that is dispossessed of any heroic reference. He is a loser in this post-war society. To make matters worse, he abandons agency, feeling distant from performance arenas and comforting himself with the spectacle of the ritual of historical violence re-enacted by bullfighters.

There again, the game is spoiled by consumerism, as he notices it. With the last authentic bullfighter messed up in the world of post-war consumption, all heroes have vanished. What remains is the concrete name of places devoid of people. It is this depopulation of the historical scene that is leaving the space bare for the clowning of zeroic figures who reveal not only the ground zero of historical possibility after WWI but also the decay of modern society due to the waning of semiotic performance, historical agency, axiological heritage and the replacement of quality by quantity.

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