

The Twilight of Conquering Heroes in *The Sun Also Rises*

SINDOU SOUMAHORO

Université « Félix Houphouët-Boigny », Abidjan

Following World War I, conquering heroes from the US roam about Paris and are surprised by increasing change in the post-war period that has substituted heroes of conquests 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 of conquest inherited from modernity.

Keywords: *conquering heroes; quest; semiotics; modality of doing; crisis; performance; modernity.*

Introduction

No attentive observer of American sport, art and politics can fail to notice the hero-worshipping drive inherent in US culture. The rationale behind America's passion for conquering 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 conquest 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 of conquest. This disbelief permeates some novels by Hemingway and tends to deny the possibility for modern heroes to be on top of the world. Typically "heroization" can, *inter alia*, be defined as a process of conquest that is running parallel with the advent of the winning imperialistic bourgeois; however, in *The Sun Also Rises*, the conquering 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 conquering heroes' performance modalities which, in the end, leads to the aesthetics of banality and zeroization.

I. Problematization and Representation of Conquering Heroes

Through this title, we are making reference to Philippe Hamon's¹ seminal book on semiotic theory where he explains the "semiological status" of characters. His theoretical assumption was hinged on the enjoyment of an exclusive paper existence by actants and an analysis riveted on the character as a sign well endowed with a signifier and a signified. This implies that character analysis should only be conducted using linguistic tools. The semiological status of heroes serves this purpose, since it is built on a range of linguistic tools making it possible to identify the distinctive nature of heroes. Hence, Hamon assumes that given their distinctiveness, heroes may 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 distinctiveness of the characters Hamon is interested in: heroes. In this section of our work, we intend to focus on the first two processes, that is to say: differential distribution / autonomy and qualification / designation. The concept of differential distribution and autonomy refers to

¹Philippe Hamon, « Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage » (1977: 115-180).

a modality of presence, both quantitatively and qualitatively. The quantity of occurrences that an actant enjoys may show that he / she is privileged with more focal attention.

Contrary to the above-mentioned definitions oriented towards distinctiveness, in *The Sun Also Rises*, the protagonist is rather characterized by a quest for anonymity. There is a contrapuntal logic in the incipit when the first-person internal narrator rather focuses – in chapter one and two – on the life of Robert Cohn instead of narrating the true protagonist's quest: he recounts Cohn's first successes at school, his prowess as middleweight boxing champion, the precociousness of his marriage, his life in Paris as a writer who is successful with New York female readers and critics. The narrator puts this as follows: "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" (Hemingway, 1926: 8).

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

In a different perspective, Jacob Barnes' absence from the vital initial chapters of the book, gives 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, at times, be 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 whereas 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, cafés, nightclubs and beaches of Paris and Pamplona. It is worth underlining that though the protagonist is seen in all these areas, he remains outnumbered by the over-presence of such successful people as US tourists, the US 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 such a coterie. He is appended to these people, hence his lack of autonomy. On the other hand, contrary to their resolute attachment to and immersion in the prevailing heroic conquest narratives of the twenties, Barnes is standing very far from such stories. If there is another factor that mainly underscores the problematization of Barnes's aspiration to a status of conquest hero, it is certainly the notion of designation / qualification.

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

Signifiers	Explanation
Barnes	Family name, multiple occurrences throughout the novel
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 Georgette asks him what is wrong.
Little girl, p. 14	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 tramps, 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 and 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 unlike expatriates that have Dionysian inclinations, true Americans are characterized by 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 I 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, Jacob burns) and anti-heroism (joke front, 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 Mippipopulous who took part in several wars and so displays his wounds as if they were part of a corporeal papyrus inking in his military prowess.

On the contrary, each time Jacob refers to the war, he insists more on its impact on him rather than on the impact of his presence at the war front. The fact for an enemy bomb to inflict him impotence, while he was eating in a trench, bears witness to his being far from the arena of bravery. The Italian Chief of Staff¹ thinks he heroically defended the group: he ironically thinks he is all bandaged on account of great military achievement at the front.

Another evidence of the flattening of 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 implies messianic expectations at a moment when Barnes 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” (97).

Furthermore, Barnes ridicules modern American heroes of conquest hanging around Europe. He describes them in two ways: first of all, he compares them to spendthrift and starving Pilgrim Fathers whom he calls “specimens of normality” (86), “Knights of Columbus Tourists” (86) at Mme Lecomte’s restaurant. Then, he also alludes to them as economic products of thriving American capitalism 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 discover and conquer America. The main allusion is that conquest heroes are those who thrive on hard work and what I term the Prospero complex. The Prospero complex is the attachment to power, land and authority by all means. It runs parallel with a celebration of *Calibanization* (coined from Caliban and evoking the acceptance to serve a conqueror in a position of subject) and *Mirandization* (coined from Miranda and referring the metaphor of fascination). The conqueror forcibly needs all kinds of subdued althusserian alienated subjects for the security and eternity of his empire. Barnes does not believe that the Pilgrims are heroes, he rather associates them with heroes of Prospero type: glaringly powerful, with a hunger gargantuan greed; the scene at Madame Lecomte’s restaurant implies the existence of a link between the so-called heroes’ hunger, their thirst for land and their Dionysian lack of measure.

Like them, Jacob’s name is associated with Christian religion. Just as he does with the Christian metanarrative, Jacob trivializes the age-old heroic matrix. His expatriation helps understand why 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” (15), or others having a moral function such as “bum” (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 and heroism. She denied Barnes capacity to conquer and win her heart. He cannot do so both because Georgette is involved in sex work and also because he is impotent. Bill also calls him “bum” as he is always on the move, through the meanders of Paris 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 heroic figures like Gorton, the Count and Cohn 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 and Jacob remains in place, believing there is no alternative to his fate. His impotence is physiological and cannot be cured. Barnes

¹“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.” (31)

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" (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: "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." (115)

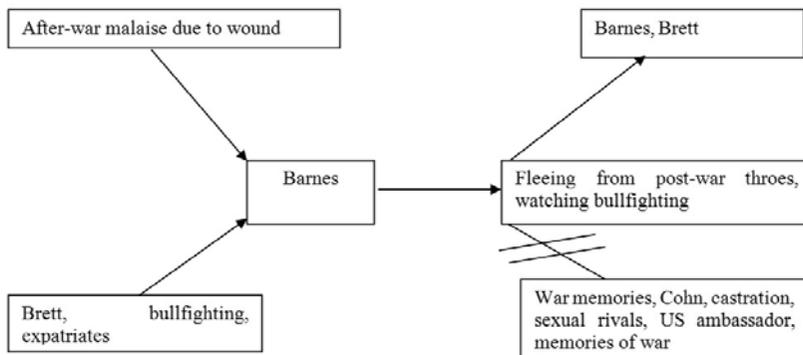
In the above quotation, Gorton is rather making a comprehensive moral portrait of the protagonist which encompasses most of the points identified in the table: impotence, lack of productivity, Dionysian propensity and lack of focus.

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 refusal to look like conquest heroes of great renown. In addition, the anaphoric nature of such signifiers runs the risk of fixing the floating outlines of his complexity and attitude 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. This is the reason why he rejects designations and qualifications that refer to historical heroes. The above list not only points to a crisis on the ontological axis, but it also anticipates the functional or performance crisis we are going to explain now.

II. Crisis of Performance Modalities

Though the notions of differential autonomy / distribution and designation / qualification aim to identify the being of a 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. In heroic narratives, the quest takes the form of a conquest. 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, but it should also be recognized by society for the protagonist to become accepted as a hero that has subdued his opponents and conquered their territories.

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 of the novel, 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 that¹ 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 front, 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 sexual partners of Brett "consumption heroes" (Zima, 1985: 57) owing to the quantitative nature of their quest. Barnes' running from the war and deluding himself that the purity of love would supersede the "dirts" (19) of the war ended up prolonging his 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, he 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 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 next 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 hospital². 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, and 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

¹"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." (11)

²"Yes, I said. She was a V.A.D. in a hospital I was in during the war", Barnes points out on page 38.

through except bullfighters.” (10) Barnes renounces historical agency and leaves it to bullfighters. Barnes finally becomes an aficionado with a new quest: being a spectator of the re-enactment of the modern historical scene.

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. Military violence is massive, generalized and irrespective of norms, but bullfighting is ritualized, limited to the torero and his bull. Ritualized violence is limited in scope, 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 under study, 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 of the Modern world and limited others (bulls, barbarians) to the periphery. The consumerist interventions of Brett and the American Ambassador, and all the marketing tools around bullfighting events, have transformed them more into a spectacle than into a place for the perpetuation of a ritual for renewing people's fidelity to a heroic gesture. The corruption of *corrida* with money points to the crisis of bullfighting as a modern discourse of conquest. It becomes a trivial killing for commercial reasons.

The next remark about this is the transition of Barnes from the role of “actor” in his own quest to that of “spectator” of others'. There is a displacement of Barnes from the center of historical performance arena to its periphery. 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 like Barnes. 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. Barnes criticizes Romero's acceptance to be the hero of others. Again, Barnes' last quest leads to defeat. The last authentic bullfighter has willingly embraced the world of consumption, not knowing its consumptive nature.

It is currently consumption economy that is progressively taking control of the ritual. Now, Romero plays for those who pay. 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 audience does not come to understand but to watch the killing. They confuse the outcome and the process of bullfighting.

The spectator 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 rationalist dialectics and the 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 is opposed to Barnes, as a hero to the anti-hero. At this point, it is worth asking this: is Barnes an anti-hero because his quest ends in defeat all the time? Can an anti-hero really be disqualified from any aspiration to heroism because of failure?

Barnes's quest cannot only be analyzed from the perspective of its outcome. He never abandons the modality of wanting. In this logic, he preserves the modality which brings into being the actuator-quest relationship. It is in the act of transforming this virtual situation into an actualized one that he fails. The modality which he fails to adjoin himself is that of “being able to”. He cannot face the challenges of adversity and move forward to 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 and heroism. Barnes resists the seduction of a performance-based economy.

Contrary to the Count, Romero and Brett do not realize their reduction to the state of tradable, competent and performing consumption heroes, whereas Barnes refuses “any economic interest” (99) arguing that “it would be like betting on the war” (99). The modality of wanting has to do with desire which is not measurable in economic terms. What is more, for Michel Pringent¹ “greatness and values are not measured in terms of failure and success since they do not belong to the realm of matter”. Immersion in the market economy leads to the confusion of qualitative and quantitative values. Hence, what is now important is not distinction, elevation but the ground zero of banality and triviality.

III. Banality and Zeroization Aesthetics

Laurence Van Ypersele defines the hero as follows: “a demigod or an overman. He belongs, writes Violette Morin, to the category of supermen in which each person projects his dreams and from which each takes his models” (1)². In this definition, the hero has capacities, superhuman qualities, and serves as a model.

The above definition hinges 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 question he asked at Madame Lecomte’s restaurant: “When do us protestants get a chance to eat, father?” (88) The question also implicitly ridicules Catholic pilgrims’ pretension 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.”

(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 to mention that “Even Bryan could see that.” (121) The main issue for us here is the association of things that do not match. 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 them from going on with this iconoclastic exercise; Bill 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.” (210) He produces utterances with no syntactic rigor. The chaos in syntax is certainly for him a

¹« la grandeur et les valeurs ne se mesurent pas en termes d’échec et de réussite car leurs principes n’appartiennent pas au monde de la matière » (1986: 19).

²« 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 » (2003-2004: 1).

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.” This statement aims at 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 never finish your sentences.” (58) Though she is drunk, she replies indicating this: “Leave ‘em for you to finish. Let anyone finish them as they like.” (58) The answer provided by Brett may mean that she refuses repressive and right or wrong syntax. On the contrary, she immerses her incomplete sentences into conversation that looks like free exchange with no censor silencing speakers’ judgments. She wants her sentences to be a collaborative and interactive work, which is exactly what she cannot get in her sexual relations with most men. If everyone is left to finish her sentences as he / she likes, then the interpretation of meaning will be 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 provide an interpretation, no one can exclusively be endowed with heroic interpretive capacities.

There is a paradigm shift from the seriousness of heroic distinction to the banality of these nonsensical nonentities downed by the war; the heroic altar being now open to all, drunkards, prostitutes, impotents and their likes step in and tread it down. Giving to banality the dignity of esthetic beauty is contrary to heroism since 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 progreident identification with / to the hero as an exceptional person, zeroization evokes regredient dis-identification from new consumption models as a resistance to alienation. The “zeroic figure” is a critical figure compared to the ideological posture 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, inasmuch as 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 (2007: 1-8) on account of their implicit binarity. Most tellingly of all, *zeroization* implies a different process and pervades Hemingway’s novels, he who is identified as a “He-man” by Carlos Baker (1972).

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Barnes does not certainly have this narcissistic attachment to powerful masculinity. He is rather closer to a “zeroized” man. This neologism is borrowed from H el ene Strohl and Anne Petiau¹ 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 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. 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.” (116)

This statement evokes a milestone in US history: the Civil War, 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

¹H el ene 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: «   la lumi ere du fait que la modernit e a apparemment culmin e dans l’apoth eose du langage, la r eaction   la modernit e ne pouvait se manifester que par cette z eroisation symbolique, marquant la fin d’une culture domin ee par la diff erence en instaurant l’indiff erence. » (2004: 65).

Emancipation Proclamation. Since then, his name has thenceforth gone down in 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 these important events are only readable in terms of libidinal and financial interests. By saying that Abraham was a homosexual in love with Grant and adding that he freed the slaves on a bet, the quotation implies, among other things, 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 Abraham – like a conquering hero – can do and undo historical conjuncture depending on his caprice. There is also an implicit dememorialization 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 capacities. 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, enjoyment, 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.” (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 Paris and the Basque region. Everything becomes marketable, exchangeable, even values. This is mainly why the Count says: “Enjoying living was learning to get your money’s worth.” (148) In this type of economy, veterans like him cannot enjoy a heroic status, but the Count can, since he has enough money. The concierge, who discovered the Count’s relationship with Brett, added that Brett is “quelqu’une!” (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 flat, dispossessed of such accumulative power and inflating semiotic modalities. He loses his faith in God, since his attachment to Catholicism can only be understood now 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 “Goddamn puritans” (86). 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”, hence the fusing confusion of use and market values. The festival in honor of San Fermin at San Sebastian is another instance of the erosion of serious ideals and of 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 symmet-

rically 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 transforms the confessional event into a secular spectacle. In addition, it symmetrically opposes the masculine religious hero to the secular heroine 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 reorientation of values in 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” (1962: 141). 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 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 what Terry Eagleton calls in *Sweet Violence* “the dark underside of the fables of progress” (2003: 207) that is the decay created by modern conqueror, a decay leading to the waning of semiotic performance and historical impasse.

BIBLIOGRAPHY:

- BAKER, Carlos, *Hemingway: The Writer as Artist*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972.
- BERMAN, Ronald, *Modernity and Progress: Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Orwell*, Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2005.
- BUDNIAKIEWICZ, Therese, *Fundamentals of Story Logic: an Introduction to Greimassian Semiotics*, Philadelphia: John Benjamins B. V., 1992.
- EAGLETON, Terry, *Sweet Violence, The Idea of the Tragic*, UK: Blackwell, 2003.
- GREIMAS, Algirdas Julien, *Sémantique structurale: recherche de méthode*, Paris: PUF, 1986.
- HALLDORSON, Stephanie, *The Hero in Contemporary American Fiction*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.
- HAMON, Philippe, « Pour un statut sémiologique du personnage », in *Poétique du récit*, Paris: Seuil, 1977, pp.115-180.
- HAMON, Philippe, « Héros, héraut, hiérarchies », in *Le Personnage en question*, IVème Colloque du S.E.L., Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, 1984, pp. 387-397.
- HASSAN, Ibn, *Crise du héros dans le roman américain contemporain*, Paris: Minard, 1963.
- HEMINGWAY, Ernest, *The Sun Also Rises*, New York: Scribner, 1926.
- LELAND, Jacob Michael, “Yes, That Is a Roll of Bills in My Pocket: The Economy of Masculinity in *The Sun Also Rises*”, in *The Hemingway Review*, vol. 23, no 2, Spring 2004, pp. 37-46.

102 AIC

POZORSKI, Aimee, "Infantry and Infanticide in A Farewell to Arms", in *The Hemingway Review*, vol. 23, no 2, Spring 2004, pp. 75-98.

PRINGENT, Michel, *Le héros et l'État dans la tragédie de Pierre Corneille*, Paris: PUF, 1986.

STROHL, Hélène; Anne PETIAU, *Dérive autour de l'œuvre de Michel Maffesoli*, Paris: L'Harmattan, 2004.

VINCENT Jouve, « L'héroïsation, effet de texte ou de contexte? », in *Cahiers Électroniques de l'Imaginaire*, n° 1, novembre 2003.

WEST, Ray, "The Biological Trap", in Robert Percy WEEKS (ed.), *Hemingway, a Collection of Critical Essays*, USA: Prentice Hall, 1962, pp. 139-151.

YPERSELE, Laurence Van, « Héros et héroïsation: approches théoriques », in *Cahiers électroniques de l'imaginaire*, n° 2, 2003-2004.

ZIMA, Pierre, *Manuel de sociocritique*, Paris: Picard, 1985.