



INSTITUTIONEN FÖR  
SPRÅK OCH LITTERATURER

# THE PORTRAYAL OF ALCOHOL IN *THE SUN ALSO RISES*:

## Drinking as Socio-Political Commentary and Measurement of Character

Emma Ericson

---

Essay/Degree Project:	Literary Research Project 15hp
Program or/and course:	EN1311
Level:	First cycle
Term/year:	Vt/2017
Supervisor:	Marius Hentea
Examiner:	Margret Gunnarsdottir Champi
Report nr:	xx (not to be filled)

# Abstract

**Title:** *The Portrayal of Alcohol in The Sun Also Rises: Alcohol as Socio-Political Commentary and Measurement of Character.*

**Author:** Emma Ericson

**Supervisor:** Marius Hentea

**Abstract:** Although drinking is a central theme in most of Hemingway's work, many scholars argue that *The Sun Also Rises* might be the one of his novels in which alcohol has the biggest presence. This essay is a contribution to the discussion about the excessive drinking in the novel. By taking a historical approach and by applying the concept of the Hemingway Hero to the analysis of the novel, this essay will offer a close reading of the symbolism and meaning of the portrayal of alcohol. This essay aim to show that alcohol is used as a tool for socio-political commentary and furthermore, as a touchstone by which the integrity of the characters in the novel is measured.

**Keywords:** Ernest Hemingway, Alcohol, Prohibition Era, 1920s America, Disillusion, The Hemingway Hero, The Lost Generation, *The Sun Also Rises*, Paris, Expatriatism

# Table of Contents

1. Introduction.....	1-3
2.1. Alcohol as a Tool for Social Commentary.....	4-9
2.2. Alcohol as Unifier and Divider.....	10-14
2.3. Alcohol as Touchstone to Measure Character.....	15-20
3. Conclusion.....	21
4. References.....	22

# 1. Introduction

*The Sun Also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway is a novel set in the 1920s and it is a story about a group of American expatriates and their bohemian life in Paris during the prohibition era. The main character is a young man named Jake Barnes and he surrounds himself with characters like his close friends Bill Gorton and Robert Cohn, the beautiful British socialite Lady Brett Ashley and her soon-to-be husband Mike Campbell. Throughout the novel, the characters drink heavily and although drinking is a recurring topic in most of Hemingway's works, many scholars (e.g. Djos, 1995; Moradi, 2013) agree that *The Sun Also Rises* is the Hemingway novel in which alcohol plays the most central role. However, there are some gaps in previous research concerning what Hemingway's portrayal of alcohol and drinking symbolises in connection to the political and social situation in which the novel was written. Therefore, this essay will analyse how Hemingway uses the portrayal of alcohol consumption as a touchstone by which he measures the moral merit of his characters and also as a medium to reflect attitudes towards the social and political situation of the 1920s and the Prohibition era.

There is little scholarly consensus concerning the underlying morality and meaning behind the constant drinking in *The Sun Also Rises*. Most scholars (e.g. J.W. Cowley, Schwartz and Djos) agree that the characters show clear signs of alcohol addiction and that the disease of alcoholism is very present in the novel. However, there is some disagreement regarding to what extent alcoholism is romanticised and what the significance of the excessive drinking in the novel is. Djos, for example, seems to suggest that the novel completely lacks a moral compass as it tricks the reader into accepting heavy drinking. Scholars like J.W. Cowley and Malone, on the other hand, acknowledge that the novel has its own set of rules and ideals that contribute to a kind of morality. Furthermore, scholars like Djos and Carol Gelderman choose to focus their research on the alcoholic tendencies shown by the characters, connecting drinking first and foremost with self-pity and a refusal to face reality. Although there is some substance in the reading of the novel as a liquor loving, self-indulgent, and destructive portrayal of alcoholic characters who are selfish and unable to deal with reality, this approach misses something important in the reading of the novel, namely what the excessive drinking symbolises when it comes to the socio-political context of the novel. Although a few scholars like Schwartz and Malone have acknowledged the political aspects of the novel to a certain extent, there is still a gap in the research concerning what part alcohol plays when one looks at the novel as a social and political commentary. To

contribute to this gap, this essay will offer a close study of the symbolism of alcohol in connection to post-WWI America, expatriation, disillusion and the values of “the Hemingway Hero.” The essay argues that the portrayal of alcohol is a key factor in understanding the underlying values and ideas of the novel and the aim of this essay is to identify and analyse the connection between the supposed ideals and attitudes of Hemingway and the portrayal of alcohol and drinking in *The Sun Also Rises*. More concretely, the research questions that this essay will intend to answer are:

- How is alcohol used as a tool to reflect attitudes concerning the political and social context of the novel?
- How does the portrayal of alcohol consumption serve as a tool to measure the moral and social merit of the characters in the novel?

This essay uses a variety of approaches to offer a nuanced response to these questions. First of all, to approach the first research question it makes sense to turn to a historical approach to connect the constant presence of alcohol in the novel with the controversial position of alcohol in the time that it is set and written. Books and memoirs about the war and its effects on American society and the Lost Generation have contributed insight about the society that *The Sun Also Rises* depicts and criticises. A book that has been especially helpful in this regard is David M Kennedy’s *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*. Kennedy’s chronicle of the years leading up to the war, the conditions during the war and the effects of the war gave this essay an understanding of the context of *The Sun Also Rises* necessary for its analysis of 1920s post-war America and the society of expatriates portrayed in the novel. Secondly, as the second research question concerns the inner life of the characters but also the supposed attitudes of the author, the essay will apply the concept of “the Hemingway Hero” to the close reading of the characters. This concept will be explained further but one can say that the Hemingway Hero is defined by a set of characteristics that most of Hemingway’s male main characters have in common. These characteristics are constructed around a code that is based on Hemingway’s idea of what makes an ideal man and they are reflected in Jake’s relationship to alcohol. By taking an historical approach and by applying the concept of “the Hemingway hero” to the reading of the novel, this essay will contribute to previous research and offer a multifaceted analysis of how alcohol is used as a tool for social and political commentary and to reflect Hemingway’s idea of what makes a good man.

The essay approaches the research questions in three different sections. The first section focuses on the historical context of the novel and highlights the underlying political symbolism behind the portrayal of alcohol. The second section analyses how alcohol is used in the novel to unify and separate different social, political and economic groups. Finally, the third section explores the concepts of the “Hemingway Hero” and investigates how the morality and integrity of the characters in the novel is measured by why and how they use alcohol.

## 2.1 Alcohol as a Tool for Social Commentary

To analyse the portrayal and the importance of alcohol in *The Sun Also Rises* it is crucial to first understand the political and social context and the controversial position of alcohol in the 1920s. Before World War One, America's economy was in recession and the Progressive Movement was pushing to address the social and economic issues of the country. The Progressive Movement had begun in 1890 and its goal was to, with the help of the government, address the problem with corruption, regulate big businesses and make the working and living conditions better for the American people. Some progressives also argued that alcohol was one of the biggest reasons for America's social problems and pro-prohibition groups like the Women's Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League were given room in the political debate.

In 1917, America entered World War One and this would lead to a shift in American values as well as changes in the economy. As the war took place on European soil, the factories and homes of America were reasonably untouched by the war compared to the devastation of many big cities in Europe. As a result of this, America entered a period of high production during the war and experienced an economic upswing by selling goods to war-torn Europe. To save grain for bread production in an effort to aid the war, the production and importation of distilled liquor had been put on hold and banned. The temperance movement, in an effort to encourage moderation in the consumption of alcohol, grew strong during the war as the sober and moral soldier was presented as a crusader for democracy whilst the European soldier was presented as undemocratic and liquor loving. This created a wave of a puritan patriotism and contributed to the idea that alcohol was the root of America's problems. Although the drive for prohibition had started many years before the war, the banning of alcohol during the war and the connection between soberness and morality gave the temperance movement a last push in their battle for prohibition and in 1920 prohibition was passed. World War One also meant the end of the Progressive era and the focus that before the war had been on stopping corruption, controlling big companies and bettering the conditions for workers now shifted towards mass production and economic and financial priorities. As an effect of the shift of priorities in the political environment and the boosted economy, America entered a new period called the Roaring Twenties where patriotism, constraint and materialism replaced the values of the Progressive Era and consumerism increased massively amongst the rich.

Although the wealthy people in America enjoyed the economic boom, inflation was high and big companies were forced to reduce wages and lay off employees, which led to social instability, strikes and competition for employment. To add further to the social tension in post-war America, a new American nationalism was born that “favoured the white, Protestant, Anglo-Saxon, middle-class and excluded what they considered the unsavoury immigrant element in their society” (Schwartz 180-182). Many young Americans did not identify with this new Americanism that was pushed by the older generation and the disillusionment with the effect of the war combined with this new Americanism where racism, consumerism, patriotism and prohibition were in focus left many young Americans with the feeling of disconnection to their home country. The main reasons as to why many of them felt alienated in post-war society were the “American dullness” (M. Cowley 240), the rise of commercialism and the social and cultural restrictions that built on the values of the temperance movement. In his memoir, Malcolm Cowley notes: “life in this country is joyless and colorless, universally standardized, tawdry, uncreative, given over to the worship of wealth and machinery” (77). Furthermore, he suggests that “there seemed to be no reason why the whole process of making, selling, servicing and discarding could not continue indefinitely at an always increasing speed” (216).

Many young writers in America also reacted to the disappointment with the effects of the war and the shift in American values and post-war literature clearly shows a “conflict between generations over the war’s significance” (D. Kennedy 221). For the older generation of writers, participation in World War One is often connected to pride, honour and courage and the moral of their literature is often aimed against the naivety of America before World War One. Moreover, the characters in the stories often go through a transformation in attitude toward the war “from apathy to affirmation” and “from indifference to commitment” (D. Kennedy 221). The younger writers, however, wrote about the feelings toward the war from an opposite angle by focusing on “the devolution of soldiers from a kind of parentally instilled enthusiasm and idealism to bitter disillusionment” (D. Kennedy 221). The disillusion of the young generation in post-war America and the disconnection that American soldiers felt toward the country that they had fought for are central themes in *The Sun Also Rises* and many other texts produced by young writers after World War One. In his memoir *Exile’s return*, for example, Malcolm Cowley describes the perplexed emotions of the young men who fought in the war and survived:

When we first heard of the Armistice we all got drunk. We had come through, we were still alive, and nobody at all would be killed tomorrow. The composite fatherland for which we had fought and in which some of us still believed [...] had triumphed.



[...] But slowly, as the days went by, the intoxication passed, and the tears of joy: it appeared that our composite fatherland was dissolving into quarrelling statesmen and oil and steel magnates. Our own nation had passed the Prohibition Amendment as if to publish a bill of separation between itself and ourselves; it wasn't our country any longer. (M. Cowley 46-47)

A marine in *When Johnny Comes Marching Home* by Dixon Wecter expresses a similar feeling of disconnection from post-war America:

“I know how we all cried to get back to the States... But now that we are here, I must admit for myself at least that I am lost and somehow strangely lonesome. These our own United States are truly artificial and bare. There is no romance or color here, nothing to suffer for and laugh at.” (Wecter 320)

What both these men have in common is the feeling of disillusion and disconnection from the country that they had been willing to sacrifice their lives for. The young American soldiers had experienced a war that people back home were very sheltered from and when they returned to America, the focus on consumption, money and morality felt unimportant, hypocritical and unworthy. At the same time, Europe was presented as the opposite of the puritan and constrained lifestyle of the Prohibition era and promised a life full of adventure including “drinking, dancing, and other behaviour unencumbered by puritan values” (Field 30). As an effect of this, a big number of ex-soldiers and young people that felt alienated by the new America decided to leave their home country behind and go to Europe where they hoped to live a carefree life and forget about the disappointments of the war.

The Americans that expatriated to Europe after the war are now known as “The Lost Generation,” a term coined by Gertrude Stein and made famous in the preface to *The Sun Also Rises*. The term could be used to describe the whole generation that was left disillusioned by the World War One but refers especially to the group of American writers that expatriated to Paris such as Ezra Pound, Zelda and Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. As a young man Hemingway himself joined the Red Cross as an ambulance driver in Italy during World War One and was wounded in the field. He later expatriated from America and spent many years in Paris as one of the front figures of the Lost Generation. *The Sun Also Rises* follows the bohemian lives of the expatriate Jack Barnes and his friends as it depicts the lifestyle of The Lost Generation. Jake Barnes is the perfect representation of the young and disillusioned ex-soldier of post-war America and this connects the novel with the social, historical and political environment of the 1920s. Whilst talking about the novel as a documentation of an era, Hannah Skahill even states

that *The Sun Also Rises* is “perhaps the most demonstrative of the grapple with post-war society and expatriation” (17).

As Skahill suggests, post-war society and expatriation are two central themes in *The Sun Also Rises* and alcohol is portrayed in connection with both these themes. The novel portrays Europe as a place where one can drown sorrows in alcohol and where it is possible to access a life that is no longer available in America. It also works as a kind of anti-thesis of the post war America that the expatriates left behind. When one looks at *The Sun Also Rises* as a political text and a social commentary rather than one of the many fictional and non-fictional bohemian tales of the Lost Generation, it can be argued that the portrayal of alcohol serves as a tool to express certain critical attitudes and views. There are two main reasons that the characters in the novel drink: to cope with disillusion and to protest against the prohibition era. Jake and his friends drink to seek refuge and relief and to cope with their feeling of disillusion and post-war gloominess. Whilst discussing alcohol as a cure for disillusion, Schwartz suggests that “Jake is either constantly drinking or discussing drinking throughout the novel, revealing [...] his desire to escape from the effects of the war through alcohol” (188). Jake is portrayed as a man who sees the world for what it is and who finds no joy in romanticizing the world around him. The war has left him with a war wound that has made him impotent. Drinking is used in the novel as the cure towards his feeling of hopelessness and frustration. Furthermore, he and the other characters use alcohol to numb the disappointment felt with America, the ugly memories of the war or their personal losses or struggles. At one point in the novel, Brett is struggling with how to best handle a personal dilemma concerning how she should handle her drama with Cohn and Mike. She says: ‘I can’t just stay tight all the time’ (160), showing that staying drunk is normally how she copes with situations that she does not feel comfortable with. Furthermore, Jake’s meeting with Harvey Stone outside of “The Select” is a tragic example of one character who has completely given in to the comforts of alcohol:

“Sit down,’ said Harvey, “I’ve been looking for you.”

“What’s the matter?”

[...]

“What do you hear from the states?”

“Nothing. Absolutely nothing.”

“What’s the matter?”

“I don’t know. I’m through with them. I’m absolutely through with them.”

He leaned forward and looked me in the eye.

“Do you want to know something, Jake?”

“Yes.”

“I haven’t had anything to eat in five days.” [...]

“Come on. Let’s go eat.”

“There is no hurry. Have a drink.”

“Better eat.”

“No. When I get like this I don’t care whether I eat or not.”

We had a drink. Harvey added my saucer to his own pile.

(Hemingway 37)

To indulge in drinking, bars and drunkenness in Paris gives the expatriates in the novel a mental escape from their inner struggles, the disappointment with their homeland and the effects of the war on top of the geographical escape that they have already committed to.

The constant use of alcohol not only functions as a symbol and cure for disillusionment but can also be seen as an act of resistance against the political and social effects of the war in the United States. Although one could argue that their chosen way of protest is a bit adolescent or irresponsible, drinking becomes the ultimate symbol of opposition, as alcohol was such a key factor in the drive for temperance and constraint in America. By drinking heavily, the expatriates not only show that they refuse to play by the rules of the new Americanism but to indulge in intoxication and freedom of body and mind goes against everything that the puritan movement stands for. In his article “The saloon must go and I will take it with me”, Jeffrey A. Schwartz supports this claim when he suggests that alcohol is used by the characters to drown their sorrows but he also that the extensive drinking in *The Sun Also Rises* has political meaning and represents freedom, comradeship and rebellion. Schwartz notices the sarcastic tone in the novel when certain political issues, especially prohibition, are brought up and he suggests that *The Sun Also Rises* is a satire and a mockery of the political situation in 1920s America. This can be seen as they criticise the political situation in the United States, particularly the country’s restrictive political culture and its prohibition laws. An example of where sarcasm is used to mock post-war America and where alcohol is used as a tool to add distance between the characters in the novel and the society that they left is a conversation between Jake and Bill during their fishing trip. Bill says to Jake:

“You know what’s the trouble with you? You’re an expatriate. One of the worst type. Haven’t you heard that? Nobody that left their own country ever wrote anything worth printing. Not even in the newspapers.”

He drank the coffee.

“You’re an expatriate. You’ve lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed with sex. You spend all

your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see? You hang around cafés.” (Hemingway 100)

Although these words sounds like the typical view of an expatriate seen through the eyes of someone belonging to the pro-prohibition crowd, there is a big measure of sarcasm in Bill’s sudden outburst and he is making fun of the stiffness of those Americans who belong to the puritan era. This sarcasm and irony is even more highlighted when Jake simply answers “it sounds like a swell life” (100). The two men continue to get drunk and by doing so they show their political belonging and position themselves in the opposition to the Americans that Bill just mockingly imitated.

At other places in the novel, the protest against post-war America is a bit less obvious and in a way, the criticism is “less against the war itself than against a way of seeing the war” (D. Kennedy 225). For example, it could be argued that the novel’s focus on Jake’s war wound is a subtle protest toward the conflicting ways in which the war was presented and the actual effects that it had on the soldiers who survived it. The war had been introduced as “a war for democracy, a war to end war, a war to protect liberalism, a war against militarism, a war to redeem barbarous Europe” and “patriotism, heroism and sacrifice were made the themes of the suggested study plan for elementary children” (D. Kennedy 51-55). In other words, the older generation presented the war as something that would bring character to young soldiers and make them into “real” men. However, Jake came out of the war impotent. This could symbolize that the war did not actually make boys into men but the opposite: it left men like shells of who they were before the war. The excessive drinking in the novel also works as an example of criticism aimed at how the older generation saw the war and its effect on society. By focusing on something that was seen as ugly and dirty by the older generation, the novel takes a stance and shows where it stands in the political debate. Whilst the older generation pushed for Prohibition as a solution to clean up the American people and make the world less ugly by removing drunkenness, the young generation portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises* indulges in alcohol. Their relaxed relationship toward drinking works as an “anti-prohibition” statement and shows that Hemingway takes a stance against the prohibition era and the set of values that comes with it. By making alcohol a central part of the story, Hemingway manages to put distance between the older generation and the younger generation at the same time as he puts distance in between his characters and 1920s America and its values.

## 2.2 Alcohol as Unifier and Divider

*“By creating their own little intoxicated bubble of booze and decadence, Jake Barnes and the other expatriates differentiate themselves from the ‘general community’.” (J. W. Cowley 45)*

The want and need to put distance between “them and us” appears on many levels of the novel and it can be argued that alcohol works as a tool to unify and to divide different social, economic and political groups. First of all, drinking serves as a unifier in many situations and the consumption of alcohol contributes to a sense of belonging not at least for Jake’s group of expatriates. The expatriate community is presented as a very tight-knitted community and they all spend their time in Paris around the Latin Quarter, an area where American expatriates fills the bars and the cafés. Alcohol is part of almost everything that happens in the novel and the culture of the expatriates is very centred around drinking. Bars and pubs and restaurants serve as their watering holes and clubhouses and most conversations are held over an alcoholic beverage. Furthermore, the majority of times that Jake Barnes meets up with another character, this meeting take place in a venue that serves alcohol or in a place where it is easy to get a drink. If they happen to find themselves in a situation where there is little or no access to alcohol the mood changes quickly for the worse until they manage to get their hands on a drink again. In other words, the focus on alcohol is what the expatriates have in common and drinking is what they do together.

Moreover, alcohol is also used as a bridge between cultures. An example of this is in chapter eleven when Jake and Bill find themselves on a bus together with a group of Basque peasants. The two groups of men are clearly from different cultures and they belong to different socio-economic classes. Jake and Bill are middle class intellectuals with enough assets to go on a recreational fishing trip whilst the group of Basques are labourers on their way to or from work on the countryside. However, the two American men and the Basques quickly find common ground in their love of wine. The two American expatriates have brought with them a couple of bottles of wine whilst the Basques are drinking wine from traditional leather wine bottles or wineskins and there is an exchange of wine and traditions that brings the men together and takes focus away from their differences.

The Basque lying against my legs was tanned the colour of saddle-leather [...]. He turned around and offered his wine-bag to Bill. Bill

handed him one of our bottles. The Basque wagged a forefinger at him and handed the bottle back, slapping in the cork with the palm of his hand. He shoved the wine-bag up.

*“Arriba! Arriba!”* he said. “Lift it up.”

Bill raised the wineskin and let the stream of wine spurt out and into his mouth, his head tipped back. (Hemingway 92)

The unifying and comforting effects of alcohol are also shown when Jake and Bill meet the Englishman Harris before they are about to leave for Pamplona. One night, the men share four bottles of wine in a pub and the alcohol has a very warming effect on Harris. He becomes loving and affectionate and says with great warmth, “I haven’t had this much fun since the war” (112). Although the effects of drinking are not lasting and the characters will not be drunk and loving forever, the fact that Jake and Bill share a drink with the Basque workers and the British ex-soldier gives them a sense of comradeship. The shared drink puts them on the same ‘side’ and even when they have sobered up and gone their separate ways, they remember each other fondly and this new found comradeship sticks with them and goes beyond nationality or economic status.

Drinking is a not only an activity that gives Jake and his friends a feeling of social belonging: the political belonging of a character is decided and expressed through his or her relationship to alcohol. As mentioned earlier, the openness toward alcohol and the relaxed relationship to drinking works as a political statement that places the characters in opposition to post war America and its puritan vales. Saying that, the focus on alcohol can be seen as a communal protest and a way to show loyalty to the political values of the one community at the same time as it adds to the distance to the other community. If you are a person who drinks, you are one of the expatriates that distance themselves from the puritan America. In the same way, if you do not drink, you are part of the puritan America and in an extent not part of the club. J.W. Cowley argues that by drinking heavily and behaving irresponsibly and spontaneously, the expatriates alienate themselves from the mundane world of the “general community” of their homeland whose “entrapment in domesticity [...] leaves them too stultified for playing tennis or hitting the fashionable bistros” (45). By creating their own little intoxicated bubble of booze and decadence, Jake Barnes and the other expatriates differentiate themselves from the ‘general community’ and their “bourgeois dream [of] a little car and a house in the country” (J.W. Cowley 45) and unite as their own community.

Alcohol and drunkenness also works as a tool to put distance between the expatriates and the seriousness of reality. At many places in the novel, drinking often interrupts serious conversations and serves as a safety blanket when reality gets too real. One example of this is in the end of the novel, when Jake has gone to Madrid to save Brett from being “rather in trouble” (209). Soon after Jake’s arrival, Jake and Brett find themselves in a bar drinking Martinis. Brett has earlier expressed that she does not want to talk about her break-up with the young bullfighter, and the two have a shallow conversation about how hotel bars are always so nice. There is a strong sense that Brett is not done talking about Romero and she cannot help but interrupt their conversation with comments about her ex-lover. Every time she does this, her comments are followed by small talk about the martinis as a reminder from Jake that she said that she did not want to talk about it anymore.

“No matter how vulgar a hotel is, the bar is always nice.”

“It’s odd.”

“Bartenders have always been fine.”

“You know”, Brett said, “It’s quite true. He [Romero] is only nineteen. Isn’t it amazing?”

We touched the two glasses as they stood side by side on the bar [...].

“I like an olive in my Martini” I said to the barman.

“Right you are, sir. There you are.”

[...]

“It’s a good bar. Isn’t it a nice bar?”

“They’re all nice bars.”

“You know I didn’t believe it at first. He was born in 1905. I was in school in Paris, then. Think of that.”

“Anything you want me to think about it?”

“Don’t be an ass. Would you buy a lady a drink?”

“We’ll have two more Martinis.” (Hemingway 214)

For the characters, life is simply easier to deal with under the influence of alcohol. This conversation shows that talking about and consuming alcohol is their common ground and what they turn to as soon as things turn serious. In the group of expatriates, the understanding that alcohol is an acceptable replacement for dealing with reality brings them closer together and contributes to the feeling of belonging. They are all running away from their inner struggles and alcohol is their commonly accepted medicine and blinder.

Although alcohol is used as a tool to unify the expatriates, the portrayal of drinking is also used to put distance between Jake and the other expatriates. The expatriates in the novel have made a choice to put physical and mental distance between themselves and the country that they

left behind. However, they are all still part of a very American community. By combining the concept of migration, which is “the physical movement of humans, as individuals or as groups, from one place to another” (5), with the concept of cultural diffusion, which is “the spreading of culture from one place to another” (5), Skahill uses the term cultural migration when she explains that “people do not simply cease to practice the cultural traditions to which they are accustomed; people acclimate and create a hybrid, purposefully adopting certain aspects of the new culture of which he or she is now a part (6). What Skahill seems to mean is that even if the expatriates portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises* are all distancing themselves from post-war America, the feeling of Americanism will still be a big part of their new community. In other words, all those who drink and live in Paris to get away from post war America are still Americans who cannot fully get away from the cultural norms and values that they are running away from.

The complexity of this situation is that Jake finds himself wanting to put distance between himself and his home country at the same time as he is mostly surrounded by fellow Americans. One can say that Jake Barnes is in the awkward position of being part of a society that he despises. However, his relationship to drinking and alcohol helps distinguish Jake from many of the other American characters. Although Jake Barnes takes full advantage of the possibilities to go to bars and drink alcohol, he does not seem to enjoy being drunk as many of his expatriate friends. Neither is he able to enjoy the promiscuousness and sexual liberty of the city as a result of his war wound. There is a feeling of melancholy and bitterness present in the novel that does not really fit in to the promise of the “happy expat life” in Paris. However, these feelings are common traits in post-war literature and reflect the hopelessness and disappointment felt by so many Americans after the war. Whilst a lot of the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* are portrayed as naïve people who romanticise Paris and its culture, “Jake emerges as a balanced figure who both participates in the expatriate world and retains a clear-eyed, unsentimental affection for the city, resisting the mythifying of other exiles” (G. Kennedy 98-99 1993). Jake treats alcohol in a similar way as he treats Paris, with a lot of affection but without the romanticizing naivety as many of the other characters. His inability to let go of the feelings of hopelessness and the way that he positions himself in relation to other expatriates shows that he has an insight in life that puts him above the other characters. Jake was in the war and he saw the ugliness of it. What he experienced made him lose his belief in justice, morality and love and he refuses to romanticise the world around him. Just as most Americans were sheltered from World War One and never saw the full horror of the war, many of the expatriates that surround Jake did not fight in the war but expatriated for other reasons. They do not possess the same degree of disillusion as Jake and there is a sense that Jake looks down on the naivety of his fellow expatriates. Whilst many of the



expatriate community came to Paris because they could drink their sorrows away and start over fresh on the other side of the Atlantic, Jake has no hope that Paris or any other place can save him from his disillusionment. A conversation with Robert Cohn in chapter two presents Cohn as naïve and Jake as experienced and knowledgeable, shining a light on the emotional distance in between them two: “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” (10). This shows very clearly that Jake knows something that Cohn does not, namely that there is no escaping what you have seen and done and that that the only thing one can do is to accept that life is how it is.

There is an “us and them” mentality throughout the novel and alcohol serves as an important tool to distinguish which group a character belongs to. Moreover, drinking is presented as a tool to unify people and to create a sense of belonging at the same time as it the relation to alcohol is used both as a tool to put distance between the expatriates and the reality of post war America and to distinguish Jake from the other characters.

## 2.3 Alcohol as Touchstone to Measure Character

*“Mike was a bad drunk. Brett was a good drunk. Bill was a good drunk. Mike was unpleasant when he passed a certain point.” (Hemingway 129)*

The portrayal of alcohol not only serves as a tool to express political and social belonging, it also expresses Hemingway’s personal preferences about what makes an ideal man. Hemingway’s supposed idea of an “ideal man” is something that is a popular subject in previous research. A concept used in this discussion is the concept of “The Hemingway Hero”, a model that can be applied to most of Hemingway’s main characters and who follows a code called “the Hemingway code.” The code is based on a set of rules that advice how to live and how to conduct oneself in different situations. According to the code, the ideal man should have the “discipline of a soldier, the form of the athlete, the gameness of the sportsman [and] the technique of an artist” (Cowley 1994: 51). The Hemingway Hero always manages to stay calm and collected in social situations and adherence to self-discipline and self-control are key elements of his personality. Honour, dignity, courage and “cojones” are other important characteristics for a Hemingway Hero. In this case “cojones”, which is the Spanish word for balls, represents the virility and virtue of a man and the more “sexually competent a man is the more virtuous he is considered according to the rules of the code” (Malone 11). According to Malone, the Hemingway Hero is always affected by events or situations outside of his control, in many cases war and “his basically serene, gentle and even pacifistic character is assaulted and reshaped by external forces of violence” (5). However, he accepts his faith and never complains. Moreover, he does not tend to work for bettering the world but instead learns how to “roll with the punches” (Malone 6) and how to live with his inner struggles. Religion normally has a strange place in the heart of the Hemingway Hero. Neither does he distance himself from it completely and there is a strong sense that “he has a deeper sensual and emotional contact with life because [...] he has brushed close to death and has seen his own mortality in it” (Malone 11). Socially, the Hemingway Hero surrounds himself with a lot of acquaintances, but he avoids building close and intimate relationships. However, the hero shows a deep connection with those who share and adhere to the same code and if someone breaks his code, they quickly lose their close friendship. Malone states that the “popular approach to Hemingway’s morality is to say that it is shallow, hedonistic, and even pagan”

(15). However, the code is similar to other religious, cultural or social moral codes and brings structure, values and principles to a world that the Hemingway Hero has lost connection to due to his disillusion caused by his experiences. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake Barnes fits in to the model of the Hemingway Hero and lives by the code, which is reflected by his relationship to alcohol and drunkenness. The portrayal of alcohol and drinking is also used to evaluate and judge the characters that he surrounds himself with and the integrity and reliability of the different characters seem to be presented in relation to their ability to handle alcohol.

A character that can handle his alcohol in a “good” way is portrayed as a trustworthy person whilst a character that acts in a “bad” way is portrayed as a person with less integrity. This distinction between “good” drinking and “bad” drinking is central whilst analysing the portrayal of alcohol in *The Sun Also Rises*. Cowley argues that “Hemingway uses drinking [...] to establish a hierarchy of moral merit for his characters” (1994: 51). In general, what rules this hierarchy and what gives Jake Barnes the highest moral merit of the characters in the novel is his adherence to self-discipline. As alcohol has an intoxicating effect one could assume that the best thing to do according to the code would be to stay sober. However, “[i]t should be added [...] that the use of alcohol within certain limits is a perfectly normal, code-approved release” (12). Drinking hard is actually one of the characteristics of the Hemingway Hero and “[i]t is when one cannot hold his liquor properly that he comes under censure because it involves lack of self-control” (Malone 12). There are two things that sets Jake’s alcohol consumption apart from that of his friends and places him on the top of the hierarchy of moral merit: *how* he drinks and *why* he drinks.

First of all, the moral superiority of Jake becomes clear when one analyses *how* he drinks. The adherence to the code in combination with self-control is what places Jake on top of the hierarchy of moral merit. With the Hemingway code as a model, Jake “sets up checks against the mouldering darkness within himself by formalizing his behaviour so that he always maintain complete control over his actions” (Malone 9). Jake drinks as much, or more, as most of his friends but he takes great care to not act like a drunkard. As a typical Hemingway Hero he surrounds himself with people and parties but it seems as if he keeps himself at a distance, adding a suitable comment to the discussion now and again without getting too involved. At one point at a dinner party, Jake states that: “we’re none of us sober” (124) as an attempt to smooth things over after a drunken fight that just happened or maybe as an explanation as to the cause of the fight. However, he does not come across as drunk and in contrast to his friends, Jake’s actions are very thought through. He is in complete control over what he does and says even if he is intoxicated. At the fiesta in Pamplona, there are many more examples of how

Jake's drinking differs from that of his friends. At one point Jake walks in to a wine shop in search for his friend and he finds them in the back room of the store engaged in a full-blown party:

In the back room Brett and Bill were sitting on barrels surrounded by the dancers. Everybody had his arms on everybody else's shoulders, and they were all singing. Mike was sitting at a table with several men in their shirtsleeves, eating from a bowl of tuna fish, chopped onions and vinegar with pieces of bread. [...]

"Where is Cohn?"

"He's passed out," Brett called. "They've put him away somewhere."

"Where is he?"

"I don't know"

"How should we know?" Bill said. "I think he's dead."

"He's not dead," Mike said. "I know he's not dead. He's just passed out on Anis del mono." (Hemingway 136-137)

In this scene Jake stands as a perfect model of the Hemingway Hero in the middle of his drunken friends. It is a very good portrayal of the difference between how he drinks and how his friends drink. Bill and Brett are breaking the rules of the code as they are giving in to their spontaneous sides as an effect of the wine, something that would make Jake feel very uncomfortable as it would require letting go of control and in a way, his dignity. Cohn also breaks the code in this scene, as it is clear that he cannot handle alcohol as he is passed out, which in a way is the perfect example of losing control as a result of intoxication. Even if Mike behaves pretty much in line with the code in this situation, he breaks the code on many other occasions when he loses his temper under the influence of alcohol. One of the most memorable examples of this from the novel is the big fight between Mike and Robert Cohn at a dinner party in Pamplona when Mike loses his temper after one too many drinks. For example, Mike seems to tolerate an affair that Robert Cohn had with his soon-to-be wife Brett in San Sebastian whilst he is sober. It is only after he gets drunk that he loses his temper at a dinner party in Pamplona, taking it out on Cohn:

"Tell me Robert. Why do you follow Brett around like a poor bloody steer? Don't you know you're not wanted? I know when I'm not wanted. Why don't you not know when you're not wanted? [...]."

"Shut up. You're drunk."

"Perhaps I am drunk. Why aren't you drunk? Why don't you ever get drunk, Robert? You know you didn't have a good time at San Sebastian because none of your friends would invite you on any of their parties. You can't blame them hardly. Can you? I asked them to.

They wouldn't do it. You can't blame them, now. Can you? Answer me. Can you blame them?"

"Go to hell, Mike." (Hemingway 124)

Not only does Mike break the code by losing his self-control and his temper but also by letting his jealousy and frustration show in public. Jake, on the other hand, never lets his guard down around other people, letting out his insecurities and emotions only when he is alone at night. However, the evening of the dinner party is one of the only times in the novel when Jake gets drunk enough to risk his self-discipline. However, when he gets back to his hotel room, he manages to control himself and refuses to go to bed before he is back in control:

"I knew I was quite drunk, and when I came in I put on the light over the head of the bed and started to read. I was reading a book by Turgenieff. Probably I read the same two pages over several times. [...]. I was very drunk and I did not want to shut my eyes because the room would go round and round. If I kept reading that feeling would pass." (Hemingway 128)

Although Jake manages to get back in control over his intoxication, this is also one of the few moments where he actually loses control over his emotions for a second as he admits that he "liked to see [Mike] hurt Cohn" (129). As he quickly realises his moment of weakness, he expresses regret about this feeling: "I wish he did not do it, though, because afterwards it made me feel disgusted with myself" (129). This moment of weakness highlights how crucial the Hemingway code is for Jake Barnes. The moment that he breaks it or goes against it, his sense of morality is shaken and he gives in to the "dark" side of his mind, which he normally tries to keep at a safe distance. On the other hand, when Jake treats alcohol in a well-mannered, controlled and dignified way by sticking to the rules of the code and never letting his guard down when he is intoxicated, he stays on top of the hierarchy of morality.

Secondly, if one analyses *why* Jake drinks, he does not drink to become a better version of himself or to find courage like many of his friends. As a typical Hemingway Hero, external forces have negatively affected Jake but he does not complain and he does not see himself as a martyr, at least not in public. Although Jake Barnes is physically unable to perform sexually, he still has "cojones" as he carries his affliction without complaining. What is central in the analysis of why Jake drinks is that he does not find his 'cojones' or his strength in the bottom of the bottle. Neither does he use alcohol to forget about his wound. Jake drinks only to get temporary release. In the discussion concerning how the Hemingway code positions itself to alcohol as a tool for release, Cowley states that Hemingway "forgives

drunkenness if [...] it is an occasional deviation from sober self-discipline [whilst] he condemns drunkenness if [...] it reflects chronic self-indulgence” (1994, 52). Again, there is a stark contrast between the reasons behind Mike’s drinking and Jake’s drinking, showing that they are on different spectrums of the code. Jake drinks because he likes it, because he can and because he likes to take the edge off. Mike, on the other hand, drinks to forget about his problems or to be able to deal with situations that he cannot cope with when he is sober. For example, when Brett has left Mike for the young bullfighter Romero and life takes a turn for the worst, Mike decides that to start drinking and then to stay drunk is the best and only way to handle the situation:

“I am rather drunk, Mike said. I think I’ll *stay* rather drunk.”

[...]

“I’m going in the room. Try and get a little sleep.”

He smiled.

[...]

“We’ll see you at noon at the Iruña,” Bill said.

Mike went out the door. We heard him in the next room. He rang the bell and the chambermaid came and knocked at the door.

“Bring up a dozen bottles of beer and a bottle of Fundador,” Mike told her.

This type of drinking indulges in self-pity and relies on alcohol for chronic relief, something that is condemned by the Hemingway code and contributes to the portrayal of Mike as a pitiful character that lacks integrity. Although Brett does not necessarily drink out of self-pity, she finds her courage in alcohol. When she is anxious about her growing feelings for Romero, for example, she says, “let’s have one more drink of that’, [...] ‘my nerves are rotten’”(158), making it apparent that Brett’s solution to cope with situations that she does not feel comfortable with is having a drink. Whilst Mike drinks as a way to relieve frustration and as an excuse to behave badly and Brett drinks to handle her nerves and to cope with the drama around her, Jake does not turn to alcohol to handle his inner emotions but as a momentary release from the disillusion he feels with the world around him. The difference between him and his friends is that whilst Mike and Brett think that the solution to their problems is in the bottom of the bottle, Jake does not drink to find courage, salvation or to become a better man. He only uses alcohol to feel temporarily better about the world he lives in. During the fight between Mike and Cohn, for example, Jake does have a drink to get away from the tension of the situation: “under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seem they were all such nice people” (127). What is central here and what makes him superior to the other

characters in the novel is that Jake is “not concerned with the meaning of life or what his place is in the universe. He simply wants to know how to fortify himself against what appears to be the malign indifference of the universe” (Malone 6). This indifference to the meaning of life and his place in the world is reflected in the way he drinks. Jake drinks because he wants to, because he can and because he likes to take the edge off. Jake does not drink to find courage or as a supplement to his personality; he only uses alcohol to feel temporarily better about the world he lives in. He sees the world for what it is and knows that there is no chronic relief to be found in alcohol and therefore, he does not search for it.

### 3. Conclusion

The aim of this essay is to showcase the important role of alcohol in *The Sun Also Rises* and to argue that the portrayal of drinking represents views both about the socio-political context of the novel and how to be a good man. On a political level, the relaxed attitudes towards alcohol in the novel works as an anti-thesis to the values of post-war America, the temperance movement and prohibition. The constant use of alcohol puts political and social distance between the expatriates and the American society that they have left behind but it also unifies them as a community and gives them a feeling of social and political belonging. The ideals of the Hemingway code in combination with the ability to handle alcohol in a well-behaved fashion govern the culture of the novel and decide who is a 'good' drunk and who is a 'bad' drunk. In extension, this also decides who ends up on top of the hierarchy of moral merit. There is a clear connection between the portrayal of drinking, the characters' relation to alcohol and Hemingway's idea of a good man and the examples shown in this essay support the argument that the integrity and reliability of the different characters are presented in relation to their ability to handle alcohol.

Through analysing alcohol's position in the socio-political context and by applying the Hemingway code to the characters, this essay has shown how the portrayal of alcohol reflects the author's political views of the 1920s and his personal attitudes about what makes a good man. For further research, as alcohol is present in most of Hemingway's work and the characteristics of the Hemingway Hero can be applied to all his male characters, it would be interesting to analyse how the portrayal of alcohol is used in his other works to express the author's political or personal views and ideals. Who knows, the portrayal of alcohol might play a central role in expressing the author's political and private attitudes towards some of his most famous themes, such as marriage, female character, bullfighting, masculinity, man's superiority over animals or the Spanish Civil War?



## 4. References

Primary source:

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. 1927. Vintage, 2000.

Secondary sources:

Cowley, J. W. (1994). Bulls, Balls, and Booze: The Sun Also Rises. *The White Logic: Alcoholism and Gender in American Modernist Fiction* (pp. 43-64). Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press.

Cowley, Malcolm. *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s*. The Viking Press, 1951.

Djos, M. "Alcoholism in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*: A Wine and Roses Perspective on the Lost Generation." *The Hemingway Review*, vol. 14, no. 2, 1995, pp. 64-78.

Field, Allyson Nadia. "Expatriate Lifestyle as Tourist Destination: *The Sun Also Rises* and Experiential Travelogues of the Twenties." *The Hemingway Review*, Vol. 25, no. 2 Spring 2006, pp. 29-43.

Gelderman, Carol. "Hemingway's Drinking Fixation", *Lost Generation Journal*, no. 6, 1979, pp. 12-14.

Kennedy, David M. *Over Here: The First World War and American Society*. Oxford University Press, 1980.

Kennedy, Gerald J. *Imagining Paris: Exile, Writing, and American Identity*. Yale University Press, 1993.

Malone, Dennis J. *The Development of the Hemingway Hero*. MA Thesis. McMasters University. 1968. Open Access Dissertation and Theses. Web. 1 May 2017.

Schwarz, Jeffrey A. "The Saloon Must Go, and I Will Take it With Me: American Prohibition, Nationalism, and Expatriation in *The Sun Also Rises*." *Studies in Novel*, vol. 33, No. 2, 2001. University of North Texas. Pp. 180 – 201.

Skahill, Hannah. *Expatriate Literature and American Culture: The Influence of Place in Literature*. Dissertation. Hofstra University. 2012.

Wecter, Dixon. *When Johnny Comes Marching Home*. Houghton Mifflin, 1944.