



The Effects of the Bullfight as a Game on Male and Female Characters in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

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Abstract

One of the important novels by Ernest Hemingway is *The Sun Also Rises*. In the novel, the characters watch the bullfight several times. This paper aims to show how the characters are affected by this game. The way the men in the novel are impacted is different from the women. The male characters are rhizomatic and deterritorialized and have no meanings and traditions to stick to. A rhizomatic situation is attributed to a post-Modernist period. However, the bullfight binds them together and creates an arborescent situation for them. The arborescent situation signifies the classical era in which there were roots, essentialism, and order. Therefore, for male characters, the bullfight acts as going back in history. While this game is uncanny for the female character and by watching the bullfight and by acting masculine, she actually moves forward in history. She repudiates arborescent condition and remains rhizomatic since as a woman, she is not supposed to like the bullfight.

Keywords: Gender Norms, New Woman, Ernest Hemingway, Bullfight, Rhizomatic, Arborescence, *The Sun Also Rises*



Introduction

Being a novel about the lost generation, *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) narrates the lives of a couple of people who are not entitled to any meaning in their lives, but to parties, games, drinks, and hanging out in cafes. These people, namely Jake, Brett, Bill, and Robert Cohn, have experienced war and now are running away from responsibilities, by constantly changing their places and the things they do. Because responsibilities are what make them captured in something which would remind them of war. Hemingway has artfully demonstrated the emptiness that surrounds life after the experience of war and death.

It can be concluded that war and its aftermath have made the characters of this novel rhizomatic. But the role that the bullfight plays is quite crucial in forming them. Moreover, the way this game affects Brett, the female character of the novel is different from Jake, Cohn, and Mike. The male characters move from a rhizomatic situation to an arborescent one; whereas Brett resists that.

The Bullfight as a Step Back in History

Deleuze and Guattari in *A Thousand Plateaus* (1980) have mentioned two concepts, rhizome and arborescence, to describe certain historical conditions. Considering *The Sun Also Rises*, it is possible to describe the characters' situation based on the two concepts. The way the people's lives are described in the novel is like they are rhizomatic. According to the two philosophers, the rhizome is "a network of threads that can send up new growths anywhere along their length, not subject to centralized control or structure. This logic (or rather, nonlogic) is exemplified by invasive species such as mushrooms and crabgrass that proliferate without a controlling structure" ("Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari" 1595). A rhizomatic character has no meaning or tradition to stick to. They are on their own and deterritorialized, as it is perfectly obvious in the novel by the way they cannot bear a single scene in their lives and have to change it all the time, be it the cafés, the games, or the cities they stay in. On the other hand, there seems to be one thing in the novel that binds them together, which gives meaning and a sort of root to their haphazard situation, and that is the bullfight.

Deleuze and Guattari illustrate arborescence as a situation in which there is a root and also other branches. It is exactly like a tree. The branches come from a meaning, they are not on their own, unlike a rhizomatic situation, which is like grass, with no single root or meaning (1595,1605). And that is the bullfight, as a game. Huizinga in his book *Homo Ludens* demonstrates how games came from rituals, but are not as serious (8,9) and how they are the result of culture (46). Huizinga describes three characteristics of plays. He says:

the first main characteristic of play: that it is free, is in fact freedom. A second characteristic is closely connected with this, namely, that play is not "ordinary" or "real" life. It is rather a stepping out of "real" life into a temporary sphere of activity with a disposition all of its own ... Play is distinct from "ordinary" life both as to locality and duration. This is the third main characteristic of play: its secludedness, its limitedness. It is "played out" within certain limits of time and place. It contains its own course and meaning (8,9).

Because the bullfight, the game or the play, is free and not part of the ordinary life and limited, it makes it easy to watch or participate in for the ones who are afraid to engage in anything serious in their lives. However, it represents culture, rituals, and traditions that are like a root to a tree. It is as if the game makes the characters gather up around a special form of culture that brings meaning into their lives. And it is a meaning which makes them go back in time, in history. It is a meaning that they try very hard to run from it. And that is the ideology of war. The bullfight resembles war in many ways. It is an infinite, chaos-oriented game, in which you have to kill in order to save yourself. It is like Darwin's theory of the survival of the fittest. In such a game, you can sometimes break the rules and sometimes abide by them, following the situation one is in. This is the case with the bullfight. Although the rule is to present a neat, beautiful game, if you are in danger, the matadors can do as they think is best. Because otherwise, you will get killed. It is the only fire that they can actually gather around and feel warm because they are used to this root, and it makes them move from a rhizomatic condition to an arborescent one.

The Different Effect of the Bullfight on the Female Character

However, the bullfight means something else to Brett. At first, the bullfight is something uncanny for her, unlike the male character. Freud, in his essay "The Uncanny", explains it as something that arouses fear. He says the uncanny points to what gives rise to dread and horror; similarly, the word is not always used with an easily defined sense, so it tends to point to what causes fear in general (219). Brett has a hard time watching the game in the first place. But she finally did it, as her friends accompanied and encouraged her. Aside from that, she represents a new woman. As a new woman, she does not stick to the normal norms relating to women of her time anymore. She has sexual intercourse

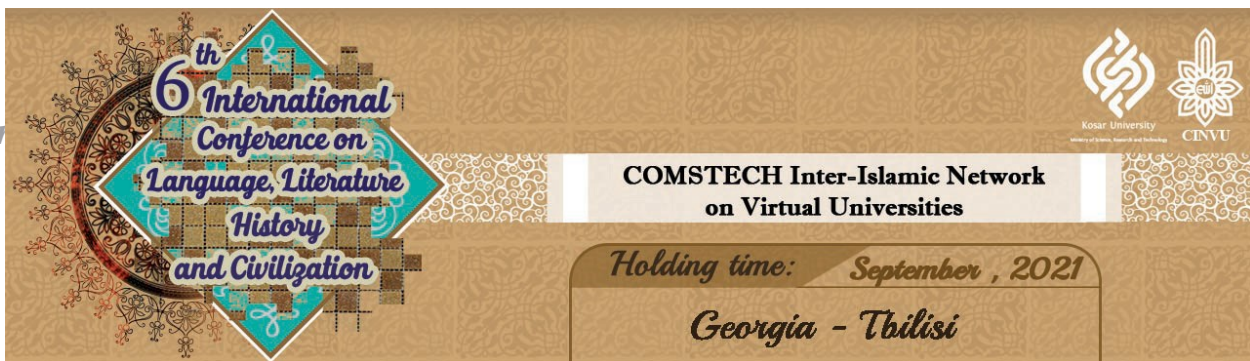


with whomever she wants to, even though she is in love with Jake. She has promised to get married to Mike, but she goes on a trip with Cohn and goes away with Romero after their trip to Spain. At the same time, she is very affectionate and kind toward everyone. There is a deep maternity instinct making her so sensitive towards everyone. She is outside the definition of a normal and traditional woman. By being as such, she is resisting the place it is defined for her as a woman. One of the ways of resisting gender roles according to Butler is to act in a way that shows the gender norms. In her book *Bodies That Matter* (1993), she explains the effects that new acts have in the domain of language. It cannot be concluded that the part of a gender that is performed is, therefore, a true gender (234). In contrast to performance as a bounded "act," performativity involves a repetition of norms that precede, constrain, and exceed the performer; furthermore, it cannot be understood as the fabrication of the performer's "will" or "choice" (ibid). She also carefully makes a fine line between performance and performativity. It would be a mistake to reduce performativity to performance. It is important to refer to a psychoanalytic consideration concerning the relationship between how gender is experienced and what gender means if one rejects the expressive model of drag in which some interior truths are exteriorized in performance (ibid). According to psychoanalysis, the opacity of the unconscious limits the exteriorization of the psyche (ibid). She believes that it also implies, properly so, that what is exteriorized or performed may only be understood in terms of that which is excluded from the signifier and the domain of the corporeal (ibid).

In *The Sun Also Rises*, Brett is standing in the fault line. She is doing what is normally ascribed to men, having free sexual relationships, but at the same time, she keeps her femininity by showing care and kindness to everyone. By doing so, by representing a new kind of woman and also by resisting to watch the bullfight at first but then watching it and enjoying it, she rejects to move back in history. She rejects arborescent condition and remains rhizomatic. The male characters have dealt with war more or less directly. Accordingly, the bullfight represents some root for them. But as for Brett, it is not so. As a female figure, she should not like the bullfight and watch it. But she does and also presents a new way of being a woman which is not like the previous definition. Therefore, unlike the male characters, she stays rhizomatic and proceeds.

Conclusion

Looking through the story, the role the bullfight plays is demonstrated as important. It changes the rhizomatic characters to the arborescent ones, which is like going back in history. The post-Modernist period is characterized by rhizomatic conditions and the arborescent situation symbolizes the classical era when there were roots, essentialism, and order. Men are rhizomatic and deterritorialized and have no meanings or traditions to adhere to. A bullfight, however, binds them together and places them in an arborescent situation. Accordingly, for male characters, the bullfight is similar to stepping back in time. But that is not the case for Brett since the bullfight is uncanny for her. She resists going back and remains rhizomatic, by acting in a way that is not the "normal" way a woman acts. Therefore, by showing the gender norms as being worn out by representing herself as a new woman, she shows a different attitude toward the bullfight.



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