



The Sun Also Rises: Ernest Hemingway's Work on Absurdism

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Abstract

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) is a remarkable debut novel. This work of fiction set a distinctive contemporary writing style in the genre and helped Hemingway carve out a niche for himself. The novel has a simple theme – expression of the frustration the young generation of the time had with life in the West after WWI. The novel deals, albeit indirectly, with social issues faced by people after the war. However, this is also a fictional representation of the young generation's fascination with the emerging philosophical thought in the West after the war years, that is, the thought that came to be popularly known as 'Existentialism.' "Existentialist angst," the feeling termed in fictional as well as non-fictional literature, was an expression of meaninglessness, purposelessness, and a general despair. Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, under investigation in the present research, brings the existentialist angst to life in terse prose and short dialogues where the dominant characters seek an easy outlet for their pent-up emotions and frustration in alcoholism and partying. Nonetheless, serious academic research work on absurdist elements in *The Sun Also Rises* is scanty. The present paper critically analyzes the thematic aspects of *The Sun Also Rises*, keeping in view the tenets of predominant philosophical thoughts of the time that influenced the contemporary writers, i.e., existentialism and absurdism, as critical lens. Critical discourse analysis and close reading have been employed as research methods. The analysis reveals that the narrative structure, character delineation, and the overall thematic perspective of the novel are testimonies to the presence of the seeds of existentialist and absurdist thought in Hemingway. The findings of the study are significant as contribution to the understanding of absurdism in Hemingway's literature, even before the ideas were documented as a philosophical trend.

Keywords: Absurdism in literature, Hemingway's fiction, existentialism, the Lost Generation, Meaninglessness, Purposelessness.

Introduction

Ernest Miller Hemingway (1899-1961) was a great writer. At the peak of his career, he was so renowned that at one point in time he became a phenomenon in the contemporary literary circle. In the American West, he still holds a celebrity status and during Hemingway Days Festival every June, many people dress up like him. Hemingway received the Nobel Prize in literature for *The Old Man and the Sea* in 1954. His writing was noted for several features that distinguished him from both his predecessors and contemporaries. His style exerted an influence on contemporary style. In addition to his debut novel *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) and the Nobel Prize winner *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), Hemingway has penned a number of novels and novellas, such as *The Torrents of Spring* (1926), *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), *To Have and Have Not* (1937), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (1940), *Across the River and into the Trees* (1950), *Islands in the Stream* (1970), and *The Garden of Eden* (1986). His subject matter was vast and covered a range of topics. Hemingway began his career as a journalist. His focus in newspaper reports was on brevity, ignoring context, background information, and interpretation. It appears he carried forward the same style of writing to creative fiction as well and termed it as "iceberg theory"

(Oliver, 1999: 322) ^[42]. His use of a host of Spanish words and expressions in *The Sun Also Rises*, without explaining what meanings they carried can be cited as an example for the case. Hemingway's fame rested on his depiction of the reality of life of his time, including meaninglessness his generation of writers felt after the devastating World Wars, which is the subject of investigation in the present research. However, after his death Hemingway's image began losing its hold on people and literary critics even began questioning the motive behind his works, and many of them were even disappointed with him. For instance, Hemingway's biographer, Dearborn (2017: 5) ^[19], writes that, "Hemingway and his place in the Western literary tradition, came under full-on attacks, as readers, scholars, educators, and activists urgently questioned what "dead white males" like Hemingway had to say to us in a multicultural era that no longer accords them automatic priority." His fictional works were also charged of antisemitic sentiments in their structure (Dearborn, 2022)*. Hemingway worked as an ambulance driver in Italy during WWI and was badly injured. He mirrors some of his experiences in the war in some of his fictional works. The general depression among people caused by large scale destruction in the war led to their frustration with life, reflected in the literary works of the time,

which Gertrude Stein aptly termed as the work of “a lost generation” (Hemingway, 1926) ^[29]. The feeling of being lost can be traced in the fictional works of Hemingway and his contemporaries. Gottlieb (2018: 75) ^[27] notices that “despite claims by scholars like David Tomkins that Hemingway tried to “decry Gertrude Stein’s insistence that his was a lost generation, his writing consistently emphasizes the apathetic and isolated feelings associated with Stein’s branding.”

**Hemingway’s biographer, Mary Dearborn, asserts that Hemingway was antisemitic. She validates her claims particularly with Hemingway’s portrayal of a Jewish character, Robert Cohn, in The Sun Also Rises, as follows:*

Unquestionably, Ernest Hemingway was antisemitic. Studied throughout his letters are nasty remarks about Jews. But Hemingway felt his prejudice had a place in his fiction as well, most notably in “The Sun Also Rises,” his classic 1925 novel about a group of Paris expatriates at the bullfights in Pamplona. (Dearborn, 2022, Back Cover matter) ^[20].

The Sun Also Rises

The Sun Also Rises is Hemingway’s debut novel. The initial reception of the novel was: Good style, bad content (Hays, 2011) ^[28]. The novel narrates the life experiences a few expatriate writers living in Paris. They belonged to America and Britain, and seeking thrill, they go to Spain during the bullfight season. The plot of the novel is very simple as nothing extraordinary happens in the story, except the bullfight scenes, if bullfight scenes can be taken to be extraordinary events. An extraordinarily beautiful British woman, Brett, who is an aristocratic socialite, and who is in love with Jake Barnes, the narrator, moves around attending parties and attracting admirers everywhere. She enjoys the company of a long line of admirers around her – Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, Bill Gorton, Count Mippipopolous, the Duke, Mike (Michael) Campbell, and Pedro Romero the bullfighter boy. Brett is, in fact, Lady Ashley, but there are issues in her marriage, so, she does not live with her husband. Brett is the galvanizing factor in this expatriate group. They go to all sorts of parties around town, drown themselves in alcohol, dine in fine restaurants and hotels, dance the whole night, and spend their time merrymaking. Some of them earn a steady income from their writings; Brett has inherited some property and gets an annual income from that, while Mike lives on borrowed money, so, he is broke all the time. Jake, Bill, Cohn, Brett, and Mike move to Spain to see bullfight and enjoy a weeklong fiesta in Pamplona. They like bullfighting very much and get acquainted with the culture and people of the place. Again, they get drunk day and night and indulge in all sorts of revelries. All of them are highly impressed by a young, handsome bullfighter, Pedro Romero. Brett and Mike were in a relationship when they met Romero, and Brett falls madly in love with Pedro Romero, although their age gap is huge- Brett is thirty-four while Romero is just nineteen. One night Brett goes to see Romero, and Robert Cohn comes looking for her. Robert Cohn, who has trained as a boxer, gets into a fight with Jake and Mike because he asked them where Brett was, and they wouldn’t tell him. Cohn knocks Jake down and attacks Mike as well. Later he says sorry to them and leaves Pamplona in shame. Brett runs away with Pedro, and Mike and Jake are sorry for her. After a week or so, Jake gets a call from Brett to come to her rescue as she wants to get out of the influence of Pedro Romero. The fiesta comes to an end, and the friends leave for Paris again. In the end, Brett and Jake are seen together.

The Research Problem

Hemingway’s literature has come into critical focus again as some critics (e.g. Dearborn, 2022; Oliver, 1999) ^[20, 42] point out antisemitic sentiments in his literature. The study of absurdism is also gaining popularity. However, there is very little research on either antisemitism or absurdist elements in Hemingway’s literature, particularly in *The Sun Also Rises*.

Objectives of the Present Study

At a cursory glance, the novel reveals shades of existentialist and absurdist thought in its thematic fabric since the fictional characters are portrayed as bearing characteristics of an attitude towards life that reflects meaninglessness in their actions. They indulge in activities without ascribing any ultimate purpose to the activities themselves or to their outcomes. So, keeping this observation in mind, the main aim of the present study was to investigate the texture of the novel further through close reading to critically examine if *The Sun Also Rises* is Hemingway’s statement on a philosophy of life that came to be regarded as existentialism and absurdism in later years. The critical analysis employs the tenets of existentialism and absurdism in literature, relying heavily on the thoughts of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus.

Significance of the Study

The study bears high significance, especially from the point of view of research on Hemingway’s literature. It is important to study literary texts not only from the aspect of their cultural significance and philosophical thoughts, such as absurdism, but also for their value as good aids to language learning. Thus, it is hoped that the present study will be a significant contribution to the understanding of absurdism in literary texts, with special reference to Hemingway’s works.

Literature Review

Existentialism and Absurdism

In some ways absurdism may be considered as a literary movement since the literary elements that define absurdism are noted in the works of famous literary figures of the time, some of whom went on to receive Nobel Prize, like Samuel Beckett, Alber Camus, Harold Pinter, Edward Albee and Jean-Paul Sartre, all at the same time, as if they were following a strong literary movement. And yet Absurdism was not considered a literary movement by well-known literary critics. For instance, Bennett (2015) ^[8] writes that, “Absurdism is not a literary “Movement,” but “absurd” is a label placed upon a number of disparate writers (many of whom were playwrights writing in the 1950s and 1960s) who revolted against traditional theatre in sometimes similar and sometimes widely different ways” (p. 2). Bennett made this comment following Walter Kaufmann (1956) ^[36], who made a similar comment on Existentialism. Absurdism as a thought is strongly associated with existentialism as the idea of absurdity of ascribing a purpose to life and life activities is based on the existentialist thought that life is ultimately meaningless. It is also to be noted that absurdism bears therapeutic and educational value too. Curzon-Hobson (2013) ^[18] reading Camus’ *The Stranger*, for instance, notes that the experience of strangeness in Camus’s novel displays synergies with educational thought, particularly the concepts of the absurd and rebellion. The researchers observe that if it is accepted that strangeness bears a positive place in education, Camus allows the readers to examine its pedagogical foundations.

What is absurdism, then, particularly in literature? To grasp the idea of absurdism in literature, we need to turn to Existentialism, the philosophical thought expounded by the French philosopher Jean-Paul Sartre and followed as well as criticized by prominent absurdist writers, like Albert Camus. Sartre states that existence is meaningless since the universe in itself has no meaning. This philosophical statement is to be understood in the backdrop of the common theistic, creationist belief opposite of and in contrast to Sartrean belief, that is, the universe is created by an omnipotent, omniscient, and omnipresent entity called “God” who created the earth and the planets around it and sent man to earth. Thus, man has an ultimate purpose of life on earth, and it is to seek his creator and be with Him. Sartrean thought is also to be grasped in the backdrop of Darwin’s theory of evolution which rejects creationism. Evolutionism rejects the idea of God, and therefore, nullifies the possibility of an ultimate purpose of [human] life in the universe. Evolution has no meaning and purpose, and man is not a special being in the series of evolutionary process which is largely a product of random mutations in the genes. In other words, the essence of beings (including man) in the universe doesn’t exist before their existence. Their essence comes into being after their existence. That is what Sartre means when he says existence comes before essence:

There are, on the one hand, the Christians, amongst whom I shall name Jaspers and Gabriel Marcel, both professed Catholics; and on the other the existential atheists, amongst whom we must place Heidegger as well as the French existentialists and myself. What they have in common is simply the fact that they believe that existence comes before essence – or, if you will, that we must begin from the subjective. (Sartre, 1946: 287) ^[46]

The most significant fallout of this thought was regarding man’s conception of absurdity of all actions if they were devoid of any divine purpose, though Sartre emphasized that existentialism conceives man to be free to make of himself what he wills.

If man as the existentialist sees him is not definable, it is because to begin with he is nothing. He will not be anything until later, and then he will be what he makes of himself. Thus, there is no human nature, because there is no God to have a conception of it. Man simply is. Not that he is simply what he conceives himself to be, but he is what he wills, and as he conceives himself after already existing – as he wills to be after that leap towards existence. Man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. (Sartre, 1946: 288) ^[46]

In literary terms, the existential philosophical thought was expressed as man lost in the hostile universe with every action of his being absurd. Eugene Ionesco expresses this feeling very aptly: “Cut off from his religious, metaphysical and transcendental roots, man is lost; all his actions become senseless, absurd, useless” (Ionesco, 1961: 23) ^[32]. Thus, in the backdrop of the idea that man is lost in the universe, there came up a vast repertoire of literature in all sorts of genre—fiction, drama, poetry, and non-fictional pieces of writing, though the term “absurdism” was first used by Albert Camus to mean human life being out of tune and discordant, therefore, the futility of search for meaning or attempt to

bring coordination in life. Camus expounds the idea in his essays in *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942). Camus’ play *Caligula* (1944) ^[14] and his novel *The Stranger* (1942) are also based on the philosophy of absurd. Camus portrays that irrationality and meaninglessness are the core features of the universe, and man, in an attempt to rationalize his existence, finds himself in conflict with this meaningless universe. There are endless conflicts between the irrational universe and the logic-oriented mind of man, between human intentions and their outcomes, and between intuitive evaluation of the world phenomenon and the actual worth of things. The inevitable conflicts lead man’s endeavors to be absurd.

Absurdism in Literature

Absurdism has been a predominant theme in literature, most conspicuously in the 1950s and 1960s, though some writers are still fascinated with the idea (e.g. Koonchung, 2009; Lacey, 2017) ^[37, 39]. The best example of absurd in literature is Samuel Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* (1954) ^[7]. The work is a tragicomedy characterized by existentialist and absurd thought. The two main characters in the play, Vladimir (Didi) and Estragon (Gogo), engage in an absurd discussion while waiting for a third character, named Godot. He never arrives. While waiting for him, Vladimir and Estragon discuss a variety of insignificant issues. Then there appears a traveler named Pozzo with his slave, Lucky. At his command, Lucky performs a dance and monologue which sounds like an academic discourse full of pure nonsense. *Waiting for Godot* is interpreted in many ways, and one of the interpretations is that Beckett’s play is a comment on the absurdity of the human condition for lack of any inherent purpose. Franz Kafka’s fictional works are other good examples of absurdist thought in literature. *The Trial* (1914/1925), *The Metamorphosis* (1915/1972) and *The Castle* (1926) are his best absurdist works. *The Trial*, for instance, is a very apt comment on the absurdity of bureaucracy and judiciary, *The Metamorphosis* shows the absurdity and dehumanization of modern human life, while *The Castle* is a portrayal of the futility of man’s efforts to achieve his desired objectives. Kafka is an absurdist, and John Hoyle (1991) ^[31] sums up the gist of his fictional themes as follows: “In his three novels Kafka registers the world as absurd, resists it via the absurd, and takes refuge from it in the absurd” (p. 219).

A cursory look at the existing literature on *The Sun Also Rises* shows that the novel has rarely been analyzed as a piece of fiction with absurdist elements. For example, Ciocoi-Pop and Tîrban (2019) ^[15] examine the absurdist leitmotif in *The Sun Also Rises*. They employ absurdist literary criticism derived from the philosophical propositions of Albert Camus, Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and other existentialist philosophers. The researchers say that absurdism manifests itself upon the main characters’ psychology, and therefore, their actions are such that though they do search for meaning in life, but unwillingly. According to Solanki (2020) ^[47], *The Sun Also Rises* portrays a picture of hollowness, emptiness, and futility of life, and that the fact is that life is full of oddities, but Hemingway presents life as a simple existence. The researchers also say that Hemingway seems to assert that the dark phases in a man’s life ultimately give way to light phases and sorrow always leads to joy. Liu’s (2021) ^[40] research on Hemingway is an exploration in the social attitude of the group of friends in *The Sun Also Rises*. Liu argues that in *The Sun Also Rises* physical dysfunction is portrayed “as part of a larger malaise of dysfunctional tribalism which affects social dynamics in the modern world” (p. 14). By the

term “tribalism” the researchers’ indication is towards a social condition where a commune is comprised of members who are fit and appropriate for the sustenance of the commune through reproduction. However, after World War I there arose a situation in the society that such men became scarce in number, posing a threat to the existence of the commune, thus, making the situation abnormal, and that is exactly what Hemingway portrays in his novel. Diadechko (2021) ^[21] dubs the lifestyle of people portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises* as “Existential downfall.” The young American and British expatriates in Paris were disenchanted with the prevalent social values and, as a result, they preferred to live in bohemian style, “drowned in alcohol, endless parties, chats, rage, promiscuity, and trips” (p. 19). The novel also reveals its characters’ psychological and philosophical distresses, notes Diadechko.

Cornwell (2012) ^[16], discussing the concept of the absurd frequently used in literature, studies the connections between absurdism, nihilism, existentialism and ontology, and then looks at ‘negative theology,’ which, according to the researchers, is relevant to practitioners of the absurd. The researchers consider the problems related to the perception of inherent absurdity of human existence. Gavins (2013) ^[25], on the other hand, combines stylistic inquiry with a cognitive perspective on language and challenges the established scholarship on absurd literature. The scholar opines that literary absurd is a linguistic and experiential phenomenon. Gandal (2008) ^[24] analyses *The Sun Also Rises* plot and characters in terms of the wartime meritocratic mobilization. The researchers see Hemingway setting up Robert Cohn, a neurotic military schoolboy, in contrast to Pedro Romero, a true warrior, because Hemingway had a problem with the military for his own rejection by it on physical grounds. Gay (1990) ^[26] also examines Hemingway's indictment of Jewish culture through Robert Cohn. The researchers argue that Hemingway's portrayal of Cohn mirrors the socio-economic apprehensions the mainstream Americans had about an alien immigrant population after WWI. In the words of the author, Hemingway reacted to what he perceived as a breakdown of social and moral values and a threat to manhood. Bradley (2006) ^[11] also considers the hints of a threat to manhood in the novel. Mike Cambell, a very strong suitor to Lady Ashley's affections, refers to Robert Cohn as a “steer,” at least four times in the novel because he feels Cohn is his competitor for Lady Ashley. Steers are castrated bulls, so it is Mike's wishful thinking about Cohn. While, in actual practice, it is Jake Barnes who proves to be the real steer in the story, being impotent for a wartime wound in the groin. And ultimately, it is Jake who wins Brett's affection in the end.

Alqaryouti and Ismail (2019) ^[3] employ Simone de Beauvoir's existentialist feminism to investigate how Hemingway depicts the female protagonist, Brett Ashley, and the predominant male character, Jake Barnes, in *The Sun Also Rises*. Their analysis shows that there is textual evidence that the novel portrays women's freedom as opposed to male control over their lives. The researchers maintain that the major female characters are free to choose the ways of their lives, notwithstanding the social forces around them; that Brett freely chooses the way she wishes to live life and to fulfil her desires making her own decisions. Brett is a powerful subject, having the power to make all the major decisions in her life. Whereas the picture of Jake is that of a man who is weak and worthless, and therefore, neglected as the ‘other.’ Kumar and Pratima (2022) ^[38] observe that in *The Sun Also Rises*

Hemingway concentrates on the artificiality and desperation of the life bred by WW I. The novel displays the post-war disillusionment and moral disorder, particularly in the West. The characters are portrayed in a mood of cynicism and as revolting against established values since they are disillusioned with traditional values. Rudat (1990) ^[45] analyses *The Sun Also Rises* from Freudian psychological perspective. In the opinion of the researchers, the major female character, Brett, displays envy for men, and therefore, assumes a masculine gender role. She challenges the traditional gender role assigned to her. Rudat observes that Brett's relationships with the male characters in the novel may represent Hemingway's relationship with his parents.

Ali Al Omari's (2024) ^[2] research is a hermeneutic interpretation of *The Sun Also Rises*. A hermeneutic interpretation of a literary work tends to associate the literary meaning with what the author has in the mind at the time of its creation, and therefore, absolute and unchangeable. *The Sun Also Rises* can be interpreted to exemplify this theory. Bond (1998) ^[10], on the other hand, presents a negativistic philosophical perspective on *The Sun Also Rises*. According to him, Hemingway privileges body over mind contradicting Descartes's cogito ergo sum/I think therefore I am. In a sense, the researchers' standpoint is similar to the absurdist point of view. Djos (2010) ^[22] takes on alcoholism as portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises*. Djos says that the portrayal of extreme alcoholism in *The Sun Also Rises* may be simply deceptive since, despite presenting it as a disease, the novelist doesn't portray it as an addictive self-destructive tendency on a large social scale. The novel is full of descriptions of drinking and talking about drinking. The major characters in the novel go to the Pyrenees and Pamplona; they indulge themselves in fishing and watching the bullfights; they return to Paris on shaky knees and go on talking about drinking endlessly, and drink more. It seems the novel is focused fully on liquor, conversations about liquor, the hangovers caused by liquor, drunken debauchery, and then the characters trying to find more liquor.

Feminist writers have attacked Hemingway problematizing his depiction of women and gender roles in his works. Taking the cue, Messent (1992) ^[41] has examined how the interplay between gender roles and sexuality works out in Hemingway's fiction. For instance, feminist literary critics, such as Judith Fetterley and Faith Pullin, level accusations against Hemingway that his works laud extreme masculinity like a cult. While, the researchers argue, John Raeburn claims that Hemingway's life and fiction were brought to the public debate by the second wave of feminist literary critics. The essays in Harold Bloom's edited book on Hemingway (1987) also raise questions on various issues in the novel, such as the feelings of meaninglessness of life, the death of love as depicted in this fiction, implication of form in *The Sun Also Rises*, the rhetoric of escape in the novel, morality of compensation, a study of Jewish Type and Stereotype, and so on. Tyler's (2001) ^[48] Student Companion to Ernest Hemingway is also an influential study to understand Hemingway as the writer and the man, particularly the chapter ‘*The Sun Also Rises*’ presents a lucid criticism on the novel. Armengol-Carrera (2011) ^[4] analyzes the existing scholarship trends on Hemingway, notably concerning gender and race issues. Regarding gender issues, there are contradictory trends as some scholars call him sexist while others call him androgynous. As regards race, there also emerge two trends. Some note a conspicuous absence of blackness in his works, while others see his racism as highly complex and ambiguous.

Lastly, Cornwell (2006) ^[17] brings in Jacques Derrida's critical exposition of the theatre of the absurd in his lecture on 'The Theatre of Cruelty' delivered in 1966. Derrida, argue the researchers, amplifies particular denomination of the general 'infidelity' of the theatre of the absurd (pp. 126-156). To sum up, though the research studies reviewed above look at Hemingway's works from numerous angles, studies on antisemitic and absurdist elements in *The Sun Also Rises* are still scanty, and therefore, there exists a gap in literature.

Discussion

A close examination of the novel shows that *The Sun Also Rises* is a theatre of the absurd. A loose plot structure, no perceivable grand story or philosophy of life, all the characters drowned in alcoholism day and night with endless parties with no conceivable purpose in life, only seeking thrill in the end etc., make Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* a fit subject for absurdism.

Recognition of absurdity of life is liberating and gives a sense of freedom. All the characters in the novel feel the same. For example, to the central female character in the novel, and who may be considered the protagonist in a traditional sense of the term, Brett, everything is absurd and futile; all men are absurd; all relationships are absurd, and she feels all the time miserable. Life is really absurd to her. She cannot tolerate anyone's control over her life; patriarchal control is an absurd idea to her, ridden with conflicts. Brett is in a constant search for meaning in her life, and she is constantly frustrated by her attempts in the end. She looks towards men and bodily pleasure (people of opposite sex, as pleasure-providing companions, are used symbolically and metaphorically in the novel as sources of meaning in an individual's life) and her pursuits always turn to be futile as she feels miserable as soon as she establishes relationship with her male companions. Her first attempt at making a relationship with a male friend was with Jake. They are in love throughout the novel, and Brett always calls Jake 'Darling,' but she doesn't stay with Jake for long. She then sets her eyes on Robert Cohn, but very soon she begins hating him. She is found with Count Mippipopolous for some time who admires her extraordinarily, but she considers him a joker and makes fun of him. Brett is highly admired by Bill, but she never establishes a relationship with him. She is then found with Mike, but while being in a relationship with Mike, she falls in love with the charming bull fighter in Spain, Pedro Romero, and elopes with him. But within a fortnight she calls Jake to rescue her from the bullfighter. And over and above all that, she had been the wife of Ashley, always feeling miserable.

Absurdism is basically an anthropocentric idea. The conditions of absurdism are predominantly prevalent in *The Sun Also Rises*. The title, borrowed from the Ecclesiastes, is a reference to the general absurdity of human existence. It is a comment on the regularity of happenings in the universe that are otherwise meaningless. *The sun also rises*, like so many things happening around us, absurdly. The rising of the sun is a meaningless, absurd event without any ultimate purpose. The party of American and British expatriates in France drink, attend parties thrown by rich friends and try to woo women, purposelessly. The point of discussion is that the disposition of the characters portrayed in the novel displays their attitude as chasing life but without finding any meaning. For instance, Robert Cohn was once middleweight boxing champion of Princeton. He cared nothing for boxing, in fact he disliked it, "but he learned it painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt on being treated

as a Jew at Princeton" (*The Sun Also Rises*, 11). The condition of Robert Cohn displays a conflict, therefore absurdity, in his character. He learned boxing painfully and yet disliked it. The group of expatriate friends go to Pamplona to see bullfights. However, Hemingway highlights the absurdity of seeking fun in bullfight by the statement of a waiter in conversation with Jake. When Jake reported that the man who was gored by a bull as the bull passed its horn through his belly, died the next day, his conversation with the waiter goes like this: "Badly cogido," he said. "All for sport. All for pleasure."

"Badly cogido through the back," he said. He put the pots down on the table and sat down on the chair at the table. "A big horn wound. All for fun. Just for fun. What do you think of that?"

"I don't know."

"That's it. All for fun. Fun, you understand."

"You're not an aficionado?"

"Me? What are bulls? Animals. Brute animals." He stood up and put his hand on the small of his back.

"Right through the back. A cornada right through the back. For fun –you understand." (*The Sun Also Rises*, 178)

The novel portrays a series of absurd events with absurd characters behaving absurdly. Robert Cohn was married two times. His present wife, Frances, doesn't trust him. He wants to go to visit South America just because he wants to go there. He thought his life was going too fast and he was not living it. There lies the absurdity of his life. Equally absurd is the life story of Harvey Stone. When he meets Jake, he tells him he hadn't eaten for five days. Life circumstances in Europe after the War were really frustrating for many, and the situation generated absurdity. Georgette, the harlot hooked to Jake, for example, picks a fight with someone at the dance party, for no reason. The Count, a fat old man, very fond of Brett, throws lavish parties, just for the sake of having parties. Brett and Jake believe that he was not really a Count, only an imposter. Bill Gorton, returned from a trip to Europe, describes the boxing fight of a nigger who faced injustice in Vienna. Mike (Michael) Campbell develops a friendship with Bill and Jake. Brett wants to marry Mike. Mike calls her a lovely piece (p. 75). Jake also has a love affair with Brett. Bill also feels for her. Brett is polyamorous. She is having an affair with Robert Cohn as well.

The group of expatriates portrayed in the novel is a very loose, incohesive kind of group whose members seem to be affiliated to each other just casually, without any meaningful bond or purposeful friendship, except that they come together to drink and have fun. There are occasions when they hate each other so much. Robert Cohn is particularly their butt of jokes. It seems all of them hate him. Having breakfast with Jake, Bill talks about him, ridiculously absurd:

"Say something pitiful."

"Robert Cohn."

"Not so bad. That's better. Now why is Cohn pitiful? Be ironic."

He took a big gulp of coffee.

"Aw, hell!" I said. "It's too early in the morning." (p. 108)

Similarly, on another occasion Cohn sends Jake and Bill a telegram, in Spanish: Vengo Jueves Cohn. Jake hands it over to Bill. He asked:

“What does the word Cohn mean?”

“What a lousy telegram!” I said. “He could send ten words for the same price. ‘I come Thursday.’ That gives you a lot of dope, doesn’t it?”

“It gives you all the dope that is of interest to Cohn.” (p. 119)

The friends behave as if they are put together by some hostile forces, though if they could have their say, they wouldn’t like to be together. The conditions are absurd in the extremes. For instance, Robert Cohn comments that there is life being a steer. Steer, as has been indicated, is a castrated bull used in the ring to keep the raging bull calm and under control. Mike makes fun of Robert, saying he (Mike) would have thought him loved being a steer. Robert asked him what he meant by that; but he goes on teasing him. Brett chided Mike to shut up, and that he was drunk. Mike insists that he was not drunk. “I’m quite serious. Is Robert Cohn going to follow Brett around like a steer all the time?” (p. 131) he adds. Mike goes on insulting Robert. At one point, he calls Robert the worst person in the group. Mike particularly hates Robert because Robert is a Jew. He declares it to Jake mincing no words that although Brett’s gone off with men. But they weren’t ever Jews. Such is his hatred for Jews. Jake also hates Robert for his Jewish origins. He liked to see Mike hurt Cohn, though it made him feel disgusted with himself afterward. Another American expatriate in the group, Bill, hates Robert Cohn so much that when, at one point, Jake asked his companions, “where’s Cohn?” Bill says, “How should we know?” “I think he’s dead” (145). When, after some time, Cohn appears and suggests they should have supper, they ask him to eat the garlies. Mike’s reference is to the wreath made up of garlies Cohn wore at that time.

On another occasion Cohn says he was afraid he may feel bored at the bullfight, Bill and Jake blame it on his strong “Jewish superiority” (p. 149). Mike insults Cohn again and again. At one point when they were talking to Pedro Romero, and drunk Mike interrupts them, he turns to Cohn and declares that none of them wanted Cohn there, that Cohn should take his Jewish face away. Even Brett also shows she was fed up with Cohn and said she was sick of him, his behavior. She declares her love for Romero to Jake and says, “Oh, darling, don’t be difficult. What do you think it’s meant to have that damned Jew about, and Mike the way he’s acted?” (p. 167). The general comments among the friends about Cohn are: He doesn’t add much to the gayety. He depresses them so. He’s behaved very badly. Damned badly. He had a chance to behave so well, and so on. Their friendship is utterly superficial, conflicting, and so ridiculous. It touches the point of absurdity when they come to blows. Brett had a date with Pedro Romero. Robert Cohn comes and asks Jake of Brett’s whereabouts, to which Mike replies that Brett had gone off with the bullfighter chap. Cohn is not satisfied with this response and asks Jake. He doesn’t tell him where she was, and then Cohn says, “I’ll make you tell Me”-he stepped forward-” you damned pimp” (p. 172). Cohn knocks Jake and Mike down. Cohn had an altercation with Romero too. Mike sums up the situation blaming Brett for roaming around with “Jews and bullfighters and such people” (p. 183).

The point is, Hemingway’s portrayal of the superficial friendship and a very loose bond between the individuals who are most of the time together for fun is symptomatic of a world where relationships are crumbling, and a long association leads to conflicts. Human expectations cannot be sustained as there arises a conflict between human intentions

and their outcomes, and between subjective assessment and objective worth, leading man’s endeavors to be absurd. Brett, for example, felt as a bitch because she is torn between her uncontrollable love for a nineteen-year-old boy, the bullfighter, while she is thirty-four. She says “I don’t say it’s right. It is right though for me. God knows, I’ve never felt such a bitch” and, “My God!” said Brett, “the things a woman goes through” (p. 167). Her endeavor turns absurd in the end as she calls Jake to rescue her from the bullfighter just after spending a fortnight with him.

Conclusion

To sum up, an explicative look at *The Sun Also Rises* shows that there are very strong elements of absurdism in the novel. Absurdism in literature appears in the 1950s and 1960s whereas Hemingway penned this novel in 1926, so it wouldn’t be appropriate to claim that Hemingway was influenced by absurdist thought. However, both absurdist thought and Hemingway’s fiction were influenced by the general feeling of meaningless and purposelessness in life in the common masses after the two World Wars. Hemingway’s novel appears just after the First World War, and the West was so much disturbed and desperate to find meaning in life after the devastating event. Hemingway mirrors that desperation. The characters in the novel wish to forget their miseries through alcohol and making merry all the time as Jake writes of his friends, “Mike was a bad drunk. Brett was a good drunk. Bill was a good drunk. Cohn was never drunk. Mike was unpleasant after he passed a certain point. I liked to see him hurt Cohn” (p. 137).

Absurdism came after World War II, as did Existentialism. Both the thoughts were influenced by the devastating war, and exactly like Hemingway’s portrayal of meaninglessness and purposelessness of life, the philosophical viewpoints underlined the absurdity of life in the hostile universe. The existing research on Hemingway’s fiction has taken up issues with points like antisemitism, absence of Black voice, racism, and othering of women in his fiction, while absurdist elements in his fiction have skipped researchers’ attention. Only a few researchers have taken up the issue. Ciocoi-Pop and Tirban (2019) ^[15], for instance, implementing the philosophical speculations of Albert Camus, Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and such other thinkers of the time, have investigated the elements of absurdism in *The Sun Also Rises*. The findings of the present research echo their research findings as the researchers say that absurdism manifests itself upon the main characters’ psychology and their actions. In the words of Solanki (2020) ^[47], *The Sun Also Rises* portrays a picture of emptiness and futility of life in general, which is yet another symptom of absurdity in life, though the researchers say that Hemingway put forth the idea that the tragic and despondent phases in life are always followed by cheerfulness and joy. Liu’s (2021) ^[40] observation on *The Sun Also Rises*, on the other hand, is that the social attitude of the expatriate writers portrayed in the novel is a representation of the larger unease of the disordered social commune which leaves its impact on the social dynamics in the modern world. Diadechko (2021) ^[21] dubs the lifestyle of people portrayed in *The Sun Also Rises* as “Existential downfall.”

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