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Hemingway's The Sun Also Rises and Lostness- An Existential Analysis

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Abstract: Lostness refers to the disinterested and detached state of mind when it has no goal or aim to project upon. In this state of mind, a person remains floating depending upon the gust of wind. He believes in enjoining only momentary things of life and thereby evading his reality including the sense of transitoriness of life. Under this state of mind, a man's existence is marked more with unauthenticity and 'bad faith'. Jake Barnes has lost much before the opening of the novel. The war has rendered him sexually wounded and that causes his alienation from the society. He remains cut off from the main stream of life and remains hanging around cafes that marks his unauthentic mode of life. All the characters have lost themselves in deluding things of life such as alcohol, dancing, sex, travelling different places. All this causes them anguish.
Keywords : 'Lostness', 'Alienation', 'Being in itself'. 'Unauthenticity', 'Bad faith', 'Disgust'.

I. OBJECTIVE

This paper attempts to make an existential enquiry of the major theme of lostness of this novel and to prove that the 'being' of Jake Barnes and most of other characters falls more into 'being in itself' then 'being for itself'.

II. INTRODUCTION

Lostness remained a dominant concern of Ernest Hemingway in his novels and short stories. His characters experience much personal despair and disillusionment. They find nothing in their existence that may give directions to their mode of living or make their life full of authentic choices and commitments. Hemingway's such characters as Jake Barnes, Frederic Henry, and Nick Adam feel uprooted. Nick Adam stands for twentieth century disillusionment and sensibility. Jake Barnes of 'The Sun Also Rises' suffers from insomnia and this makes him cry bitterly in the darkness of nights when he is all alone and feels futility of life.

III. ANALYSIS

The term 'lostness' was first used by Miss Gertrude Stein to refer young Hemingway and some other contemporary young American writers. Hemingway himself explains this in his book 'A Moveable Feast':

> 'That's what you are. That's what you all are', Miss Stein said, 'All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation.'[1]

Miss Stein used this term for Hemingway and other contemporary novelists because they drank to death and also they were expatriates. These novelists came to Paris and got the crude experience of the First World War. They came face to face with death. Death began to haunt them. To them, life became futile. Only cafes and inside them wine and whores was reality. Alcohol and Sex sustained their life as this made them forget the crude reality of their existence. They began to retort to meaningless killing, physical violence or evil games as this gave them a thrill of life. Herbert Gorman writes that Hemingway in his The Sun Also Rises has 'portrayed a great spiritual debacle, a generation that has lost its guiding purpose and has been driven by time, fate or nerves into the feverish atmosphere of strained passions'.[2]

Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes, though try to avoid making a bad show as if they believe in simple values, yet Jake Barnes turns alcoholic and Brett tries to find solace in sex. Before the opening of the novel, Jake Barnes has lost much. The war has rendered him sexually wounded which has alienated him from the society and life. He feels desperate as he fails to participate in party or dance. He develops a sense of alienation. Even in cafes or dancing clubs, he is more of an observer than real participant. The war has rendered him sexless. The war wound has brought him death in life. This war wound has made his being more towards 'being-in-itself'. Love is not a sustaining or consoling force in the life of Jake Barnes or Brett. Jake's love for Brett becomes a constant frustration. Every meeting with Brett begins in a pleasurable mood but results in disappointment and dissatisfaction. Jake's sexual injury has shattered his being badly. His thought of love and its impossibility of actualizing it make him cry when he is all alone in

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his room. His desire is to see Brett as an object or 'being-in-itself' which he cannot fulfill. Brett has sexual desires and Jake cannot satisfy because of his inability to have sex. This is nothing else but inauthentic mode of existence.

In existentialism 'freedom' implies to will by oneself. Man is free in the sense of not being determined. Questioning, negating and imaging are activities of human freedom or human consciousness. But many times an individual tries to flee from his freedom due to many factors. One may project oneself in a way that one is not. Then one starts living according to the image others have made of one. One may identify oneself with the past or one may pretend to give meaning to one's existence in theoretic systems. All this fleeing from one's freedom has been termed as 'bad faith' in Sartean philosophy. In bad faith, man's attempt is to escape the reality of his situation. In fact, 'bad faith' is a 'lie to oneself'. In an attitude of 'bad faith' one is 'lying to oneself' only. Here one's attempt is to hide his real situation and to present the displeasing truth as untruth. Thus it is self deception.

The world of Jake Barnes and his coterie is for the most part, a moral 'wasteland'. Paris has become a city of pimps, whores and homosexuals. John W. Aldridge describes: "Paris has become a city of crowds moving around in a ring; human relationships are destructive rather than fulfilling, love is lustful, the sexual relationships are often sadomasochistic."[3]

When the novel opens, Jake Barnes is seen committed to work. He works hard in his office. But he also seems to be frustrated and embittered as if something had robbed him of the freshness of his existence. This is clear when one evening he picks a prostitute named Georgette merely for the fact that he was feeling bored or "he has a vague sentimental idea that it would be nice to eat with someone."[4] As they were passing through a dark gate into the Tuileries, Georgette cuddled against him and wanted to be kissed. He tells her "Everybody is sick. I'm sick too."(p.16) He is sick because he "got hurt in the war." (p.17)

Jake Barnes' situation is that his war wound is incurable. Both Jake and Brett must recognize or accept their situation or freedom. Jake and Brett try to live together despite the fact that their freedom of movement is limited. Hemingway has put Jake into a strange situation and living in that he is to make choices and decisions for finding a meaningful life. If he is to live a disciplined and meaningful life, he must face the reality by accepting his sexual injury. Brett's inauthentic relations with other men as they are only on the physical level, also work as coefficient of adversity in realizing the freedom by these two who are ensnared by their circumstances. Jake is adopting an attitude of 'bad faith' when he does not accept this reality of his situation. He must accept that Brett has sexual desires. Whenever Brett flirts with other men, Jake experiences moments of anguish and in such moments he also realizes his freedom. But it is superficial freedom as he goes on living with a lie to himself that Brett is physically his own. Brett's dancing or flirting with other troubles Jake. He feels offended because his relations with Brett are under the authentic mode of relations. In his own thoughts, he reacts in the following manner:

> "I was angry. Somehow, they always made me angry.
> I knew they are supposed to be amusing and you should
> be tolerant, but I wanted to swing on one, any one
> anything to shatter that superior, simpering composure." (p.20)

Brett admits that the count Mippipoplous is mad about her. Brett's statement strikes at his heart. He states when Brett goes out of his room:

> 'I lay face down the bed. I was having a bad time.
> I heard them talking but I did not listen'. (p.48)

Seeing Brett with the count or her admitting that the count is mad about her makes him feel rotten. Only for a short time, when Jake Barnes and his friend Bill Gorton move to Burgette for fishing, Jake Barnes becomes aware of his reality of freedom or ensnared situation. But when Jake and Bill come back to Pamplona to join Mike, Brett, Cohn and others for enjoying the fiesta, Jake Barnes again shows an attitude of bad faith as Brett's flirting still leads him to anguish but it does not make him cry as he is now realizing his freedom. It is in anguish that he gets the consciousness of his freedom. Lady Brett Ashley is also a lost character. For her, life is composed of nothing more than drinking, dancing and shifting from male to male. This leads her to self disgust.

Other characters of this novel are also living under the anxiety of death. Human existence is being toward death and this is revealed by our anxiety. This leads to continuous evasion from the anxiety of death. This evasion is an inauthentic mode of existence. Robert Cohn thinks that by moving from the place to another one can get away from the reality of death. Cohn tells Jake: "Do you know that is about thirty five years more we will be dead?" (p.13). He continues saying: "Well I want to go to South America" (p.13). In reply Jake says:

> "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 is nothing to that" (P13).

For Mike, alcohol is everything. For the count Mippipoplous, there is nothing but sex to sustain his being. Bill says to Jake while sucking the drumstick "Our glory on earth is not for long. Let us rejoice and believe and give thanks." (p.102) Cohn tries to escape into romantic books and palaces which is nothing else but a bad faith or inauthentic mode of existence.

IV. CONCLUSION

Thus all these characters exist in inauthentically as they don't accept their responsibility and also reality of death. The novel portrays the futility and the meaninglessness of the post war European society. The war had made them visualize their own tragic end. The war had uprooted the moral values of the Victorian society and there left nothing for them to sustain and console them as there life had no goal or motive. They try to adopt an attitude of bad faith in order to evade reality. Eating, drinking, dancing, travelling different places, involving in physical relationships, all these imply the emptiness of their existence. This is their bad faith. This inauthentic course towards death is nothing else but lostness. These characters are always trying to remain cut off from their freedom. They are without any goal or motive. Their being falls more into 'being-in-itself.

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[3] John W, Aldridge, After the Lost Generation (New York: Books for Libraries Press, 1951 rpt 197) (p.16).
[4] Ernest Hemingway, Fiesta (The Sun Also Rises, 1926) (London : A Trial Grafton Book, 1976) (p.16) Subsequent references from the novel are from this edition and carry only the page number at the end.

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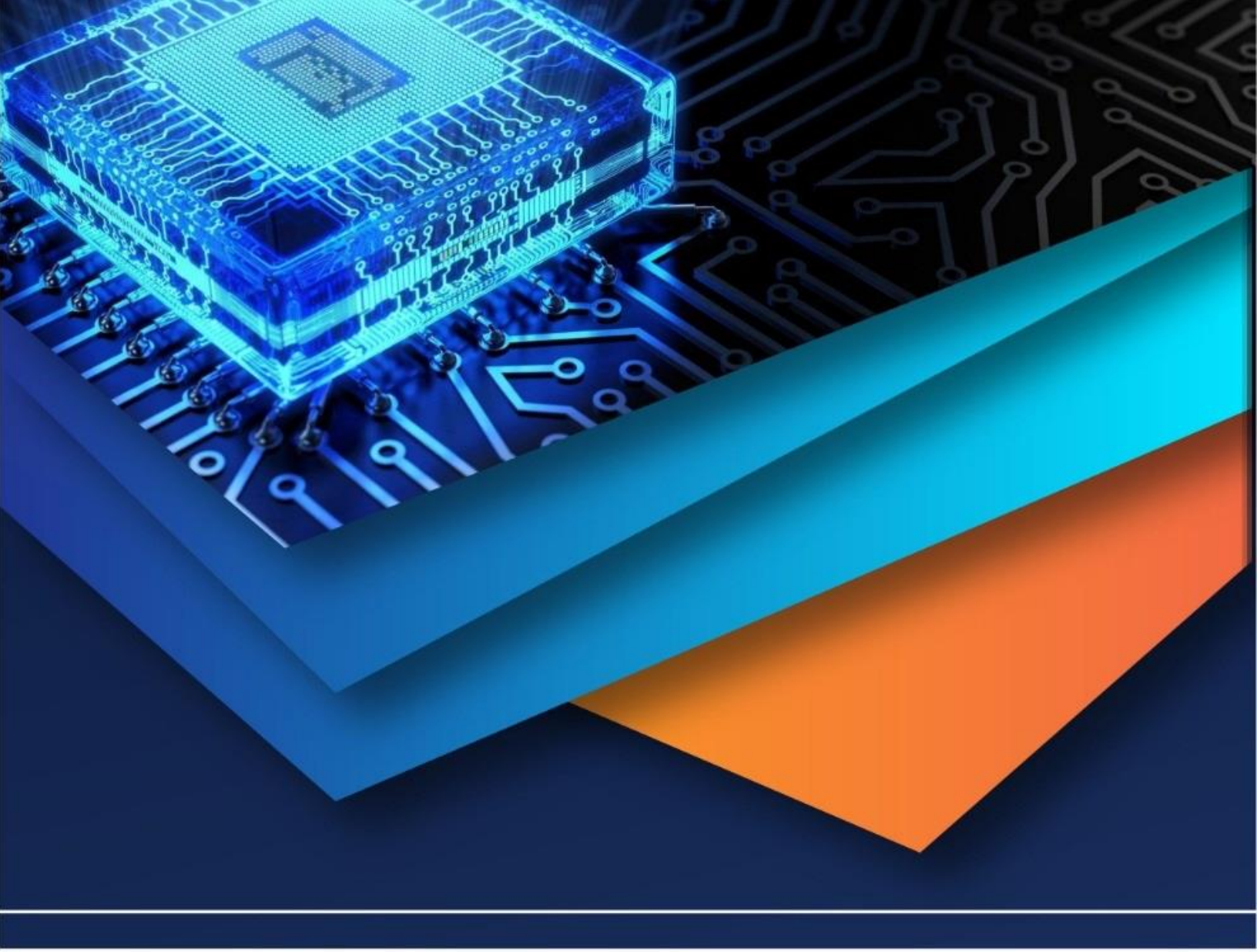

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