

## RESENHAS/BOOK REVIEWS

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**Blume, L. M. M. *Everybody Behaves Badly: The True Story Behind Hemingway's Masterpiece The Sun Also Rises*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016 (Hardcover). 373 p. ISBN 0544276000**

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Lesley Blume's book depicts the 'making of' of Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* (1926) by studying the personalities who inspired the novel and the immeasurable changes it brought to the literary world. Blume is a well accomplished North American cultural historian and journalist who – amongst other achievements – has covered the United States presidential elections of 2000 and the September 11th catastrophe of 2001. This book, released on 7 June 2016 has already become a source of polemic in face of Blume's revelations about Hemingway's debut novel that gave voice to the so-called "Lost Generation", whom Hemingway observed from his privileged affluent expatriate *environs* in post-war Paris.

The term "lost generation" has been much overused along the past century. It refers primarily to those who took part in – and suffered from – the loss of innocence, enduring the horrors and brutality of meaningless war, which seemed to perpetuate forever and a day of mud, blood, madness and confusion.

Hemingway's novel recounts the scandalous trip to Pamplona that inspired Jake Barnes, Lady Brett Ashley, Robert Cohn, and the characters from literature's greatest *roman à clef*. Here is how Blume arrives at her conclusions.

During the summer of 1925, Ernest Hemingway and a group of disorderly friends went to Pamplona, in Spain, for the well-known annual *San Fermín* bull-fighting festival. Subsequently, throughout the following weeks he conducted the expedition like an orchestra of turbulent wild waters – quite a plate full of creative motivation for a writer – including drunkenness, fights, sexual competitiveness, nighttime infidelities, and next day hangovers, which he spilled out into his trailblazing novel *The Sun Also Rises*.

This groundbreaking work revolutionized the definition of modern literature. However, it also triggered the same results in his peers' identity, who became forever labeled as the Lost Generation. Nonetheless, the complete story of Hemingway's celebrated fame has remained untold up to the present. Blume comes to reveal it with her book. It suffices to say that the book is tantalizing from the first page onwards and one cannot stop reading it. With a background as a cultural historian as well as a journalist, Blume manages to constantly sparkle new elements that keep the readers enthusiastically wanting to reach the next page – contrary to what some might have initially thought, that is, that Blume was about to tarnish the memory of an author we love. It is, undeniably, a different look at the origins of one of American literature's finest works by one of its most celebrated writers, although, different nuances enter into play and Blume attempts to bring them all to surface. If it is correct to say that Hemingway was well known, it is also correct to say that he, like any writer, was subject to reality, to everyday problems, to the fear that writers experience, and that was also depicted by Blume.

In the introduction Blume tells about a moment in Hemingway's life in which he faced rejection: "The rejection slip is very hard to take on an empty stomach" (BLUME ix). He referred to the slip that was usually attached by the publishers when a work had been rejected and returned by mail. He said he couldn't help but cry. In the early 1920s, before Hemingway became famous, that was his everyday life: sending drafts to publishers in an attempt to get published. Blume affirms that as a result of years suffering this fate, with bills to pay and no work



published, he decided to change his own destiny by playing the cards his own way: he translated the delectably bad behavior of his friends into a literarily interesting piece with which he promptly obtained his first acclaimed novel *The Sun Also Rises*. Since then, the word “famous” would be a gross understatement as he has been read in dozens of languages around the globe, a Nobel laureate, “frequently called the father of modern literature and more than half a century after his death he still commands headlines and crops up in gossip columns” (x), in Blume’s words.

The author’s research for the book was rather thorough. Almost by chance she came across a previously unpublished picture of Hemingway and a group of people where a distinguished woman stood out. When she investigated the woman’s identity, she turned out to be Lady Duff Twysden, the real-life inspiration behind Lady Brett Ashley in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises*. Additionally, she was a person of importance in his personal life, who also gave support during dire times in Hemingway’s career.

From rags to riches, persistence was a constant and it took time for results to show. When still unpublished, he had his own little circle of admirers ... composed of his girlfriend and himself. Once, in his early twenties, he told a friend he hoped to be the greatest writer in history, which shows he was not short in expectations and hopes for himself.

Some literary experts defend that Hemingway’s second publication, *A Farewell to Arms* (1929), would have been the one that established him as a giant in the literary pantheon but, in many ways, according to Blume, from the backstory of *The Sun Also Rises*, its characters and the backstory of Hemingway’s life himself at the time, the latter is a much greater work because, as far as literature was concerned, it basically “introduced its mainstream readers to the twentieth century” (x). Or, in the words of Lori Stein, editor of the *Paris Review*: “It was modern literature fully arrived for a grand public. I’m not sure that there was ever another moment when one novelist was so obviously the leader of a whole generation. You read one sentence and it doesn’t sound like anything that came before” (qtd. in Blume, x)

Changing the landscape of what readers were used to, Lesley Blume resuscitates the volatile, agitated panorama of Spain and Paris in the 1920s, disclosing how Hemingway facilitated the creation of his own celebrity image. It was not by chance that he chose Paris; living there was cheap and he was surrounded by the culture and eccentricity that thrives in the city of light. Hemingway composed a persona immersed in the adrenaline brought upon by dangerous hobbies such as bull-fighting and the boldness acquired from consciousness altering substances, having become a heavy drinker and turning himself into a danger-seeking enthusiast, well known as a short-fused literary genius and a *bon vivant*. Blume’s flamboyant account uncovers the inside world of the Lost Generation as it has never been revealed before, indicating how it continues to impact what we choose to consume culturally in terms of reading, how we nowadays see youth, sex, love, and exaggerated consumption of dangerous substances as a result of the “lost generation” label.

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