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“Lions on the Beach”: Ernest Hemingway and Postcolonial Representations of Cuba as a ‘Dark Shadow’ of Spain

“Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.” (Maraire) This metaphor of postcolonialism lays out a definitive difference between the colonized and the colonizers while indicating history is always written by the victors, not the conquered. Colonial intentions caused centuries of pain and grief as western powers brutalized their colonies, enslaving their people and pilfering their natural resources. Beyond these tragedies though, colonizers stole away the ability of the colonized to tell their side of the story with European victors writing the narrative. The Western writer of fiction which explored these colonized civilizations was no exception to the victor’s narrative, depicting harsh pictures of brutal savagery and limited humanity within their works. Ernest Hemingway, with his prolific works taking place across the globe, was arguably one such writer who fell victim to colonial representation of the colonized.

Hemingway was no stranger to travel, spending a good portion of his life abroad, untethered to the country of his birth. He visited France, Italy, Africa, etc. living in Paris, Key West, Havana, etc. However, two countries were depicted in his works with startling frequency, two countries which scholars argue captured his heart: Spain and Cuba. Hemingway frequently returned to Spain throughout his life, from his early days as an impoverished writer to the bitter days of his depression driven final year. He lived in Cuba for twenty-two years of his life, writing numerous novels wrapped comfortably in Finca Vigia, his Cuban home. In her article

“Hemingway – Our Own,” Gabriel Garcia Marquez revealed that the relationship between Hemingway and Cuba “was not a case of love at first sight, but a slow, arduous process, whose intimacies appear scattered and in code throughout most of the work of his maturity.” (Fuentes 9) and that “without meaning to, perhaps without being aware of it, he was falling under the spell of Cuba’s...charms” (11). Marquez doesn’t hesitate to suggest Hemingway’s deep love and appreciation for Cuba, but neither does Ricardo Marin Ruiz as he applies this same level of enchantment between Hemingway and Spain. According to Ruiz “Italy, France, Cuba or the African savanna were some of the many destinations that Hemingway visited during his lifetime. However, none of these places seduced him as much as Spain” (106) citing a letter from Hemingway in which he declared “Spain is the very best country of all. It’s unspoiled and unbelievably tough and wonderful” (106). Though each author, representing the countries they connect to Hemingway, are likely biased because of these personal connections, Hemingway showed a certain level of fascination with both countries, spending vast portions of his life wrapped in every aspect of the country.

Hemingway’s attraction to the countries was not one sided. Both scholars cite the deep appreciation their countries possess for the American writer. Marquez explains that “today there is a bust of Hemingway in a niche in the wall, and...an old bartender from his time never tires of showing tourists the bar stool where he used to sit” (10) and claims “No other writer – with the exception of Jose Marti has been the object of so many Cuban tributes at so many different levels.” (13-14), while Ruiz asserts “few foreign writers have been as closely linked to Spain” (106) alluding to another letter in which Hemingway wrote “I am considered a Spanish author who happened to be in America” (106). It seems Hemingway had an astounding relationship with each country, a deep love and appreciation for the nation and its people, so much so that Spain and Cuba became the settings of numerous novels including *The Sun Also Rises* (Spain),

To Have and Have Not (Cuba), *For Whom the Bell Tolls* (Spain), and *The Old Man and the Sea* (Cuba). However, his novels paint a very different picture than Marquez and Ruiz suggest, one which seems steeped in the colonizers mindset as Hemingway presents Spain, a colonizer, and Cuba, the colonized, in vastly different lights pertaining to his descriptions of land based geography, his binary of land and sea in tandem with the representation of destination and escape, and the conclusions he sets for the characters in the four novels previously mentioned, all of which romanticize one nation, while leaving the other steeped in poverty, crime, and death.

Though an ocean separates them, Spain and Cuba possess intriguing similarities, particularly in terms of Hemingway's experience. Until 1898 at the end of the Spanish-American War, Cuba was a colonial possession of Spain, conquered by the European nation in the early 1500s. Though the local population retained aspects of their culture, Spanish culture infected the island. To this day, the world outside of Cuba identifies Cubans as Hispanic. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Hispanic means "pertaining to Spain or its people" and "Spanish-speaking." Though independent, the rest of the world still views Cuba and its people in relation to Spain. Outside of their historic and cultural connections, Spain and Cuba have large expanses of coastline. While Cuba is an island, completely surrounded by water, Spain is a peninsula, surrounded on three sides by water, giving both countries long coastlines with large fishing industries and a surplus of fishing villages which rely on the trade. This trade drew Hemingway, who had a fondness for fishing since his boyhood, to Cuba. However, though fishing was available in Spain and Hemingway recognized this, the allure of Spain existed in bullfighting, a unique feature of Spanish culture. Though different, each country possessed a feature which drew Hemingway to its shores. Along with these geographic and cultural similarities, Hemingway experienced revolution in both countries. The Spanish Civil War began in 1936, lasting three years until its conclusion in 1939. Cuba wouldn't see the fulfillment of revolution

until 1959 when Fidel Castro took over the government, but the seeds of revolution were planted during the 30s and 40s as citizens began to revolt against the government, resulting in civilian massacres and dictatorial power moves. Though vastly different countries, Spain and Cuba are intertwined, a fact which partially answers Hemingway's fascination with the two countries. The similarities in particular, coupled with Marquez's and Ruiz's identification of similar dualities between Hemingway and the nations, suggest Hemingway's depictions of the countries should be similar, or at least on an equal plane, an assumption which is plainly refuted through his novels.

Hemingway is traditionally considered a modernist, his style reflecting a shift with its hard athletic prose and sparse details matched by his experimentation with point of view and plotlines. However, there are two particular novels which forced critics to question Hemingway's style. *The Sun Also Rises* stands as a monument to the modernist literary convention, but there are certain aspects of the novel which lean toward the romantic tradition. These distinctly romantic passages all involve Spain. "it was really Spain. There were long brown mountains and a few pines and far-off forests of beech-trees on some of the mountainsides...an oak forest, and there were white cattle grazing in the forest...grassy plains and clear streams..." (98-99) followed a few pages later with "We came around a curve into a town, and on both sides opened out a sudden green valley. A stream went through the centre of the town and fields of grapes touched the houses." (111) Hemingway describes the Spanish countryside in rich detail, focusing on the beauty of the natural world and presenting scenes that almost seem stolen from time, preserved in a pastoral perfection. The pastoral tradition, a method of focus which typically characterizes romantic writing, continues throughout the descriptions of Spain as he includes domesticated animals alongside his descriptions of the natural world. "The fields were rolling and grassy and the grass was short from the sheep grazing. The cattle were up in the hills. We

heard their bells in the woods.” (121) Combining the focus on nature and the simple beauty of a rural setting creates bubbles of romantic writing trapped within Hemingway’s modern style.

This romantic tendency continues in Hemingway’s novel *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, a novel which takes place solely in Spain and deals with the brutality of Civil War. The novel begins with the same focus on nature. “He lay flat on the brown, pin-needed floor of the forest...and high overhead the wind blew in the tops of the pine trees.” (1) Twenty chapters later and this fascination with the landscape continues with a repetitive focus on pine trees. “There was no wind now and the pines were still in the night. The trunks of the pines projected from the snow that covered all the ground...The sky was clear and there was enough light reflected from the snow to see the trunks of the trees and the bulk of the rocks where the cave was.” (258) Hemingway never fails to romanticize Spain from the gentle pastoral countryside in the hot summer months in *The Sun Also Rises* to the guerrilla warfare invested mountains in the harsh winter months in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*. According to Ruiz, for Hemingway Spain “reactivated many Romantic stereotypes that had a powerful appeal...Spain [was] the opportunity to live an adventure and to fight for ideals.” (104-105) Hemingway saw in Spain an ideal, a place of vibrant passion and a fighting spirit, where the culture infected the very land and vice versa. To an extent, in Spain Hemingway found a paradise.

This same passion for the natural geography isn’t evident in Hemingway’s novels concerning Cuba. In fact, the land is mentioned very little with the focus of his two Cuban novels, *To Have and Have Not* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, being primarily set at sea. Similar to *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, Hemingway begins *To Have and Have Not* with a description of the setting, which is Havana in Cuba. “You know how it is there early in the morning in Havana with the bums still asleep against the walls of the buildings; before even the ice wagons come by with ice for the bars?” (1) Hemingway sets the scene immediately, directly identifying the locale

and immediately associating Havana with bums sleeping against buildings, the only aspect of the landscape he provides. The next detail doesn't paint a kinder image. "I saw a closed car come across the square toward them. The first thing a pane of glass went and the bullet smashed into the row of bottles on the showcase wall to the right. I heard the gun going and, bop, bop, bop, there were bottles smashing all along the wall." (2) Within the first two pages Hemingway paints a picture of poverty and lawlessness.

The Old Man and the Sea doesn't soften this harsh imagery. Though the novel is almost entirely set at sea, Hemingway mentions the land where the old man lives a handful of times. "When the wind was in the east a smell came across the harbour from the shark factory; but today there was only the faint edge of the odour because the wind had backed into the north and then dropped off and it was pleasant and sunny on the Terrace." (12) This Cuban fishing village is associated directly with a presumably foul odor, which is atypically missing and though it is considered 'pleasant' and 'sunny,' there isn't much description of what this location's physical presence. Scent is once again associated with Cuba as the old man leaves on his endeavor: "he left the smell of the land behind and rowed out into the clean early morning smell of the ocean." (28) Once again, the land isn't associated with the romanticism of the Spanish landscape, but a filthiness remedied once the old man leaves the undefined Cuban landscape behind. This lack of description continues through the end of the novel. Even as he approaches land, returning from a harsh sea journey, there isn't any semblance of love for his home: "When he sailed into the little harbour the lights of Terrace were out and he knew everyone was in bed." (120) Santiago returns to a lifeless land, one locked in darkness and sleep. Alongside associations with crime and poverty, Hemingway creates a Cuba linked with filth, discomfort, and darkness.

Along with the difference in how Hemingway writes about the landscape of each country, the directional movement of his plot in relation to the country reveals another aspect in which

Cuba is reduced as a shadow of Spain. In both his novels about Spain, as evidenced by his focus on the Spanish countryside, the characters travel deeper into Spain. This is quickly evidenced once Jake Barnes and company reach Spain in *The Sun Also Rises*: “we were going way up close along a hillside, with a valley below and hills stretched off back toward the sea. You couldn’t see the sea. It was too far away. You could see only hills and more hills.” (97-98) Barnes is constantly moving away from the sea, deeper into Spain, leaving it completely out of sight. This is a similar theme in *For Whom the Bell Tolls* which is a completely landlocked novel which never ventures near the sea, remaining trapped within mountains and pine forests: “moving carefully from tree to tree in the shadows and now, through the last pines of the steep hillside...The late afternoon sun that still came over the brown shoulder of the mountain showed the bridge dark against the steep emptiness of the gorge.” (35) There is no water in sight and the only potential for an avenue back to the sea is ‘empty.’ Both novels are locked deep within the Spanish country and never reach the coastline, let alone venture into the sea despite Spain’s expanse of coastline and fishing industry.

Hemingway’s representation of the sea in his novels based in Cuba is in the exact opposite. While Jake Barnes and Robert Jordan head deeper into the country, Harry Morgan and Santiago both leave the nation behind. In *To Have and Have Not* Morgan watches Havana “spreading out astern, and then dropping it off behind us as we brought the mountains up.” (23) Unlike the brief sense of melancholy in which Barnes realizes the sea has been left behind, Morgan leaves Havana behind with a sense of apathy, stating it as a fact and only once (whereas Barnes mentions the loss of the sea multiple times). However, once Hemingway’s novel reaches the sea, leaving Cuba behind, his romantic style seeps back in with a focus on nature. “There was some gulfweed on the stream and a few birds working...the only fish I saw were those little brown ones that use around the gulfweed.” (23) In a country with vast natural scenery,

Hemingway never mentioned nature while in Havana, but the moment he leaves the country behind, nature is applied to the setting. This is exemplified in *The Old Man and the Sea*. “He saw the phosphorescence of the Gulf weed in the water as he rowed over the part of the ocean that the fishermen called the great well because there was a sudden deep of seven hundred fathoms where all sorts of fish congregated because of the swirl the current made against the steep walls of the floor of the ocean.” (28) Though applied to the ocean, the same romantic touch which infected Hemingway’s writing about Spain can be seen in this passage, particularly in the beauty Hemingway imbues in the sea, something he failed to do in relation to the Cuban landscape. Santiago’s account goes one step further in the sea imagery after Santiago returns home. Though the ocean is described immediately as a clean, vibrant place filled with life, one of the last scenes after Santiago reaches his home paints a very different picture. “That afternoon there was a party of tourists at the Terrace and looking down in the water among the empty beer cans and dead barracudas a woman saw a great long white spine with a huge tail.” (127) As the sea approaches the land, its purity is compromised, the beauty destroyed, tainted, by the very presence of the village.

This conceptualization of land versus sea is encapsulated in the characters and their actions. In *The Sun Also Rises*, shortly after Jake Barnes indicates he “was back in France” (237) he reveals he’s returning to Spain: “I stood in line with my passport, opened my bags for the customs, bought a ticket, went through a gate, climbed onto the train, and after forty minutes and eight tunnels I was at San Sebastian.” (237) Despite the troubles he encountered with Spain, including sacrificing his few values, he returns to the country. “But his left leg stayed perfectly flat under the horse as he moved to the right...he felt with his two hands of his thigh bone where the left leg lay flat against the ground and his hands both felt the sharp bone and where it pressed against the skin.” (461) Due to his injury, a broken femur bone, in *For Whom the Bell Tolls*,

Robert Jordan remains behind while his surviving compatriots attempt to escape. He dies on Spanish soil, never leaving the country. Like with Jordan, *To Have and Have Not* doesn't give Harry Morgan a particularly happy ending. "Back at the hospital Marie Morgan climbed the steps in a rush. The doctor met her on the porch as he came out through the screen door. He was tired and on his way home. "He's gone, Mrs. Morgan," he said. "He's dead?" "He died on the table.'" (138) Harry Morgan dies in a hospital in Key West, Florida. During an attempted heist, he was shot in the stomach by Cuban revolutionaries. Though *The Old Man and the Sea* doesn't result in Santiago's success, he does return to Cuba. However, his dreams reveal that where he ends up is not where he truly wants to be. In the beginning of the novel, Santiago has a dream in which "he dreamed of Africa when he was a boy and the long golden beaches and the white beaches, so white they hurt your eyes, and the high capes and the great brown mountains. He lived along that coast now every night." (25) This sentiment is complete with the last sentence of the novel. "The old man was dreaming about the lions." (127) Taken in tandem with the dream (though it might be more akin to a nightmare) in which he finds himself back in Cuba – "he dreamed that he was in the village on his bed and there was a norther and he was very cold and his right arm was asleep because his head had rested on it instead of a pillow" (81) – and Hemingway makes it clear that though Santiago is in Cuba, he doesn't want to be. In fact, in the very last moments of the novel he wasn't in Cuba, but 'living,' as Hemingway put it, on the coast of Africa. By the end of their novels, Barnes and Jordan are both entrenched in Spain by choice, while Morgan and Santiago (whether literally or figuratively) are no longer in Cuba, nor do they have any desire to be.

Based on his life and his personal choices, living in Cuba for a good portion of his life and frequently visiting Spain whenever he could, Hemingway loved both countries. And both countries have a special place reserved just for the author who captured their nations in the

written word. In this regard, both Marquez and Ruiz are undeniably accurate in their analysis of Hemingway and his relationship with Cuba and Spain. However, his novels lead to a different understanding in how Hemingway perceives the countries. Ultimately, through his depiction of landscape, the land-sea dichotomy, and where his characters find themselves at the end of his novels *The Sun Also Rises*, *To Have and Have Not*, *For Whom the Bell Tolls*, and *The Old Man and the Sea*, Hemingway reveals the vibrancy of Spain and sets Cuba as a shadow of the country which captured Hemingway's heart in the early days of his career. Hemingway depicts Spain with a vivacious landlocked geography that doesn't rely on an easily accessed avenue of escape, providing the country with characters who return and/or remain in the nation through their own free will. He doesn't give Cuba the same courtesy, avoiding descriptions of the landscape which don't associate the island with crime, poverty, and death, which require an escape through the ocean he paints with romantic strokes, while creating characters who do not want to be on the island. Hemingway may have loved Cuba, but it was merely a shadow of the pure Spanish world he held dear. This representation bleeds into his writing, revealing a deeper understanding of postcolonial relations. Though Hemingway certainly displayed an admiration for lions, in the end he was the hunter.

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