Olli, Fall, 2023: Classic American Novels on Film and Television

“The Sun Also Rises,” (1957), based on Ernest Hemingway’s novel of the same name, directed by Henry King, Screenplay by Peter Viertel, Produced by Darryl F. Zanuck, Camera: Leo Tover, Edited by William Mace, Music by Hugo Friedhofer, Distributed by 20th Century Fox, Running Time: 130 minutes, Budget: $3.5 million, Box Office (U.S. Film Rentals) $3, 815,000.

The Cast: Jake Barnes…Tyrone Power

Lady Brett Ashley…Ava Gardner

Robert Cohn…Mel Ferrer

Mike Campbell…Errol Flynn

Bill Gorton…Eddie Albert

Count Mippipopolous…Gregory Ratoff

Georgette Aubin…Juliette Gréco

Zizi…Marcel Dalio

Army Doctor…Henry Daniell

Harris…Bob Cunningham

Marie…Danik Patisson

Pedro Romero…Robert Evans

The central event of Hemingway’s 1926 novel “The Sun Also Rises” (TSAR) was the festival in July at Pamplona, Spain, in 1925. He had previously attended the festival there in 1923, and 1924, along with his wife Hadley. The novel includes characters based on Hemingway’s real life friends. Lady Brett Ashley was based on Duff, Lady Twysden. Mike Campbell, was based on her lover, Pat Guthrie. The Jewish character Robert Cohn in the novel was based on Harold Loeb, who was then in an affair with Duff. Loeb resented his portrayal. The novel’s Bill Gorton was based on Bill Smith, Hemingway’s Michigan boyhood friend. Jake Barnes was based on Hemingway, who seems to have been jealous of Loeb’s affair with Duff. Hemingway suffered a serious wound in World War I, evidently not in the genital area. Hemingway’s first title for the novel was “Fiesta,” (as it was originally titled in Britain) then he settled on “The Lost Generation,” and other choices before deciding on TSAR.

Hemingway’s fictional bull fighter Pedro Romero was based on the brilliant young matador named Cayetano Ordoñez, who, after a bull fight in Madrid, made Hadley, Hemingway’s wife, a present of the bloody bull’s ear. In real life, Hemingway and Loeb went out to fight, but made up. Also, Duff Twysden did send Hemingway a panic letter from Paris asking for money, but she did not sleep with a bull fighter.

Hemingway’s marriage to Hadley Richardson was breaking up, and Hemingway was preparing to marry Pauline Pfeiffer, who was a devout Catholic. Hemingway was in the process of a formal conversion to Catholicism. His hero, Jake Barnes, was Catholic. Hemingway remained Catholic, after his fashion.

Hemingway gave to Hadley the royalites and the rights to the novel TSAR, and she sold the rights for a reported $10,000 (probably in the 1930s). By the time Darryl F. Zanuck acquired the rights, the price had jumped to $125,000..

The casting was somewhat complicated. Zanuck wanted Gregory Peck. He got Tyrone Powers. Jennifer Jones was originally cast as Lady Brett. Hemingway insisted on Ava Gardner for Lady Brett, so Zanuck went along.

The casting of Errol Flynn as Mike Campbell is now regarded as a stroke of genius.

Juliette Greco, famous French singer and actress in French films, was spotted by Mel Ferrer and Audrey Hepburn in a café, and she was hired to play the prostitute, Georgette. She had a love affair with Zanuck. Among Greco’s many lovers was the trumpeter Miles Davis.

Bullfighting scenes were shot in Pamplona in June 1956. Apparently , the casting of Gardner forced a delay, and the filming was changed from Pamplona to Morelia, Mexico, in March, 1957. Morella was changed to match the footage from Pamplona.

There is no mention in the film that Cohn is Jewish. It is left to us to realize that Georgette is a prostitute. In the novel Jake tells her that he is sick, not having suffered a war wound. References to gay males are laundered in the film.

The subject of castration and impotence were forbidden in 1957. Zanuck agreed not to mention them, but they are stated in Jake’s dream. Otherwise, what would be the problem?

Zanuck spotted Robert Evans in a night club, and he chose him for the bull fighter Romero. Members of the cast complained about his acting, but Zanuck said, “The kid stays in the picture.” Evans later became a noted producer (“Chinatown”).

Hemingway, who did not make a nickel on the film, did not like the movie. Zanuck fought back, stating the author had approved the shooting script.

The book was dedicated to Hadley, and to his son John Hadley Nicanor. Gertrude Stein’s famous comment, “You are a lost generation” is printed at the front of the book, along with a passage from Ecclesiastes. The style of the book at times mirrors Stein’s eccentricities in writing. When Hemingway is writing about two of his passions, fishing and bull fighting, the effect is magical. Unfortunately, the novel’s fishing chapters are all but ignored in the film. In real life, the fishing trip was a failure. After logging, the streams were clogged with dead branches.

The evident suggestions of Jew-baiting in the novel loom now larger and darker than in the 1920s. Harold Loeb, the original of Robert Cohn, was outraged. He had treated Hemingway with kindness and generosity. Loeb had his say in his 1959 autobiography, “The Way It Was.”

TSAR sold out its first printing of 5000 copies, and a second printing of 7000 copies was soon made. The critical reaction was mostly positive. Hemingway’s mom hated it. His father sent him a hostile review. About the same time Fitzgerald’s “The Great Gatsby” came out and it had very meager sales. As we know, both novels are now doing just fine.

The critical reaction to the 1957 film was mixed, and it did not make much money. Time and nostalgia have somewhat softened the contemporary view of it. A made-for-TV, in 2 parts, miniseries came out in 1984.