

A Taste of the Prohibition Cigarettes and Alcohol in Hemingway`s Novels

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Abstract

On January 17, 1920, across the territory of the USA, the 18th Amendment of the Constitution became effective. While some celebrated in churches the triumph on ousting alcohol and turning America dry, for some the 13 year-long period which followed would now mean they would have to turn to speakeasies serving moonshine, in lack of their favourite alcoholic beverages. The prohibition had divided the USA between the “drys” and the “wets”. (Slavicek, 2009) Millions of Americans turned to alternative solutions (medically prescribed alcohol, home brewing, illegal taverns, “booze cruises”). In this historical context, Hemingway`s novels set in the era - *The Sun Also Rises* and *To Have and Have Not* can be read in relevance to the societal response to life conditions in the aftermath of WWI and the prohibition that followed.

This article sets off to explore the semantic fields of alcohol and cigarettes, as they were expanded through the discourse of advertising, present in Hemingway`s novels, during a time when consumer culture was gaining momentum. Another line of interest concerns the class-divided consumption of goods in and its representation in modernism.

In his *Mythologies*, French philosopher Roland Barthes discusses, among other day-to-day products, the cultural connotations of wine. He explores how wine is often elevated in cultural significance, associated with elegance, sophistication, and pleasure. Barthes notes that wine is endowed with a range of meanings beyond its mere consumption, making it a symbol of social status and refinement. As for cigarettes, advertisement creates myths around them to convey complex narratives of desire, escape, transformation, maturity and independence.

Key words: Hemingway, modernism, advertising, consumerism, the prohibition, posters, class-division

INTRODUCTION

While at the heart it was a Greek company from Constantinople, *Muratti* cigarettes, Lady Brett`s brand of choice, were later produced in Berlin, and then London. The history of their manufacture is closely linked with the Turkish immigrants and *guest workers*, who inhabited Berlin`s suburb of Kreuzberg. The *Ariston* variety, which belongs to Berlin`s most renowned cigarettes, (Von Westhafen, 2005) was advertised as “smoked by royalty and nobility”. In fact, these cigarettes were so highbrow, that despite the existence of cigarette filling machines, the business owners, B. Muratti Sons & Co Limited, preferred that they be filled in by hand to suit the highest exigencies of the *niche* they were addressing.

There was an ongoing change in the public perception in the use of cigarettes, as they were emerging from the dark allies to the countertops of the finest coffee shops. The tobacco industry was beginning to flourish, their products were now designed for the wealthy, rather than the destitute. After the war, *Muratti* would end up absorbed by the tobacco consortiums but remained a product for the high-end market.



Fig. 1 Female Predecessor of the Marlboro Man, or myths of female emancipation and of masculinity.

By her choice, Lady Brett Ashley compliments her aristocratic perception of self. *Muratti* cigarettes' outdated means of production make it expensive and counterproductively exquisite, to which Lady Ashley acquiesces when she buys them, as they fit into her aristocratic self-built public image. After all, her public outfits involve a tweed skirt and a felt hat. There is a gapping contrast between the glamour of this carefully cultivated avatar – Lady Ashley, which allows her to associate with her mundane acolytes, Jake and his group, Count Mippipopolous, Romero, to name a few; and Brett's short-lived consumeristic episodes.

She flashes a tin of *Muratti* cigarettes in public, as a piece of props for the aristocratic role that she plays. After a bullfight, she is given the bull's ear, (Bocanegra's ear had been given to Romero as a symbol of his bravery in the bullring), which she carelessly discards in the back of a drawer along with some of the stubs of her favourite cigarettes. In her immaturity, Lady Brett Ashley refuses to acknowledge even the pettiest of the consequences brought about by her lifestyle. The traumatic impact of the war had forced her into an early widowhood and led her towards an amnesia, which comes to her as salvation, since now she is able to reconcile with her previous self. With the bull's ear, she foregoes everything that relates to the previous day. After the act of consumption, Lady Ashley makes room for Brett to step in, so as to dispose of the remnants, be they *Anis Del Toro* liqueur bottles, *Muratti* cigarette butts, chunks of animal parts, or abandoned lovers.

In contrast, Santiago, the ageing fisherman, has little control over the trademarks that are brought before him. Along with food, Manolin fetches *Hatuey beer*¹ for him, which, since it comes in bottles, fails to rank among Santiago's favourites. Here, a subtle note is made. Chief Hatuey was a Cuban indigenous leader who fought the conquistadors through guerrilla tactics. When the Spanish finally did capture him, he was burnt at the stake. This sacrifice makes him Cuba's first national hero and would seemingly qualify him as Santiago's hero, as well.

However, this heroic image that is chosen for the ale proves little more than a resonant marketing move to conceal the less appetizing move of large corporations acquiring national symbols,

¹ In order to expand their business, the Bacardi family chose the brand Hatuey, which was regarded as powerful enough to match what would soon become the best-selling rum in the world, hence the company bore the name Bacardi y Hatuey. The product soon became the most popular beer brand in Cuba.

to increase sales. Similarly to other of Hemingway's men, Santiago, too, sees through the mediated national heroics, which he does not reject, nor does he believe in them. Given a choice, as the old fisherman confesses to Manolin – his considerate young friend, he would much rather be treated to canned beer. There is a chance, however, that the object of Santiago's disenchantment might not be the bottle itself, but rather with brands altogether.

Chief Hatuey – whom the Spanish burned to death in Cuba after a 1512 uprising – is revered as the first to lead an organized fight against colonialism in the New World. The first bottles of Hatuey, a premium pale ale, rolled off the production line in January of 1927. That same year, Hatuey won a gold medal at the Cienfuegos Exposition [...] Henri devised a clever ploy to introduce the new brew: he instructed the sales force to give away free blocks of ice with every purchase, and Hatuey was soon known as the only cool beer on the island. (Rosal, 2016, p. 45)

In addition to the obvious upper hand held by cold beer over its competition, in a fishermen's village ice would have been highly appraised for its essential role in preserving fish. Thus, it is not far-fetched to claim that in fact *Hatuey* beer was the bonus product and a by-product of ice, since we can think of it as an incentive for buying ice rather than the other way around. We can only imagine that *Cerveza Hatuey* was affordable enough not to affect significantly the package sale, and thus to become the most popular beer in Cuba. With Manolin's help, the other fishermen, whom we imagine younger as more successful than Santiago, treat the old man to a bottle of beer, which was plentiful in the village.

When changing styles while alternating between a third-person objective perspective and allowing Santiago to become the storyteller, Hemingway's vocabulary and thoughts are reduced to fit those of a simple fisherman from a Cuban village. The language stripped of inessential parts of speech, as Ezra Pound had deemed adjectives and adverbs, best emulates the austere ambience of Santiago's fishing shack. Deprived of food, clothes, shoes, or even proper lodging, Santiago takes refuge in a newspaper, which substitutes in utility for a television set. He learns of the news, the latest baseball results and is kept attuned with his favourite superstar through the press. The few possessions of Santiago seem to be melting away with the old man. His ragged clothes, the worn-out blanket, the leaky roof, and the dripping walls give out the impression of an imminent collapse. In this dismal picture, the newspaper is the only crisp and consistent link to a fleeting present.

Another one of Hemingway's *Have Nots*, Harry Morgan, is left with similar alternatives in his menu when he is conned by a rich customer, who flies to Miami without paying for his fishing trip. Harry Morgan must use his remaining pennies prudently.

I had black bean soup and a beef stew with boiled potatoes for fifteen cents. A bottle of Hatuey beer brought it up to a quarter. When I spoke to the waiter about the shooting he wouldn't say anything. They were all plenty scared. (Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 1996, p. 18)

In posters, painted metal boxes, on labels, *Hatuey* promised the carefree life of American marines overseas, outside the reach of the

still effective 18th Amendment of the Prohibition. As Greg Myers points in his *Words in Ads*, we tend to identify with the things we buy based on our association of meaning to commodities. A *Hatuey* drinker must then be a financially and socially successful womanizer, who leads a carefree life. The beer, alongside its twin brand, *Bacardi*, advertised through openly patriarchal strategies. In one poster, a spruced-up navy captain enjoys a poolside snack in the company of a scantily dressed young woman, while in another ad, an open-chested beauty parachute from the sky carrying bottles of liquor in one armpit and ale in the other one.



Fig. 2. Replenishing the American Dream

During the prohibition years, the brand *Bacardi* was advertised as synonymous with Cuba. In the 1920s the number of American tourists to Cuba grew to 90,000 in 1928. There was a daily Pan Am flight from Miami and Key West to Havana. American tourists quenched their thirst in Cuba, while American bartenders took over every bar available since their jobs in were no longer legal back in the USA. (Cameron, n.d.) Cuba was becoming an American drinking outpost. Advertisements had to be aimed to both Americans, hence the inclusion of flight-related motifs in visuals, as they did to Cubans, who were lured into buying the products by the seemingly carefree life of the American expat. In the end, consumers do not buy the drink as much as they buy into the lifestyle that it proffers.

The campaign must have also appealed to Harry Morgan, who was desperately in need of a financial breakthrough. The images, which he must have seen on his return trips to the USA, certainly provided part of his drive to become wealthy and successful enough to afford the life promised in the posters. Hemingway's reconstruction of the Havana *Zeitgeist* is impressive. Johnson flees the country with a daily flight, which we now know was a Pan Am. Harry Morgan makes a tour of the bars in town: the Chink place, Donovan's, then three or four stops for beer, finally the Cunard bar.

Advertising drives the entire motivation behind Harry Morgan's rise and fall. His choices of branded cigarettes and spirits require a

certain level of earnings, which he maintains through a life of crime.

Though generally regarded as one of Hemingway's novels of secondary importance, *To Have and Have Not* has the merit of providing an abundance of episodic narratives and a wealth of props, whereof then Hemingway would draft only a handful in the economy of *The Old Man and the Sea*. Nevertheless, the harsh life of fishermen, characters who enjoy only short-lived success was already there in 1937. Their drive, we are led to believe, often lies in the American dream, exported to Cuba through newspapers, advertising posters, magazines, and other such publicity channels.

It has been claimed that by associating the brand with his characters, Hemingway contributed to its success and this was acknowledged by the Bacardi owners, who seized the opportunity and held a lavish party to celebrate his winning of the Nobel Prize for literature and sprinkled it with *Daiquiris* and *Hatuey* beer. Greeting the special guest, there stood an overhead banner "Hatuey beer salutes the "old" ERNEST HEMINGWAY". (Cabrera Infante, 1956) To be sure, the sea was no other than the beer itself, which completed the puzzle through the customised lyrics sung by Amelita Frade over the soundtrack of *Guantanamera*. (Fuentes, 2019, pp. 87-89). Bacardi thus managed to capitalise on Hemingway's success and link his novels' characters to the beverages owned by the Bacardi family. The move was necessary to gain an advantage over one of their rival brands in particular.

Harry Morgan conducts an inventory of his few remaining coins, only to find he has 40 cents left, but takes consolation in the three bottles of *Tropical*, the only payment he is left with, having been conned by Johnson.

"Well," I said to Frankie, "we might as well have a cold one. Mr. Johnson bought them." There were three bottles of *Tropical* left." (Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 1996, p. 16)

Cerveceria La Tropical, the manufacturer of the ale, takes pride in being the oldest brewery in Cuba, established in 1888, and throughout its history it has constantly been among the most popular beer producers. The company's name also features in the opening scene of the novel, where a kiosk painted in its brand colours serves as a cover for the gunmen attacking the Perla bar. Significantly, the wagon is destroyed by gunfire, also losing one of its two pulling horses. Thus, to the reader, the brand turns into a bad omen, one that will bring about mayhem, death, and deceit. When Harry Morgan leaves his old, impoverished life behind, he gives out the impression of also stepping up the ladder of beer brands.. His discarding of *La Tropical* and welcoming of *Hatuey* tells us that he perceives himself as a sort of dignified, self-righteous outlaw, pushed into crime by the historical context, similarly to the native Cuban chief behind the image of the brand.

Harry's image of a self-made independent boat operator is further constructed using brands. Bacardi appears constantly throughout the novel, at times in contexts which are nothing short of a commercial script. Chapter 13 sees Harry Morgan and his acolytes at Freddy's bar, where he serves the customs agents with an alibi for the night when his boat was stolen.

“Oh, yes,” said Hayzooz. “I forget. I didn’t ask you.... You get what you want?” he asked the stranger. “Yes. I think so. Is that the best price you have on Bacardi?”

“Yes, sir,” Freddy told him. “That’s the real carta del Oro.” (Hemingway, *To Have and Have Not*, 1996, p. 68)

Harry’s boat had been seized by the customs officers when it was caught unloading bootleg alcohol. Freddy Wallace had a boat of his own and Harry was there to chart it, therefore the sources of his beverages were obvious. Moreover, the original product was called Bacardi – Carta de Oro, so by adding an extra “l”, Freddy mocks the stranger who had inquired him about the origins of the rum he sells. The author confirms that we are in the presence of counterfeit trademarks when he un-capitalizes the label, turning Bacardi’s premium product into commonplace moonshine.

In the same chapter, we learn that Harry Morgan chases his shots with his favourite cigarettes. In the scene where he, now an old buccaneer, manages to open a package of *Chesterfields*, despite having lost one of his arms, sets him apart from all the other characters of the novel. While all others smoke anonymous cigarettes, Harry smokes *Chesterfields*. In the 1930s, during the Great Depression, the major cigarette makers were increasing their expenses in product placement campaigns. They turned to the new media of radio and films to increase their share in the market. *Liggett and Myers*, the owners of the *Chesterfield* brand ranked among the biggest three cigarette producers according to the total sales in the US at the time, along with *American Tobacco (Lucky Strike)* and *R.J. Reynolds (Camel)*. In terms of growth, starting with the late thirties, advertising companies opened offices around the world, so the industry was gaining a head start for the upcoming globalization. The same period witnessed the society becoming more permissive towards female smokers. A *Chesterfield* campaign carried the slogan “*Blow some my way*”, where attractive women expressed a sort of augmented admiration for the male smoker, which seems to have been based solely on the brand of cigarettes puffed by him. The line would certainly qualify as explicit now, yet the still patriarchal society of the time, overt sexual suggestions were perfectly acceptable.

The campaign paints the *Chesterfield* smoker as a virile figure, who needs no more than to light a cigarette in order to have all womanhood at his feet. The brand is turned into a sort of secret code, letting smokers into a world of pleasures. In the novel, Hemingway certainly makes good use of this fatal aura of the brand and makes Harry Morgan stand out through his mundane vices. In turn, despite the small number of books sold by the first Scribner edition, *Chesterfield* gained considerable publicity in a time when cigarette advertisement went largely unregulated.

In “Elements of Semiology” (1964), Roland Barthes refers to all these semantic fields - garments, food, furniture, etc., - as “systems of objects, images or behaviour patterns” displacing the reality of things:

In clothes as written about, that is to say, described in a fashion magazine by means of articulated language, there is practically no ‘speech’: the garment which is described never corresponds to an

individual handling of the rules of fashion, it is a systematised set of signs and rules: it is a language in its pure state. (Barthes, *Elements of Semiology*, 1964)

CONCLUSIONS

The language of advertising is part of the urban landscape represented in Hemingway’s novels. *The Sun Also Rises* and *For Whom the Bell Tolls* stand witness to the creation of two distinct Spains. To this often contrasting depiction, we argue that advertisement plays a significant role. While the first one abounds in fine liquors, cigarettes, designer clothes, expensive hotels, tabloids, and billboards; the second Spain, roughly a decade later, has been stripped by all of these commodities through the trauma of civil war. Hemingway’s “civilian” characters are defined through the brand names that they consume. Brett’s identity is elevated to that of her Lady Ashley through the high-end products which she exhibits (Muratti hand-filled cigarettes, *Anis Del Toro* liqueur, a tweed skirt, and a felt hat).

Through its branding, Hatuey beer creates a myth of bravery, independence, and national heroics, as Chief Hatuey was a victim of colonialism. Nevertheless, the narrative melts into the advertising strategy chosen by Bacardi for their product, as part of strategy to be associated with Cuban history. For Santiago, Hemingway’s hero from *The Old Man and the Sea*, the Hatuey gains inside privileges into the minimalist surroundings of Santiago’s clay fishing shack. As for Harry Morgan, Hatuey his financial progress and decline are traceable through the beverages around his drinking routine, as he moves up from La Tropical to Hatuey. Harry also adheres to an image of independence, virility, and prosperity, all projected through *Chesterfield*’s advertising campaigns of the time.

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