

The sun also rises



The Sun Also Rises Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* demonstrates elements of weakened masculinity throughout the novel. The lasting effects of WWI on the characters, Jake Barnes' insecurities, and Lady Brett Ashley's non-conformity all contribute to the minimized presence of masculinity.

Hemingway began writing *The Sun Also Rises* in 1925 and it was later completed in 1926. Much like the novel's protagonist, he too resided in Paris working as a journalist, after fighting in WWI. Hemingway began to use his journalism expertise to write fiction. He believed that a good work of fiction was rooted in real life experiences and events.

If one were to take a look at Hemingway's life, a parallel can be drawn between his life and *The Sun Also Rises*, as well as many of his other works. Other similarities from this period of Hemingway's life and *The Sun Also Rises* include: the group of American expatriates and the relationships within the group, the trip to Pamplona, and the bullfighting. *The Sun Also Rises* is set in the mid-1920's, which leads to the centralization of the post-WWI generation. World War I had a lasting effect on this generation and more specifically, the characters in *The Sun Also Rises*. WWI brought forth a reevaluation of masculinity.

Before the war, soldiers were brave, dignified, and overall proud to be fighting for their country; going into battle was a heroic act. However, fighting a war was not all they thought it would be. For long periods of time, soldiers would be crammed into trenches while the enemy attacked.

Surviving the war was not all about who was the bravest, but who was the luckiest. The reality of war led to the undermining of what it traditionally meant to be a man. The war held no honor or glory; it was not worth the

death and destruction and therefore, led to a sense of confusion amongst the soldiers about what they were actually fighting for.

After the war, the sense of confusion lingered and brought forth a generation that was dissolute and aimless. "The Lost Generation" can be defined as the generation of men and women who came of age following WWI. As a result of their war experiences and the social upheaval of the time, they were viewed as cynical, disillusioned, and without cultural or emotional stability. The theme of "The Lost Generation" is rather apparent based upon the novel's two epigraphs. The first is from a conversation with Gertrude Stein, "You are all a lost generation. The second is originally from the book of Ecclesiastes, it reads, "One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh; but the earth abideth forever...The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to the place where he arose...The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits...All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again. " The generation could be like the wind, " whirleth about continually. They wander about with no direction, aimlessly going about their lives—seeking direction. In some ways, the war shattered the generation's beliefs in traditional values such as morality, faith, and love. With the absence of these values, it led to the aimless wandering of the generation. They had no aspirations, which left them empty. Alcohol and partying were distractions from the emptiness in their lives. The characters in *The Sun Also Rises* go through the novel in an almost constant state of drunkenness. In chapter three Jake states, "I was a little drunk. Not drunk enough in any

positive sense but just enough to be careless. Here Jake is using alcohol to tolerate being around these people. In chapter thirteen, Jake says, " Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people. " Here, Jake is consuming the alcohol as a distraction. He is distracting himself from what his friends are really like, but once sober, he will once again see his friends for what they truly are...false. Many friendships in this novel have no source of affection, the consumption of alcohol allows them to overlook this problem and drink their problems into nonexistence.

This is just another example of the dissolution from " The Lost Generation," nothing was real for them. Jake Barnes can be viewed as an embodiment of the post-war generation. Jake and the entire lost generation have both been left impotent by the war. Another element that adds to the lack of masculinity in the novel is Jake's insecurities. Jake Barnes never directly mentions his insecurities; however, we must piece together his interactions with the characters to view his insecurities. One example of this is Jake's relationship with Robert Cohn. Jake has a very condescending attitude towards Cohn.

In Cohn's relationship with Frances, he is dominated by her, which is very emasculating. As a result, Jake views Cohn as a weak, powerless man. Cohn also has the tendency to lay out his emotions to others, which is not a very masculine characteristic. There is an instance in chapter five that allows us to see Cohn revealing his emotions to Jake, " Cohn smiled again and sat down. He seemed glad to sit down. What the hell would he have done if he hadn't sat down? ' You say such damned insulting things, Jake. ' ' I'm sorry.

I've got a nasty tongue. I never meant it when I say nasty things. ' I know it,' Cohn said. ' You're really about the best friend I have, Jake. ' God help you, I thought. " In this exchange between Cohn and Jake, we can see Cohn offering his feelings, man-to-man, which is awkward and unwanted by Jake and leaves him feeling embarrassed. The attitude Jake has towards Cohn is a reflection of his own insecurities. The source of Jake's insecurity arises from not only the mental effects of the war, but also the physical. Although Jake never fully comes out and says it during the novel, we are led to believe that Jake was wounded in a way that left him impotent.

Therefore, Jake was physically emasculated by the war. This leaves him to believe that he is less of a man than he was before the war. His war wound is the only thing keeping Brett from entering into a relationship with him. An example of this is in chapter seven, Jake asks, " Couldn't we just live together, Brett? Couldn't we just live together? " Brett replies, " I don't think so. I'd just tromper you with everybody. You couldn't stand it. " He longs to be with her, but Brett knows it is not possible for him to satisfy her sexually. His sense of inadequacy is heightened by Brett's refusal to have a relationship with him.

Lady Brett Ashley is the embodiment of the 1920's New Woman. Her non-conformity makes her one of the most masculine characters in *The Sun Also Rises*. Brett's appearance, her behavior, and open sexuality all make her into this New Woman figure. Brett is first introduced in chapter three and we are given her appearance, " Brett was damned good-looking. She wore a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt, and her hair was brushed back like a boy's. " Although Brett is very pretty, she has a sort of masculine style, which we

can tell from the jersey and tweed material—not to mention her hair cut. In literature, a woman's hair helps to define the female gender and is usually symbolically important. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway has given Brett this short, cropped, masculine hair style. This may seem like an insignificant detail but it helps to minimize Brett's feminine traits and maximize her masculine traits. Brett also demonstrates a masculine behavior with the language she uses and her drunkenness. Although this is a term more commonly used to refer to men, Lady Ashley refers to herself as a "chap." Throughout the novel, Brett always appears to be drunk.

Most the time, when it comes to talking about her and Jake's problems she would rather drink than talk. Brett also has a very open sex life; she does not try to conceal it at all. Her sexual desires are her main reason for not entering into a relationship with Jake. Jake may satisfy her emotional needs, but he cannot satisfy her physical needs. At the very end of the novel we see an instance where Brett admits they would have been great together—"We could have had such a damned good time together." to which Jake replies, "Yes, isn't it pretty to think so?"