

The modernist movement and "the sun also rises"



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The Sun Also Rises is a modernist novel written by Ernest Hemingway, which was published in 1926 and is widely considered to be one of Hemingway's most distinguished literary achievements. This piece of historical fiction is about the life of Jake Barnes after World War I. He was in love with a woman, Lady Brett Ashley, he meant during the war.

Ashley refused to start a relationship with Barnes because of his impotence and spent most of her time switching between men until she got bored and moved on. They lived in Paris with other a few other British and American expatriates and spent all their time drinking and partying before deciding to travel to Spain to watch the bullfighting festival. In this book, Hemingway illustrates many strong themes; including the directionless way of life the Lost Generation seemed to live, the damage that can be caused by sex, as well as it being symbolic of the war, and the exorbitant drinking that is tied to the memories and aftermath of the war. Of the copious amount of motifs demonstrated in the text, the forms that are most prominent are the varying demonstrations of non-traditional masculinity and the insecurities that are present in society post-WWI, which can be displayed by contrasting the varying aspects of the novel's masculine characters, as well as considering the similarities that they may share.

One of the products of comparing Hemingway's fictional masculine personalities show in The Sun Also Rises could be the resulting example of how the principles of society changed over the course of World War I, as well as displaying the aspects of life that remained the same as they always were. Robert Cohn was the only non-veteran among the group of friends; he tried to hold on to the same system of morals, values, and romance that he

believed in and lived by before the war. Cohn grew up feeling like an outcast because he was Jewish, so he took up boxing when he was attending college at Princeton. However, his life was controlled by his insecurities that manifested from his feelings of inadequacy and inferiority, as well as from the way he was treated by the other men: Due to his misunderstood religion and his lack of participation in the war, Robert Cohn was a common target for ridicule and mockery among the posse. On the flip side of the same coin, Jake Barnes, the narrator and protagonist of this novel, was an American veteran who was wounded in WWI and was left impotent as a result.

For many reasons, Barnes was a very fitting symbol for Hemingway's the Lost Generation - the generation of men and women after WWI who thought their lives had no purpose. His confidence, as well as his manhood, were crippled by his war injury, but the rest of his insecurities surfaced when the woman he loved rejected him due to his impotence. When Barnes desperately asked Lady Brett if they could just live together, she crushed his feelings by declining and claiming she would just tromper [him] with everybody (Hemingway 62). As the book went on and Lady Brett didn't change her mind, Barnes' behavior seemed to become more and more cynical. Barnes' uncertainties played a fairly prominent part in his life because he allowed his self-doubt to be the main facet of his personality. Though Jake's condition is clearly the most obvious display of not being able to feel masculine, it is absolutely not the only example.

All of the veterans in this novel feel insecure for some reason or another because they couldn't find the strength to move past their fears. Of all the divergent male characters in Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, one

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could make the argument that Lady Brett Ashley was, in many ways, the more traditionally masculine character out of them all: She had a short haircut, referred to herself as a chap, wore men's clothes, had a masculine name, and an insatiable need for sex. Ashley was even introduced as having her hair brushed back like a boy's. (Hemingway 30). Lady Brett clearly did not worry about her reputation or the way other people perceived her: She was a very independent woman and was not in any rush to get married again, which was considered to be very unusual behavior for a woman during this time period. As men are commonly known for, Lady Brett frequently used different men for her own sexual needs, then discarded them as though they were garbage.

Unlike most of the women in this century, Ashley always seemed to be in control of her life, which gave her opportunities that were generally experienced only by men, and Lady Brett was a very well-connected woman. She refused to enter a relationship with a man she considered to be the love of her life, Jake Barnes, simply because he was impotent and could not perform the way she desired, but constantly toyed with his feelings and enlisted his help with other men. While most of the men in this book seemed to let all of their insecurities control them, Lady Brett Ashley embodied the qualities that were generally given to characters that were manlier. Another important symbol that represents one of the differing versions masculinity in this novel is the bullfighters that live in Spain. Hemingway used bullfighters, specifically Pedro Romero, as an absolute subject of how the male characters should have been perceived in the world. Pedro Romero's life was basically the exact opposite of how the group from Paris's lives were. He was young,

handsome, charming, and talented, as well as confident and very dignified. While the Paris expatriates were living lost and aimless lives, Romero's passion for fighting bulls gave his life a sense of purpose and meaning.

The characters in *The Sun Also Rises* consider bullfighters to be sort of like celebrities. In the second chapter of the books, Robert Cohn is complaining to Jake Barnes that he thinks he may be wasting his life, and Barnes reply's, Nobody ever lives their life all the way up except bullfighters (Hemingway 18), implying that the only people that truly live their lives to the fullest are the people who are genuinely extraordinary. Hemingway illustrated all of the expatriates from *The Sun Also Rises* that lived together in Paris as very different types of people with different thoughts and beliefs. Jake Barnes felt as though the war took away his manhood and confidence, which had left him feeling lost. However, Robert Cohn grew up constantly feeling alienated, but still tried to hang on to the values that he believed in before the war began. Lady Brett Ashley seemed to be one of the more masculine characters, overshadowing all her male counterparts, except for possibly Pedro Romero; who embodies everything a man really should be.

Hemingway was very skilled with illustrating themes by using symbols; he made it a lot easier to understand the messages he was trying to send.