

# [A critical analysis of jake barnes essay sample](https://assignbuster.com/a-critical-analysis-of-jake-barnes-essay-sample/)

In Ernest Hemingway’s novel The Sun Also Rises the character Jake Barnes illustrates the tragic fate of the lost generation. Although literary critics debate the source of Hemingway’s purpose for the protagonist, most of them agree that Jake Barnes portrays the moral, psychological, and physical decay of the postwar generation. His wound impedes him from achieving a loving relationship with Brett. His experiences in San Sebastian only provide a temporary escape from his troubles, but enduring them is inevitable.

Throughout the novel Jake only comes to accept his injury and the repercussions of it, but its does not transform because of his tragic fate. Jake’s loss of masculinity as a result of his wound and inability to enter into a successful relationship with Brett symbolizes the physical and psychological decay of the postwar generation. Men undoubtedly felt a login to express physical love when they returned from combat; however, while they were gone, “ Love, community, and friendship… had been tainted, fast-eroding and corrupted.

The mechanization of love had occurred, and sex was infected; instead of being a liberating experience from modern chaos, it became another form of this chaos” (Collins 14). Although the exact nature of Jake’s wound is debated among critics, Hemingway explains to George Plimpton in an interview: Jake’s “ testicles were intact and not damaged. Thus he was capable of all normal feelings as a man but incapable of consummating them. The important distinction is that his wound was physical and not psychological and the he was not emasculated” (Wagner 31).

Nevertheless, Jake’s inability to feel but not consummate those feelings with Brett certainly results in psychological damage for Jake and adds to the reader’s perception of his tragic fate. The connection between Jake’s physical wound from combat and the emotional torture he feels in the present emerges through his actions. Jake’s wound leads him to become insecure and feminized. Literary critic Amy Cannistraro points out that “ Hemingway gives a voice to Jake’s fear, that acting on his emotion… will only emasculate him further” (18).

For instance, when Jake sees fay men at the bar he says “ they always make me angry” (28). Jake grows jealous because he realizes that the gay men are manlier than himself because they have the ability to consummate physical love. This causes anger because they choose to deprive themselves from that opportunity, while he has no option. To Jake homosexuals are another reminder of his incurable wound. Similarily, Jake’s relationship with Brett highlights the effects the war casts on him. Jake wants a platonic relationship however Brett cannot be in a relationship that prioritizes love over sex.

Exemplifying their conflict, Brett denies Jake saying “ I’d just tromper you with everybody. You couldn’t stand it” (Hemingway 62). Because most women are typically the ones who desire a platonic relationship Jake is essentially feminized. Therefore, Jake’s desire to establish an impossible relationship with Brett is in vain; he attempts to create resolutions to their conflict, but Hemingway seals his fate to depict the irrepressible effects of war. Hemingway further propounds the inescapable effects of the war on Jake in San Sebastian, the central location of his pain and suffering.

Critic Jeremy Collins states that “ there are moments where Jake’s life can temporarily hold richness and fullness…in the world of the outdoors and in the realm of sports” however this does not cure the caused damage (24). Supporting this argument, San Sebastian is the site where the “ ramifications of Jake’s impotency is felt most deeply. It is the site of Brett and Robert Cohn’s friendly fornication early in the novel. It is also the location of the layover for Brett and Mike Campbell on their way to Hotel Montoya to join the Fiesta” (115).

Watching Romero in the bull-ring reminds Jake of his lacking masculinity; as a result, he gets more drunk “ than [he] ever remembered having been” and feels “ like hell” (Hemingway 227). Although he attempts to escape his pain by drinking, Jake realizes that “ it won’t do any good” (226). Likewise, Jake uses money as another mean to find some purpose and enjoyment in his life: “ I paid my way into enough things that I liked, so that I had a good time” (152). However money, sports, nor alcohol can permanently help Jake escape form the effects of an injury that constantly attract his attention and lead him to a state of self- pity.

Hemingway’s ambiguous ending for the novel reveals Jake’s stoic nature and tragic fate. Ian Crouch states that the novel ends in a “ sharp, sad, and perfectly balanced ‘ isn’t it pretty to think so? ’ ” (1). A scholar suggests that Jake’s mere level of restraint is key to demonstrating his development: “ He does not grovel. He does not beg. He does not surrender to sentimental, wistful, longing, imagining. He also does not respond in anger or resentment” (Collins 148). He adds “ Brett and Jake will no longer live under the illusion of lovers, damned lovers, fate-stricken lovers, lovers in thought, lovers in imagination or lovers at all.

That is over” (149). However, Hemingway himself insists that the novel is “ a tragedy and not a hollow or bitter satire” (Rovit 128). Literary critic Peter Hays interprets the end of the novel saying that Hemingway’s “ concept of the hero … is one of burlesque elements … if the hero does not win, neither does he lose. [Jake] holds life to a draw” (54). Therefore Jake may have “ come to terms with his wound” and “ emerged, at the end of the novel, transformed, changed, newer to himself” (Collins 150), but he still must live with an incurable would, leading to a tragic fate and promising pain and suffering.

Essentially, Jake does not transform but instead reaches acceptance of his wound and what it entails. Ultimately, Ernest Hemingway reveals the difficulty of living in a world of cultural decline after the war through Jake Barnes’ struggles in The Sun Also Rises. Although Jake survives the war with only one external wound, he experiences extreme emotional and psychological trauma. Through Jake’s character Hemingway highlights the powerlessness of many men and the disarray of life after war. Jake’s attempt to develop a relationship with Brett is in vain, as are his quests for happiness and meaning.

While Jake many reveal some sense of transformation at the end of the novel, the reader must remember that his future still undoubtedly holds pain and suffering because of his tragic fate caused by the war.

## Works Cited

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