

The cyclical  
consequences of war  
in the sun also rises



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In the novel *The Sun Also Rises*, Ernest Hemingway utilizes cyclical themes to communicate an underlying message about the negative effects of war. By integrating cyclicity into the novel's main characters, Hemingway portrays how World War I created the Lost Generation, stuck in a turbulent cycle characterized by alcoholism, moral and religious confusion, and purposeless lives in order to successfully reveal the horrors of war. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway uses characterization that demonstrates the characters' cyclicity as his most direct mean of communicating the perils of war. Consequently, the main characters, Lady Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes, are both members of the Lost Generation, plagued by "Fake European standards... [drinking themselves] to death... [becoming] obsessed by sex... [and spending] all [their] time... not working" (120). Brett is culpable of indulging in all of these traits whereas Jake is incapable of having sex and thinks "it [feels] pleasant to be going to work" (43). As both Brett and Jake participated in World War I, their inability to be together as a result of various events resulting from the war leads them to fall into their respective patterns. While they share many resemblances, Brett and Jake's biggest similarity is their need to escape reality through various manners.

Throughout the novel, Lady Brett Ashley appears trapped in a cycle distinguished by frivolous romantic affairs and bouts of depression. Brett's personality flaws, her restlessness and inability to be satisfied, result directly from her scars obtained in the war. While Hemingway refrains from direct characterization, through conversation, he abruptly reveals her exploits in the war; "' she was a V. A. D. in a hospital...[,] her own true love... kicked off with the dysentery,'" and she married a crazy war veteran who made threats on her life (46). As a result, she lives a meaningless life and merely occupies

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herself with being a restive romantic. As the novel progresses, Brett's actions develop into a pattern: falling in love, going on trysts, breaking her own or someone else's heart, and returning back to Jake. This cycle is both unyielding and unsatisfying as it consistently leaves her where she started. Brett has such relationships with Count Mippipopolous, an elderly veteran of "seven wars and four revolutions" who is not a member of the Lost Generation and personifies the Victorian ideals, Robert Cohn, a foil character who, having not served in the war, does not fall into the cycle, and Pedro Romero, a young bullfighter who personifies innocence (66). Her incompatibility with those who are not members of the Lost Generation, whether for selfish reasons, such as with Cohn, or selfless reasons, as with Romero, shows her inability to recapture an actual and emotional love, like the one she lost in the war. Brett's relationship with Count Mippipopolous exemplifies this because although their values could not be more opposite, she remains with him for his money and he for her looks. When Brett eventually grows restless and refuses his money, the relationship comes to a halt, albeit not on poor terms. Although not heartbroken, Brett's inability to connect emotionally takes its toll and she once again finds herself alone. Soon after dating Count Mippipopolous, she goes on a tryst with Robert Cohn, Jake's former friend. When they return from this excursion and Brett is reunited with her fiancé, Mike Campbell, Cohn is so lovestruck that he finds it difficult to disregard his sentiments towards her and follows Brett, Mike and Jake on a trip to Spain. This ends tumultuously, with Cohn's heart shattering. While in Spain, Brett courts Pedro Romero, a nineteen-year old bullfighting prodigy. The relationship that results is very different because although she is very affectionate of Romero, for altruistic reasons, she does not want to

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ruin his innocence, she deserts him. Though Brett does this for Pedro's own fortune, it once again portrays her inability to make emotional relations. After all of this, she alerts Jake and tells him to "Come [to] Hotel Montana" because she "[is] in trouble" (242). Jake obediently travels to Madrid to aid her, consequently completing another revolution of the cycle. Although she comes closest to achieving true contentment with Jake Barnes, the narrator, his inability to satisfy her sexual desires ruins any chance of this. By submerging Brett into a cycle of emotional sorrow and hopelessness triggered by the tragic events of World War I, Hemingway helps put a face on the war, thus increasing the effect of *The Sun Also Rises* as an anti-war novel. Whereas Brett seeks elusion in promiscuity, Jake does so through alcoholism. After suffering a devastating wound in the war, one that renders him impotent, Jake realizes his only shot at true love and happiness is tarnished and forever ruined. Although Jake and Brett share a deep love, his impotency dissuades Brett from pursuing a relationship. Instead, Jake is merely put on hold. Accordingly, when Brett goes on assignments only to return heartbroken, Jake comforts and takes care of her. Jake, realizing that he will forever serve only as her second choice, falls into alcoholism. Throughout the novel, Jake, who believes that "A bottle of wine [is] good company," spends most of his time getting "tight" (236). While he rarely openly admits it, Jake uses his alcoholism to combat the devastating nature of his wound and the heartbreak associated with Brett. The latter is evident when, immediately after learning that Brett has run off with Pedro Romero, he confesses that "[he] began to feel drunk but [he] did not feel any better" (226). Later, Brett pleads, "' Don't get drunk, Jake... You don't have to'" (250). Of course, his response is simply one of denial as he altogether avoids <https://assignbuster.com/the-cyclical-consequences-of-war-in-the-sun-also-rises/>

the topic. Whereas the war directly alters Brett's personality traits, by taking away his ability to reproduce, the war indirectly ruins Jake's chance at true love, thus causing him to resort to alcoholism as a means of reprieve. Much like with Brett, Hemingway entangles cyclical patterns into Jake's character so as to further emphasize the multidimensional negative effects of war. In the novel *The Sun Also Rises*, therefore, Ernest Hemingway uses recurring cyclical patterns in the form of personality traits to communicate the destructive qualities of war. Hemingway connects Lady Brett Ashley and Jake Barnes' entrapment in vicious cycles of alcoholism and recklessness to the events of World War I. Through his weaving of harmful cyclical patterns into the personalities of the main characters, Hemingway is able to transform *The Sun Also Rises* into an epic novel warning about the dangers and hazards of war.