

BRETT ASHLEY AS A NEW WOMAN: A STUDY OF THE NOVEL *THE SUN ALSO RISES* FROM PSYCHOANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The Sun Also Rises is about the traumatic events of Great War I and the characters of the novel go through traumatic experiences in one way or the other. The characters are suffering from war trauma. The main focus in the novel is to portray the characters of Jake Barnes and Ashley Brett who are stressed and homeless because of their traumatic experiences of war. It examines, how people remember traumatic events and also the symptoms and problems of the characters. In this study the theories of Freud and Cathy Caruth on trauma are relied on, to examine and investigate the psychological ailments of the characters. The novel chronicles the physical and emotional volcano of the characters lost in darkness. The novel is about the scenes of death and brutal killing that made the characters sick and neurotic in real life. Ernest Hemingway once told Scott Fitzgerald that *The Sun Also Rises* is rotten; "the novel was a hell of a sad story whose instruction only instruction was how people go to hell" (*Ernest Hemingway, Selected Letters* 183). The World War I explodes the collective population and psyche as the events of the war affected the culture and the mindset of the people. Hemingway through the novel introduces the themes of declining age, death, despair, loss of self and boredom of life

Keyword: Trauma, war, injury, stress, trajectory, suffering

Introduction.

Lady Ashley Brett is a multi-faceted character of Hemingway; she personifies the generic female alcoholic having the ability to "target the emotions of any man who will have anything to do with her, hopeful that he will somehow restore the integrity of her womanhood" (Fussell 64). She is a neurotic woman and she uses men to restore herself. She married someone who never loved her. Lord Ashley was a sailor who could not adjust to a civilian life after the war was over:

When he came home he wouldn't sleep in a bed. Always made Brett sleep on the floor. Finally, when he got really bad, he used he to tell her he'd kill her. Always slept with a loaded service revolver. Brett used to take the shells out when he'd gone to sleep. She hasn't had an absolutely happy life. Brett damned, shame, too. She enjoys things so. (*Hemingway, The Sun also Rises*207)

Brett accepts changes whole heartedly and flouts all traditional norms. She maintains dignity by celebrating those elements of the past that are worth honoring, and making it clear that the world has changed. Her self confidence sets an example for other women as she believes that woman is no longer a puppet in the hands of man. Brett fights for the equality of women. Like men, she has short hair, wears masculine clothes and enjoys hard drinking. She rejects the traditional assumption that woman is destined for procreation as she says: "I'm not going to be one of these bitches that ruin children". She gives courage to other women to raise the voice to get equality among all spheres. Brett constantly seeks fulfillment "without hope of achieving it is to revise the framework of sexual exchange between men women within Hemingway's text" (Nagel 98). She loves being pursued by her men. Her androgynous physical attractiveness enhances her sex appeal. Though Jake is "emotionally unstable" Brett cannot live without companionship. In spite of Jake's emasculation she shows her unwavering fascination for him. While in traditional Western courtship narratives, "the woman's power is the power to be pursued", but whereas in the case of Brett's courtship of Jake, she not only "maximizes her opportunities ... by retaining the interest of multiple suitors", but she also prolongs indefinitely "the powers of pursuit she now wields" (Martin 70).

Brett Ashley uses sex as a therapy to escape from the worries and tensions of life. She becomes a sex-addict. Sexual addiction implies a medical condition or pathology. The critics observe that Brett is a whore penned by Hemingway's misogynistic bravado. Leslie Fielder comments thus:

Brett never becomes a woman really; she is mythical rather than redeemed. And if she is the most satisfactory female character in all Hemingway, thus s because for once she is presented not as an animal or as a nightmare, but quite audaciously as a goddess, the bitch goddess.(28)

The plot of the story parodies the romantic concept of love. Jake waits for a lady who is attached to someone else. Jake's view of love reveals the constant decline of modern love. Jake's story is romantic and thrilling but it is a symbolic explosion of traditional romance and marriage. Jake Barnes witnesses a parade of sexual cripples and in Book one. Jake reports: "the dancing locals took Bill and me by the arms and put us in the circle...Brett wanted to dance but they did not want her too. They wanted her as an image to dance around"(159). This moment pin points the neurotic anxiety of Brett who wants to overcome the feelings of trauma through her dance therapy. The centrality of her place symbolizes her important role in the novel; she is the heart of the novel and a woman traumatized by war. Like Jake she struggles to lead a normal life but remains obsessed by her horrible past. She can never forget the tragic death of her husband in the war Hemingway depicts the traumatic experiences of the war-ridden individuals struggling to survive in a harsh universe. Jake is not a superhuman portrayed by Hemingway. He has many short comings; his

friendship with Cohn becomes problematic. He joins baiting of Cohn who is a Jew in a shameful manner; he tries to hold his friends at Pamplona but fails and has to pay a heavy price for the failure in the rupture with Monotoya. Jake tries his best to bridge the gap between aspiration and achievement but the gap remains. Jake has to endure great pressure and often he looks confused and bewildered in the plot. The critics have been very harsh with Brett Ashley as they labeled her as a “destructive bitch.” The feminist critics found her a complex character; she has been described as a war victim struggling to find “a way to live in it.” She is also called a New Woman of the 1920s, seeking a “place in the postwar age of liberation” (Martin 68). She “has also been called a role model for women since she had the courage to define her own standards and abide by own authentic self” (Willingham 34). The novel is about Brett; a “story of the lady” and an investigation of her history.

Brett Ashley is a typical flapper of the Jazz age; a liberal woman likes Catherine Barkley of *A Farewell to Arms* of Hemingway. Brett has short hair, masculine clothes, hard drinking and is always fired by sexual promiscuity. Brett trades in her tight bodice and long sleeves and hair becoming as a role model of the twentieth century woman. She ventures out of her private sphere of home and doesn't want to be the “angel of the home” any longer. She is seen rubbing out her elbows and drinking whisky with her male friends. Brett is staying in Paris, the fashion capital of the world as her dress and hair style reveal the impact of fashion trends on her personality. Inwardly she is torn and broken but she tries to forget the memories of war and struggles to begin her new life.

Wendy Martin in the essay “Brett Ashley as New Woman in *The Sun Also Rises*” comments: “Gone are the long skirts, hustles, and constricted waists: New clothes designed by Coco Chanel and Erie are intended for movement. The short skirts and light fabrics of the new fashions for women shocked traditionalists” (Martin 50). She wants to be in the company of the “chaps.” Georgette, the prostitute tells Jake: “Everybody's sick I'm sick too and Francis, the lover of Robert Cohn sees her chance to have children slipping away with Cohn are also barren and traumatized women characters” (51). Brett has been a nurse on the Italian front and lost her lover in the war. She is also a wounded character like Jakes. She survives the colossal violence of War, and struggles to forget the causes of her shattered life through the sex therapy and enjoying the fruit of promiscuity in Europe. He falsely believes that Brett is a loyal woman and serious in love and intimate relations. He describes Brett in his meeting as “absolutely fine and straight” (58). The dissolution of her two marriages; the breaking of all relationships shattered her life. She bitterly observes: “I had such a hell of happy life with the British aristocracy” (203).

Brett is a mighty achievement of Hemingway and her actions in the novel evoked heated arguments in the critics of Hemingway. Jake is charmed by her modern dress; she looks “damned good” wearing a “slipover jersey sweater and a tweed skirt (29). Allan Tate (1969) calls her: “hard-boiled.” (18). Theodore Bardacke says: “Brett is a woman devoid of womanhood”(25). Jackson Benson observes that she is a “female who never becomes a woman”(43). Edmund Wilson describes her as “an exclusively destructive force” (238) and John Aldridge observes that Brett is “compulsive bitch”(24). Delbert Wylder sees her as a Janus-like character” (23).

Brett's unconventional dress and her liberal attitude in smoking and drinking. Her booze and sex and other adventures are strategies to escape from the wounds of her psyche. Brett appears with a group of homosexuals parodying the rigid attitude of the people. They are in high spirit and later dance together to break the monotony of life. But soon Brett becomes depressed and Jake tells her: “I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again” (64). Her husband Lord Ashley was shell-shocked and her grief over his death increased with the passage of time. Brett's is sterile as she has no children or pregnancy but has myriad lovers. Jake's impotence is contrasted with her contraceptive sterility by Hemingway. The critics call “her nymphomaniac, a drunk, a bitch and a circe who turns men into swine” (159). Brett tries her best to dominate Jake claiming that she “is principally a constrained figure running after Brett in vain. Gatsby if Fitzgerald also runs after Daisy even after her marriage with Tom Buchanan because she is his soul mate but Brett is not the soul mate of Jake. During their fishing trip in Burguete, Bill tells Jake:

You're an expatriate. You've lost touch with the soil. You get precious. Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking not working. You're an expatriate see? You hang around cafes.(109)

Brett has the power to fascinate as Delber Wylder argues: “Brett is tremendously attractive and sexually stimulating, she is a threat, and no one, least of all the critics, has been able to forgive her for that” (32). Laurie Watkins argues that “the bond between Jake and Brett is actually symbiotic” (72). Interestingly, Brett's ability to survive impresses Jake: “But what if the secret agenda is to admire and emulate Brett? What if Brett is the woman Jake would in some sense like to be?” (178). Indeed, Brett is a dynamic character; center of attraction of all male characters and Hemingway highlights the contraceptive manifestation of her trauma. She is a free American woman but cannot come out of the bog of trauma till the end of the novel. Georgette is another woman; sick and sterile, having reduced love to a simple monetary exchange. It is found that the husband of Brett Lord Ashley terrorized her.

Hemingway reveals the main cause of depression, frustration and inner turmoil of Brett who led a horrible life with her husband Lord Ashley. She remained psychologically disturbed for a long time. She joined the company of the expatriates that included Robert Cohn, Jake Barnes and other guys who entertained her and promoted her sex adventures. Mike explains Brett's depression: “Yes, I've had such a hell of a happy life with the British aristocracy”(66).

Brett has to work hard to sleep with the Jew Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero who is a young and innocent bull fighter. Mike concludes: “She hasn't had an absolutely happy life, Brett damned shame, too. She enjoys things so”(207). Hemingway depicts the rebellious spirit of Brett portraying her as flapper who rejects the traditional assumption that woman is destined for

procreation. Brett is not interested in giving birth to children and she takes precautions not to become pregnant. Jake loves country life but Brett has no love for the country life; “she knows that it is the urban centers that provide mobility and choices for the new woman, not the country, with its traditionally limited vision of woman as reproductive being” (59). Wendy Maritn observes that the rebellion of Brett is inspired less by modern feminism and more by her inner trauma. She has experienced horror in her life and this is why she flouts all norms of the society and in her ambition to enjoy emancipation, she embraces her sterility. In the introduction part of the novel it is reported that Brett is a mother of a son and Ashley wouldn’t divorce her but there was a separation and Brett went off with Mike Campbell leaving her son alone. Her abandonment of her child depicts her selfishness and her selfishness. Her cold-hearted attitude is unbelievable; it is her contemptuous response to the horror of her marriage. Her trauma is a testimony of the fact that the wounds of Brett are very deep and the horrible experiences can damage a woman at any time. She tries three therapies to overcome her depression; first romantic love and sexuality; second the wine; and the third smoking and drinking fearlessly. When the crisis comes in her life she calls Jake and not to anyone. She wants to marry someone as she admits to Jake: “I’m thirty four you know!” and in mentioning her age she gives the hint that the period of her sterility is over and there is possibility in her of having children (92). Brett is a modern woman with revolutionary ideas as she says: “I’m not going to be one of these bitches that ruin children”(52). The beauty, grace, innocence and grandeur of Brett created sensation in the characters in the novel. Brett is really in love with many European outsiders. Romero is the only character and a suitor of Brett whom she doesn’t want to destroy at all. Brett is under the spell of masculine personality of Romero:

Everything of which he could control the locality he did in front of her all that afternoon. Never once did he look up...Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too. But he did not do it for their any loss to himself. He gained by it all through the afternoon. (160)

Romero wants Brett to look smart and charming: “Romero wanted me to grow my hair out...I’d look so like hell...He said it would make me more womanly I’d look a fright” (246). Jake recognizes their mutual wounds as Brett is unable of procreation as Jake. The problem with Brett is her overwhelming anguish and the wounded psyche. In chapter seven of the novel, Hemingway describes the scene of the party enjoyed by the Count, Brett and Jake. Brett is in very bad mood as she is worried about her bleak future. She expresses her anguish thus:

I should say its rotten luck. I’ve wasted two years and a half on him now. And I don’t know now if any man will ever want to marry me. Two years ago I could have married anybody I wanted, down at Cannes. All the old ones that wanted to marry somebody chic and settle down were crazy about me. Now I don’t think I could get anybody. (41)

Jake dances with Brett and the music and party celebrations are in full swing but all of a sudden Brett is overwhelmed with traumatic feelings: “I don’t know. I just feel terrible” (56). Jake fails to understand the sudden change in her behavior; Brett decides to leave the party saying: “I had the feeling as in a nightmare of it all being something repeated, something I had been through and that now I must go through again” (56). Jake feels upset and expresses his genuine sympathy for Brett who is under emotional fit. Brett concludes: “Oh! Jake, please let’s never talk about” (247). Brett’s disordered and traumatic life symbolizes moral degradation of the world of *The Sun Also Rises* as Brett has been depicted as insouciant, careless and femme fatale; she is dangerous to men. Edmund Wilson argues that Brett has redemptive role in the novel to save the life of men who are leading a traumatic and alienated life after the War. Mike observes that Brett “loves looking after people” (203). When Cohn insists to act as a knight Brett wants to save his life performing the role of a liberal woman free of sexual repression. It is pertinent to note that Scott Fitzgerald advised Hemingway to cut the fifteen pages of the novel in which he portrayed Lady Brett as the main heroine and his earlier script begins “with Lady Ashley Brett living in Paris”(23).

Hemingway conceded and the present structure of *The Sun Also Rises* is about a group of expatriates wounded in the War and leading a traumatic life. She falls in love with so many people but her best man is Jake Barnes who is physically wounded and sexually impotent. Brett knows that he is the only man who doesn’t like to possess her. Hemingway has given a new interpretation of the sexual politics; Jake is proud of his masculinity and exhibits his passion for bull fighting. Sex and friendship are inversely dramatized in this novel. Brett is a very clever woman; she breaks up her relationships when her lovers try to possess her. She is fascinated by the masculine body of Romero: “His bull fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements and always quietly and calmly let the horns pass him close to each time” (153). Romero remained undaunted and fearless facing a dangerous bull and looked graceful. Jake remarked: “It was not brilliant bull fighting; it was only perfect bull fighting” (195). Philip Young called the entire episode as sensational, romantic and an expressing of “grace under pressure”(17). Romero received serious beating he showed brilliant balance of mind and continued the fight till the end. Hemingway observes thus:

I sat beside Brett and explained to Brett what it was all about I told her about watching the bull, not the horse, when the bulls charged the picadors, and got her to watching the picador place the point of his picture so that she saw what it was all about, so that it became more something that was going on with a definite end, and less of a spectacle with unexplained horrors. (153)

Brett doesn’t like to be dominated by men. She likes and loves Romero who is a nineteen years young and masculine Romero but when he finds her domesticating, she repels. But Brett rejects his proposal and scraps the ideal of female dependency of the Victorians. She says: “he wanted me to grow my hair out. Me, with long hair. I’d look so like hell” (242). Jake considers his predicament in the same night and reports: “I lay awake thinking and my mind jumping around...I was thinking about Brett and my mind stopped jumping around and started to go in smooth waves. Then all of a sudden I started to cry. Then after a while it

was better...and then I went to sleep”(39). The romantic encounter of Jake and Brett brings psychological pain to Jake leading to his tears and exhaustion. Jake’s impotence expands beyond his physical wound. His relationship with Brett is illusive and this awareness brings traumatic sufferings in the life of Jake. Cathy Caruth argues in *Unexplained Experience* that “the shock of the mind’s relation to the threat of death...not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not yet been fully known” (62). In Pamplona Brett has an opportunity to enjoy a night with Romero.

Conclusion

Brett no longer remains a sufferer rather emerges as a new woman who flouts all the norms. Brett is radiant and full of enthusiasm. It was a bright sunny day as she said: “I feel altogether changed. You’ve no idea Jake”(207). She complains that all men made her miserable but today she is in high spirits. In Paris, she complained that “Oh! Darling I’ve been so miserable” (20). But Brett looks radiant and happy and feels “altogether changed” (20). Brett has found sexual gratification for the first time in a long time. Hemingway gives us that signal at the very time Romero and Brett are consummating the sexual union. When the enraged Robert Cohn storms into the Cafe Suizo and asks Jake where Brett is, Mike Campbell replies: "Brett's gone off with the bull-fighter chap. They're on their honeymoon"(190). Brett near the end of the novel banishes Romero from the premises and sends the boy away since she doesn’t want to ruin his life. She cries after he is gone and says: “You know. I think that boy’s got a future. But personally I don’t want him around” (63).

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