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Literary Theory and Writing
Gender Criticism Proposal
October 24, 2012

Overview


Ernest Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* appears to present Brett Ashley as a true bitch who emasculates all of the male characters. Feminist readers immediately pick up on the negative portrayal of Brett: her nonchalant promiscuity, insatiable libido, and insensitivity to Jake Barnes. However, one may want to view the relationships between Brett and the men in a broader perspective. Hemingway places the focus entirely on the reaction of the male characters to Brett; in other words, he wants the reader to notice the individual struggles that the men face in regards to the ideal of manhood. Brett is an empowered, dominating woman and therefore represents the rise of women and the feminization of men. The empowerment of Brett’s character in the novel is not a collective insult to women but is rather an individual challenge to men. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway uses the empowered female character of Brett to redefine masculinity; Jake’s reaction to feminization represents the new masculine response to the modern woman.

I believe my thesis is sound because it is quite debatable. Many readers of *The Sun Also Rises* believe that Hemingway writes Brett negatively, and I do not believe this is true at all. The narrator, Jake Barnes, is the only true “man” in the entire novel and adores Brett. It is Jake’s reaction to Brett that matters, because Jake represents the proper way to respond to the empowered woman and the rise of feminism.
Outline

My introduction will be very similar to my overview as printed above. My thesis statement is as follows: In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway uses the empowered female character of Brett to redefine masculinity; Jake’s reaction to feminization represents the new masculine response to the modern woman.

Brett is the portrayal of the rise of feminism and the modern woman; Hemingway experienced this between 1890 and 1920 but the rise of women is very relevant today. Her character is exaggerated to purposely show the new domination of women over men. Brett dominates the male characters sexually, emotionally, and socially. *Sources to include: textual examples, Forter, and Fantina.*

Robert Cohn, Mike Campbell, and Pedro Romero do not react properly to the modern woman and Hemingway uses these characters to demonstrate the weaknesses in masculinity. Robert Cohn is the man who still believes in romance and emotional connections between men and women; therefore he is positively trampled by Brett because he allows himself to be. Mike Campbell endures Brett’s affairs and cheating scandal with Robert; therefore he is seen as the weakened, “cuckold” man. Pedro Romero represents pre-modern masculinity; the kind that is found in traditional Spain partaking in a bullfight. He represents the true, authentic man but he is outdated. Romero attempts to tame Brett and domesticate her and Hemingway wants the reader to see that the new, modern woman is not to be forced into a gender role. *Sources to include: textual examples, Fantina, Forter, Onderdonk.*

Jake Barnes represents the new, feminized form of masculinity and is therefore the only true man in the novel. He allows himself to be feminized by Brett and acknowledges it without displaying an overflow of emotions. Jake is impotent, yes, but he relies on sexuality that is not
driven by sex alone. Critics label Jake’s endurance to be rather masochistic in that he willingly suffers because of his repressed desires and emotions. Jake learns to find pleasure in the act of repression and behaves properly in response to the rise of women and Brett’s tirade. All the while, Jake still adores Brett and is willing to continue tolerating her at the novel’s close. Jake is the example that Hemingway is trying to set for men; he is trying to encourage a self-conscious, sensitive, yet stoic masculinity in the face of feminization. Sources to include: textual examples, Fantina, Onderdonk, Forter.

Hemingway’s redefining of masculinity in the face of feminization is absolutely crucial because it encourages men to not only tolerate the rise of women but to embrace it.

Abstract of Forter


The conflict between “invulnerable” masculinity and “emotionally expressive” manhood is linked to the notion of physical and emotional loss; all of which is seen in Jake’s attempt to mourn his wound in The Sun Also Rises. Forter uses the theory of Michael Kimmel to explain men’s fear of feminization in 1890-1920 and Hemingway’s attempt to work through the loss of the “autonomous male” due to the uprising of women in the middle-class male social power. The Sun Also Rises attempts to mourn the phallic ideal by using “stylistic substitutes”—fishing, drinking, speaking, Hemingway’s writing style, and bullfighting. All substitutes must fail because such an ideal is irreplaceable. A man loves his manhood in the image of himself and he has not experienced it existing apart from himself. Therefore, Jake’s wound also depicts the loss
of a “genteel, sentimental, and implicitly feminine masculinity,” which sets him apart from the other men in the novel because his masculinity is not at risk of softening.

Forter argues that the loss of masculinity is also an opportunity to reinvent masculinity “in a less rigidly constrained, less physically defensive, and less socially destructive fashion.” I will expand on this concept in my essay to show that Hemingway does in fact reinvent masculinity through Jake and his reaction to not only the other men but to Brett, the new woman and the representation of the rise of empowered feminism.

Abstract of Fantina


Hemingway creates empowered, “phallic” female characters and his wounded male heroes submit to them willingly. In doing so, Hemingway presents diverse forms of masculinity and even touches on masochism. In The Sun Also Rises, he combines the self-conscious, sensitive qualities of Jake with the “solitary, heroic qualities” of Romero. The phallic signifier is absent due to Jake’s wound. Brett possesses the phallus so that Jake can receive it. For Hemingway, penetration is not the only method for satisfying the female character and it is the withholding of the penetration that builds the pleasure of the male heroes. Brett is idolized when she is danced around in Pamplona and becomes “a goddess with the power to nurture or destroy.” Jake’s willingness to endure the suffering is what creates the new version of masculinity. In the end of the novel, he is triumphant over the other men and “recuperates the function of the phallus” all while submitting entirely to Brett. The last line, “Isn’t it pretty to think so?” reflects his willingness to endure further suffering while still remaining a man.
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Fantina’s description of Brett as an empowered, phallic woman is useful for my paper because I want to break away from the idea that Brett is the root of all destruction in the novel. Jake represents a new form of masculinity because he tolerates Brett and does not need physical reassurance of his manhood, unlike the other men. Hemingway is not presenting women in a negative way in *The Sun Also Rises* but is rather presenting them as they are today—empowered and androgynous. Hemingway wants the focus to be on the masculine acceptance of femininity and the rise of women.

**Abstract of Onderdonk**


Onderdonk argues that Hemingway’s dominance in authorship is parallel to the “new” form of masculinity he presents; in order to interpret and master the “difficult truths” of writing, the author must realize that he is feminized. The baseline of this form of masculinity is in fact feminization and the male’s reaction to it determines whether or not he is an authentic man. To Hemingway, the men versus the inauthentic men differ just as much if not more than men and women. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake is one of the only real men in the novel because he acknowledges his feminization and allows it to empower him instead of fearing it or living in ignorance. Jake withholds dignity in the face of feminization; he masters emotional restraint, just like Hemingway does in his style of writing. Jake’s emotional repression is masochistic in that he indulges in his repressed emotions in a pleasurable manner. Therefore, Onderdonk makes the point that just as Hemingway dominated the art of “serious writing,” Jake triumphs over the
other men because he is able to acknowledge his own feminization. He realizes he is feminized not just in the sense of his wound, but in his reaction to the empowered woman.

Onderdonk’s article will be very useful for my essay. I am going to focus heavily on Jake’s acceptance of the rise of empowered women. The rise of women is not critiqued by Hemingway, but I believe he is in fact critiquing the male’s reaction to the empowered woman. In *The Sun Also Rises*, Jake can endure Brett’s attempts to “ruin” him because, as Onderdonk states, even she has a “limited understanding” of their relationship. The modernization of masculinity must occur in order to match the modern woman, and feminization is absolutely crucial in the process.

**Timeline**

- Begin drafting Sunday, October 28.
- Re-write and edit preliminary draft on Monday, October 29.
- Visit Dr. Pennington Wednesday with preliminary draft Wednesday, October 31.
- Touch-up draft on Thursday, November 1.
- Turn in draft on due date Friday, November 2.