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Celebration of Free Will and Liberation in *The Sun also Rises*

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Abstract

The paper examines the female character named Ashley Brett as a character enjoying her free will and liberating subjectivity in the novel *The Sun also Rises* by Ernest Hemingway. Set in the context of world wars and lost generation, the novel blurs the subjectivity of woman as feminine and of man as masculine figure. The gender boundary between masculine and feminine subjectivity is blurred as women in emerging time of modernity breaks the traditional gender roles. The research has used textual analysis as research method where relevant lines are extracted and interpreted with theoretical insights of feminism. The methodology for this research is feminism where the ideas of Butler and Beauvoir are used. Butler's idea of gender as becoming and Beauvoir's ideas of second sex are used in this paper. As shown in the novel, Brett's affair with Robert, Mike, Romero, the Count and other men nightclub shows that she feels happy to do what her heart says to her, and she enjoys her 'free will' and liberating impulse. A group of men met her, they follow her. She is also known as Lady Ashley in the night club. She is a titled British aristocrat, Robert Cohn is immediately attracted to Brett, but she does not respond at first and leaves the club with Jake. This strong determination is a feature of new woman. The paper concludes that women's subjectivity in modern time is beyond the confinement set by a society. The research implies that modern new women enjoy liberating self.

Keywords: feminine subjectivity, gender, new woman

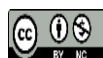
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Introduction

The novel *The Sun also Rises* revolves around the travelling experiences of Brett to the different places with men characters where she also goes enjoying bull-fighting. Previously, she has lived a painful life as it is difficult for women to live in patriarchal society. She is also taken as an object but she develops consciousness and goes against all kinds of domination to emerge as liberating bird.

Women's history of liberation is not long. Women were not considered as independent being until 1920. Beauvoir (1953) argues that humanity is largely male-oriented which often subjugate women. They were called second sex and inferior race. By the 1920s, they have not been the status of the weaker sex and gradually involved in mainstream politics and included as men in society. Though, Brett is presented as a flapper with mini skirt and short haircut, she enjoys her sense of freedom. Being a woman, she sleeps in a hotel with men and gives her address to them. She enjoys kissing them and to wander with them. Men follow her. She kisses them as a indication to growing sense of freedom in women.

Literature Review

The novel has been analyzed by different critics from different perspectives. Saunders (2018) discusses how the theme of unproductivity is found in the modern texts like *The Sun Also Rises*. He asserts, "Plot, theme, setting, and characterization in *The Sun Also Rises* all point to connections between reproductive failure and pessimistic worldviews. Barrenness is a pronounced feature of the human environment in which the narrative unfolds" (p. 211). Barrenness is considered as common phenomenon. Saunders argues that every man who sees Brett immediately desires her: she is regarded as a woman with undeniably high mate value.

Saunders also brings issue of modernity, sexual incompetence. Men competing with other men with futility are found in the novel. Saunders (2018) asserts that her fashion-forward attire and hairstyle are suggestively daring; they set her apart, distinguishing her from more ordinary, less exciting women. Men as radically different in background, age, and temperament as Robert Cohn and Pedro Romero desire her as a long-term mate. He mentions:

Thus the novel portrays men competing with one another for sexual access to a woman of doubtful reproductive worth: libidinous energy is expended with little likelihood of positive procreative outcome. The overwhelming sense of futility permeating the novel (of things already being over), ascribed in large part to physical and psychological damage inflicted by World War I, is mirrored in the evolutionary biological futility of the sexual activity so prominently foregrounded in the novel's plot. (Saunders, 2018, p. 213)

There is overwhelming sense of futility permeating the novel from the beginning like the issue of love, physical and psychological damage due to World War I, futility of the sexual activity. They are prominently foregrounded in the novel's plots which are thematically highlighted.

Saunders also discusses about the characters like Pedro Romero who successively, within the space of a very few times, married to Ashley. The men could not understand Brett as well. Brett's libido is higher and she is a female protagonist whose sexual urge is conspicuously hard, just as strong as that exhibited by the men who desire to get her or more than their desire for sex. She has the erotic motivation which compels deceive and dominate. Saunders (2018) writes, "She is a woman of unrelenting ardor—a quivering mass of proximal impulses—whose many mating serve no ultimate, reproductive purpose" (p. 214). She has a strong sexual libido. Similarly, Nagel (2006) talks about Brett who is an extraordinary female character: ". . . a woman but an extraordinary woman for the age, a point not clear unless she is considered in historical context. From this perspective, the women in *The Sun Also Rises* might be regarded" (p. 92). This woman is a strong, bold and masculine. She has motivation and courage to associate her with her own standards and law that she can define. She is a complex character for psychological analysis.

Similarly, Onderdonk (2006) argues that her condition is difficult "to be feminized" (p. 61). He further asserts

that men are like women and women are like men, “Hemingway himself uses, the metaphorical representation of men acting or being treated ‘like a woman -that is, adopting or being forced into states of shameful passivity or disempowerment’” (p. 61). The reversal of role is a questionable issue in the novel, “The observation that gendered difference has been overvalued in relation to other, interrelated forms of identity is a foundational tenet of the burgeoning field of whiteness studies” (p. 68). Her identity within the narrow sense of feminist movement is not a singular, monolithic category to be controlled, but it critique and “ignores the specificity of the category of white masculinity itself” (p. 68). The complex attitude toward male feminization is the issue of the novel. The novel crosses the “sexual orthodoxy and his transgressions, since in his view the proper modern author, culturally and professionally pressured to demonstrate manly authority, must yet abandon many traditional markers of that authority precisely due to perceived changes in the conditions of modernity” (p. 71). In modernity, the traditional markers are removed and avoided.

Hemingway (2025) himself argues, “This is a novel about a lady. Her name is Lady Ashley and when the story begins she is living in Paris and it is Spring. That should be a good setting for a romantic but a highly moral story. As everyone knows Paris is a very happy and romantic time” (p. 1). He mentions that the novel is about a lady named Lady Ashley and when the story begins she is living in Paris and it is Spring. He further mentions, “It was the boredom and the uncertainty of their position that made Brett drink more as she did and there was nothing about the alcoholic about her. Set, at least, for a long time. They spent their time sleeping as late as possible and then drinking” (p. 3). She is free to choose her life style. Many men have come to her life without any certainty.

The next character Jake’s situation with Brett is also questioned if seen from masculine discourse of dominant ideology. Cloonan (2018) talks about Lady Brett Ashley has used Jake for her purpose and Brett is one to the most complex character, “. . . of alienation allegedly based on some traumatic experiences but who, eight years after the armistice, have turned putative psychological damage into something of a fashion statement” (p. 101). The novel shows traumatic experiences. The novel shows postwar trauma is seen in the novel, “without having to write explicitly about the war; second, to examine how these previously unlinked textual gaps are used as complex metaphors to indicate a range of failures stemming from a misguided ethos of masculinity. The issue of trauma, psychological horror, crisis in masculinity shapes the novel. Cloonan (2018) further mentions about weakness of Jake and strength of Brett by stating the Jake’s feelings for Brett, along with his frustration at not being able to act on them, emerge early in the novel. When Brett makes an unexpected appearance in the company of two homosexuals, Jake gets angry at the presence of the gay men, who will serve a variety of functions in the novel. He stalks out of the bar and goes to another one where the beer and cognac he drinks fail to calm him down.

Brett is a character who changes her thinking, perspectives, and values as well. She is both flirtatious, depressed. She is also contemplative, playful, strong, and nervous. He extends the discussion that if she is to find. Hemingway (2023) writes that if there is a man with whom she could be happy, it could never be Jake or someone from his entourage. To find another person she could love and be loved by, she would have to break out of the expatriate cocoon, something she cannot, and does not want. She can break her relation with anyone easily.

Butler (1999) suggests a radical discontinuity, “between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders” (p. 10). She opines that the traditional boundary or a set of principles for women should be dismantled as they are culturally constructed to suit one dominant groups of society. The identity for her is a matter of performance. A series of performances of Brett as active girl pursuing her selfhood through her act of denying traditional notion of subjectivity is what Butler (1999) calls: “. . . gender proves to be performative- that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be. In this sense, gender is always a doing, though not as doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed” (p. 33). This is applied to Brett who takes her identity as a process, a series of doing rather than being. Butler here asserts that one’s identity is what he or she does in her daily life. Identity then is ‘doing’ rather than ‘being’. Brett’s identity then is not singular and monolithic, it is plural and diverse. The search for ‘being’ prior ‘doing’ is impossible. To find

'being' before 'doing' is to construct gender which does not apply to Brett. In this regards, Butler (1999) further explains, "The cultural designation of sex-and-desire-where desire is heterosexual and therefore differentiates itself through an oppositional relation to that other gender it desires" (p. 29). The way desires are heterogeneous, identities are also plural. Brett cannot remain as sexed body. She is a character who enjoys free will and liberating feature of freedom.

Jake, suffering from impotence, is doing unnecessarily socialization meeting people without any purpose indicating lost generation. Brett is promiscuous woman with drinking problems. Jake meets the independent woman Brett. She treated Jake in the war front. They share their feeling, but they don't tell it directly. He has become impotent. She cannot marry him due to this. It is her 'free will' which reflects the capacity to think and behave independently, and exercise manipulation over one's decision. It is based on personal judgment and reasoning. It is often associated with individuality. Brett enjoys these features.

Jake tells about her to Robert. They know that she is going to san francisco. They meet Brett and Mike in Pam. Mike knows Robert is following his wife – Brett. Jake and Brett's private discussion indicates they have difficulty in sustaining a relationship. They love each other like a married couple, but an injury that Jake suffered an impotent person. Narrator mentions that she does not marry anybody she didn't love. She has done it twice. She enjoys her free will and determination. Jake here mentions that she is a strong person.

The most remarkable point about Brett is her inclination towards modernity. Brett is proof that she is not an old-fashioned girl who was supposed to serve the man. Brett is sexual and promiscuous in aggressive way. She cuts her hair short, similar to a man. She addresses men as chaps. She has developed or has attempted to develop her relation with men like Jake, Cohn, Mike, Romero, and the Count and she plays with them. Her lack of female friends indicates she is a woman with masculine features. She is compared to the "sun" around which the other characters, the male characters orbit. She is merely realistic and optimistic about, and accepting of, the power and control she has over men. She is sensitive girl as well. Though she shows her deep feeling to Pedro Romero, she gives up it on her own wish.

Brett's Multiple Subjectivity: Analysis of *The Sun also Rises*

Lady Ashley is born as Elizabeth Brett Murray. Her title in the name has emerged from her second husband. She has been separated and divorced many times. She is often decisive in her life. At present she has also managed for the legal separation or divorce with her second husband. She cannot be measured by characters around her. For example, Jake and Robert cannot fathom her. Cloonan (2018) argues that both Cohn and Romero are defenders of tradition, a secular one and a quasi-religious one. The world has become quite different, and in the end Cohn and Romero cannot accept this difference embodied in Brett; they want her to conform to what they think she is, but they cannot fathom who she really is.

Brett often says that it was her great mistake to marry a sailor. She rejected the marriage that gives her torture. She has opposed the ideal of female dependence and delicacy: "He wanted me to grow my hair out. Me, with long hair. I'd look so like hell" (Hemingway, 2023, p. 256). She is a modern lady, and she rejects the traditional norms and values. She does not want to make her hair long. Martin (1987) in this regards argues, "This redefinition of masculinity and femininity was not an abrupt rift in the cultural landscape but rather a gradual shifting of the ground on which the edifice of Victorian sexual identity was built" (p. 65). She does not follow the tradition and culture of past life: "Interestingly, Brett breaks up her relationships when her lovers attempt to claim her, that is, to exercise authority over her. She even leaves the bullfighter Romero - a man to whom she is overwhelmingly attracted - when he shows signs of wanting to domesticate her: He tells her to give up her mannish felt hat, to let her hair grow long, to wear more modest clothes" (Martin, 1987, p. 70-71). She easily breaks up her relation with men if she feels uncomfortable.

After World War I, the female role was undergoing a massive change. She could not be limited to the household activity alone. The Victorian nurturer and family care taker was challenged by Brett who goes on resisting the traditional gender roles. The modern woman of unprecedented mobility is represented by her and her public visibility

and arrival at party show she enjoys her own 'being'. Dragunoiu (2000) talks about the shift in gender relations exemplified by Jake and Brett in a way that supports Lacan's theory that the phallus enters the realm of the feminine when the masculine system of signification has been destabilized by various cultural forces. Dragunoiu (2000) mentions about the loss of the conviction of masculine invincibility and authority after the war came a stoic attitude that is a compensatory stance for this new awareness of vulnerability. Hemingway's definition of courage, which he succinctly phrased as "grace under pressure," is in many respects a startling echo of the Victorian adage to "suffer and be still" that was directed to women who felt helpless to meet the demands of their sacrificial role.

Traditionally, women are limited in the private spaces, where they are protected by masculine principles but she challenges this concept. She is in a position to enjoy British aristocracy. However, she takes it as less important thing. Hemingway (2023) mentions that she is not happy with this life similar to hell. In the name of happy life with the British aristocracy, she feels she is losing her selfhood and she rejects it to extent her identity looking after people. It shows her determined identity. She performs a series of action to prove her masculine traits. Hemingway (2023) writes, "Brett wore a black, sleeveless evening dress. She looked quite beautiful. Mike acted as though nothing had happened" (Hemingway, 2023, p. 158). She is very assertive and dominating one. She could easily dominate other humans. The narrator talks about Robert who "could not stop looking at Brett. It seemed to make him happy. It must have been pleasant for him to see her looking so lovely, and know he had been away with her and that everyone knew it. They could not take that away from him. Bill was very funny. So was Michael. They were good together" (Hemingway, 2023, p. 158). However, Brett deceived them unlike the traditional women are were only watched.

In the novel Brett states, "He wanted to marry me, finally, Of course. I can't even marry Mike" (Hemingway, 2023, p. 257). The assertive voice of Brett shows new consciousness of her embedded in new woman of modern world. In this regards, it is argued that she understands marriage is detrimental as De Beauvoir mentions, "Marriage is an oppressive and exploitative economic arrangement, which reinforces sexual inequality, and binds women to domesticity" (p. 321). Marriage perpetuates the belief that woman is supposed to be protected her male. Thus, it is oppressive and exploitative.

The issue of femininity transcending the traditional code of conduct is pervasive in the novel. While it is reasonable to argue that every individual is free to enjoy his/her autonomous self, such autonomy invites challenges keeping filial relation in crisis. In this context, the paper aims to explore the crisis in masculinity since the above literature reviews have not touched this issue. Horrocks (1994) talks about masculinity as a complicated thing. He mentions, "Masculinity is a complicated term" (p. 23). It has complexities due to socio-political scenarios. He further remarks, "Men are formed and broken by our own power . . . Masculinity cripples men" (Horrocks, p. 25). Men need to perform their masculine role in the society. Manhood as it is known it in our society requires such a self-destructive identity. This is found in the novel which is seen in the character of Jake Barnes and Robert Cohn.

She does not easily accept what male partners say to her. For example, Jake discusses with Brett in this way, "Couldn't we live together, Brett? Couldn't we just live together?" "I don't think so. I'd just _tromper_ you with everybody. You couldn't stand it. "I stand it now." "That would be different. It's my fault, Jake" (Hemingway 58). He asks her if they could live together, now it depends on her decision, so it is her empowerment. She further says, "It's the way I'm made" (p. 58). Here, Brett is seen as decisive and dominating in her relation to Jake. Brett's strong assertion is reflected in the following quote: "Brett came over with her wrap on. She kissed the count and put her hand on his shoulder to keep him from standing up. As we went out the door I looked back and there were three girls at his table. We got into the big car. Brett gave the chauffeur the address of her hotel" (p. 77). She shows her masculine traits by kissing the count. She also gave the chauffeur the address of her hotel.

Reynolds (1987) talks about influence of modernism in the character of Brett; "As with so many of the modernists, Hemingway's modernism resided in his style, not in his ideas or his value system" (p. 46). She is showing

her modernist attributes. He writes, “Jake, badly hurt when Brett takes Cohn with her for a week at San Sebastian” (p. 53). Here, Jake is hurt and she takes Robert Cohn with her. Reynolds further writes:

Today Brett Ashley, with her liberated attitudes, seems our contemporary; in the twenties she was not the norm, but the new wave. In 1925 she was on the leading edge of the sexual revolution that produced two types of the “new woman”: the educated professional woman who was active in formerly all-male areas and the stylish, uninhibited young woman who drank and smoked in public, devalued sexual innocence, married but did not want children, and considered divorce no social stigma. (p. 58)

Brett enjoys her liberated feeling and emotions not being limited to the four wall of a room. She is a leading figure and a new woman. She could smoke in public area and marry easily without becoming a mother. Brett's relation with Pedro Romero is also problematic who could truly love her. She says, “I'm not going to be one of these bitches that ruins children” (Hemingway, 2023, p. 257). Her determination is strong. Jake is used by her, “Oh, Jake,” Brett said, “we could have had such a damned good time together” (Hemingway, 2023, p. 261). Brett at last accepts Jake to as friend or lifelong friend. She has developed her agency in every relation. She performs her role and identifies herself as liberating bird as Butler states that gender proves to be performativity.

Conclusion

This paper concludes that though Brett's challenging behavior serves as an evidence for a profound challenge to patriarchal norms, it puts masculinity in crisis leading to anarchy in the society. Brett is a character who breaks and defies the social codes and sets herself free. She continues transcending the conventional role of women. Brett's desert of Romero and her return to Jake again shows the flexibility in her character. She decides regarding if ‘they could have had such a damn good time together’ and Jake replies that it can be done, signifying the lack of mutual cooperation of their potential relationship. Brett enjoys every moment of life. She is overtly sexual and absolutely promiscuous. She has her own measurements of life. She is a person with masculine attributes. She befriended Jake, Cohn, Mike, Romero, and the Count, and she has affair with them. She ignores feminine quality. Notably, Brett is no more a ‘man's woman.’ She is a woman in process of becoming and doing, rather than being a fixed category of traditional gender role.

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