

**THE SUN ALSO RISES - A PORTRAIT OF THE LOST GENERATION**

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**ABSTRACT**

Ernest Hemingway's 1926 novel, *The Sun Also Rises*, stands as a quintessential portrait of the "Lost Generation"—a cohort of disillusioned expatriates grappling with the psychological and spiritual aftermath of World War I. Through the understated prose characteristic of Hemingway's "Iceberg Theory," the novel explores profound themes of impotence (both physical and spiritual), the search for authenticity, the complexities of love and relationships, and the pervasive sense of aimlessness that defined a generation. This article will analyze how Hemingway masterfully employs a minimalist narrative style, a cast of emotionally wounded characters, and symbolic settings (Paris, Pamplona) to articulate a powerful critique of modernity, while simultaneously positing the "Code Hero" as a potential, albeit often elusive, pathway to meaning and "grace under pressure" in a world stripped of traditional values.

**Keywords:** Hemingway, *The Sun Also Rises*, Lost Generation, novel

**1. INTRODUCTION**

Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*, published in 1926, is more than just a novel; it is a cultural touchstone, an indelible image of a generation profoundly shaped by the cataclysm of World War I. Often regarded as the definitive literary work of the "Lost Generation" (Smith 25), the novel transports readers to the vibrant yet spiritually barren landscape of post-war Europe, specifically the bohemian cafes of Paris and the chaotic bullfighting arenas of Pamplona. Through the eyes of its wounded and cynical protagonist, Jake Barnes, Hemingway captures the pervasive disillusionment, moral ambiguity, and desperate search for meaning that characterized the interwar period. The novel's spare prose, often referred to as the "Iceberg Theory" (Baker 78), became a hallmark of Hemingway's style, allowing complex emotions and profound themes to simmer beneath the surface of seemingly simple dialogue and description. This article will delve into *The Sun Also Rises*, exploring its historical context, its emotionally complex characters, its central thematic concerns—from love and impotence to the "Code Hero"—and its enduring narrative style, ultimately revealing its powerful and tragic portrayal of a generation adrift.

To understand *The Sun Also Rises* is to understand the historical and cultural vortex from which it emerged. The term "Lost Generation," popularized by Hemingway himself through a Gertrude Stein quote in the novel's epigraph, refers to the generation of young Americans who came of age during World War I. Having witnessed unprecedented carnage and the collapse of traditional European empires and values, they returned home, or remained in Europe, profoundly

disillusioned. The war, with its mechanized slaughter and grand but ultimately empty rhetoric of heroism, stripped away their idealism, leaving a spiritual vacuum (Donaldson 45).

Many of these young Americans, including Hemingway, became **expatriates**, flocking to European cities like Paris. Here, they sought artistic freedom, a lower cost of living, and an escape from what they perceived as the stifling materialism and moral hypocrisy of Prohibition-era America. This expatriate community, a vibrant mix of writers, artists, and socialites, created their own rules, often embracing hedonism, heavy drinking, and a casual approach to sex in a desperate attempt to fill the void left by shattered beliefs. Yet, this pursuit of pleasure often led to deeper emptiness, as their physical wounds (like Jake's) or psychological scars rendered true connection and satisfaction elusive (Reynolds 67). *The Sun Also Rises* is a vivid chronicle of this specific time and place, capturing both the allure and the underlying despair of the expatriate lifestyle.

## 2. CHARACTERS: A STUDY IN MODERN ALIENATION

Hemingway populates *The Sun Also Rises* with characters who embody the psychological and spiritual wounds of the Lost Generation. Their interactions, marked by cynicism, wit, and underlying tension, reveal the profound difficulties of human connection in a fragmented world.

Jake Barnes, the novel's first-person narrator, serves as the emotional and moral center of the story. An American journalist living in Paris, Jake is permanently wounded by a war injury that has rendered him impotent. This physical wound is a powerful metaphor for the spiritual and emotional emasculation experienced by his generation (Rovit 33). Despite his injury, Jake maintains a stoic demeanor, a keen observational eye, and a deep, unrequited love for Lady Brett Ashley. He attempts to find meaning through adherence to personal integrity, traditional values (especially in the context of bullfighting), and authentic experiences, but his physical limitation prevents him from fully participating in the relationships and passions he desires. He represents the man who knows the "code" but is tragically unable to enact it fully in his own life.

Lady Brett Ashley is the novel's enigmatic and captivating female lead, a symbol of the "new woman" of the 1920s—liberated, sexually uninhibited, and fiercely independent. Having served as a V.A.D. in the war, she, too, bears invisible scars. She is beautiful, charming, and magnetic, drawing men to her, but her emotional instability and inability to commit to one relationship leave a trail of broken hearts. Her casual affairs, heavy drinking, and restlessness are symptoms of her own profound disillusionment and an inability to find genuine contentment. Her tragic flaw lies in her search for passion that cannot be truly satisfied, especially with Jake, the one man she genuinely loves but cannot be with (Fetterley 89).

Robert Cohn serves as the novel's primary outsider and often a foil to the expatriate group. A Jewish American former boxing champion and Princeton graduate, Cohn is portrayed as a romantic idealist, largely untouched by the war's cynicism, who clings to traditional notions of love and heroism. His earnestness and conventional morality clash with the group's detached hedonism, making him the target of their cruel jabs and anti-Semitic remarks. His pursuit of Brett is driven by a desire for a grand, cinematic love, which the cynical world of the expatriates cannot accommodate, ultimately leading to his humiliation and expulsion from the group. His inability to conform to their unspoken "code" marks him for ridicule and ultimately, isolation (Lynn 102).

The supporting characters further illuminate the group's dynamics. Bill Gorton, Jake's fishing companion, offers moments of genuine camaraderie and humor, often serving as a sounding board for Jake's unspoken thoughts. His relatively stable friendship with Jake contrasts sharply with the volatile romantic entanglements. Mike Campbell, Brett's financially unstable and

perpetually drunk fiancé, embodies the irresponsible and destructive aspects of the expatriate lifestyle. His constant need for money and his drunken outbursts highlight the group's moral decay. Count Mippipopolous, a wealthy Greek count, provides a brief but memorable counterpoint to the group's cynicism. He claims to have "values" and an understanding of true joy, suggesting a different path to living meaningfully. Finally, Pedro Romero, the young bullfighter, represents the idealized "Code Hero"—a figure who embodies courage, discipline, and integrity in the face of death, providing a stark contrast to the aimless expatriates.

### 3. THEMES: DISILLUSIONMENT, MORALITY, AND THE SEARCH FOR MEANING

*The Sun Also Rises* explores a complex web of themes that resonate with the post-WWI era and continue to speak to the human condition.

The most pervasive theme is *Disillusionment and the Loss of Idealism*. The war shattered traditional values, religious faith, and the belief in grand narratives of progress and heroism. The characters are emotionally scarred and spiritually empty, struggling to find purpose in a world where old certainties have crumbled. Their hedonistic lifestyle—constant drinking, casual sex, and endless parties—is a symptom of this void, a desperate attempt to numb the pain and fill the emptiness. The novel suggests that while they may experience fleeting pleasures, genuine fulfillment remains out of reach (Wilson 115).

*Love, Sex, and Impotence* form the agonizing core of the novel's emotional landscape. Jake's physical impotence symbolizes the spiritual impotence of the Lost Generation—their inability to truly connect, create, or find lasting satisfaction. His love for Brett is profound but agonizingly unconsummated, creating a perpetual state of longing and frustration. Brett, for her part, is drawn to Jake precisely because he is "safe" due to his injury, yet she craves passion, leading her to destructive relationships with other men, whom she inevitably leaves. The novel explores the new sexual freedoms of the 1920s but suggests that liberation without emotional depth can lead to further emptiness. True intimacy, unmarred by the trauma of the past or the search for superficial thrills, seems impossible for them.

The concept of the "*Code Hero*" and "*Grace Under Pressure*" offers a potential, albeit difficult, antidote to the prevailing disillusionment. This theme is most clearly embodied in the character of Pedro Romero, the young bullfighter. Unlike the Lost Generation, Romero faces death with dignity, skill, and an unwavering adherence to the ritualistic code of the *corrida*. His actions are precise, disciplined, and authentic. The bullfighting scenes are not merely entertainment but a profound metaphor for confronting life's inevitable challenges—and death—with courage and integrity. Jake, despite his limitations, deeply respects and understands this code, finding moments of peace and meaning in observing or participating in rituals that demand discipline and authenticity, such as fishing or bullfighting (Baker 90). These activities offer a temporary escape from the psychological chaos of their lives, providing structure and a fleeting sense of purpose.

*Prejudice and Anti-Semitism* are starkly present, particularly in the treatment of Robert Cohn. The casual and often cruel anti-Semitic remarks directed at Cohn by Mike Campbell and others expose the underlying bigotry that still permeated even the "liberated" circles of the expatriates. Cohn, as an outsider, becomes the scapegoat for the group's frustrations and insecurities. His Jewish identity is repeatedly invoked to mock his idealism and justify their contempt, revealing a darker undercurrent beneath their seemingly sophisticated veneer (Swartz 72).

Finally, the *Power and Limitations of Nature and Ritual* serve as a crucial thematic counterpoint. The fishing trip to Burguete, far from the chaotic Parisian nightlife and the intense spectacle of Pamplona, offers Jake and Bill moments of genuine peace, camaraderie, and connection to a natural rhythm. It is a space where they can momentarily escape their emotional wounds and find a fleeting sense of order. The bullfight in Pamplona, while intense and violent, also offers a form of ritualized authenticity. For Jake, it is a meaningful experience that contrasts with the aimlessness of his social life. These moments highlight the characters' longing for something real and enduring, even if those moments are temporary and cannot fully heal their deep-seated wounds (Grebstein 55).

#### 4. NARRATIVE STYLE: THE "ICEBERG THEORY" AND BEYOND

Hemingway's distinctive narrative style in *The Sun Also Rises* was revolutionary for its time and remains incredibly influential. It is primarily characterized by *minimalism and concise prose*, often referred to as the "Iceberg Theory." Hemingway believed that the true power of a story lay in what was *not* explicitly stated, just as only a small portion of an iceberg is visible above water. The deeper meaning, emotion, and psychological complexity are implied, forcing the reader to actively engage and infer (Brenner 28).

This stylistic choice results in short, declarative sentences, a scarcity of adjectives and adverbs, and a focus on concrete nouns and verbs. The effect is one of directness, efficiency, and emotional restraint. Rather than telling the reader how characters feel, Hemingway shows it through their actions, dialogue, and subtle gestures. For example, Jake's unspoken despair over his impotence and his love for Brett is conveyed through his internal monologues, his often clipped dialogue, and his careful observations of others, rather than explicit declarations of sadness.

*Dialogue* is a cornerstone of Hemingway's style in the novel. It is incredibly realistic, reflecting natural speech patterns, but it is also layered with subtext. Characters often speak past each other, or their words reveal more through what is left unsaid than what is articulated. The repeated phrases, the dry wit, and the understated emotional exchanges subtly convey the characters' emotional states, their cynicism, and the underlying tension in their relationships.

*Symbolism* is deployed with precision. The bullfight, as discussed, is a central symbol, representing an authentic code of conduct, the confrontation with death, and the pursuit of honor. Alcohol serves as a pervasive symbol of escapism, self-medication, and the characters' inability to truly cope with their disillusionment. The fishing trip, in contrast, symbolizes peace, natural order, and fleeting moments of genuine connection. Jake's wound itself is a potent symbol of his generation's collective trauma and impotence.

The novel is told from *Jake Barnes's first-person point of view*. This grants the reader intimate access to Jake's thoughts, observations, and emotional struggles, but it also limits the perspective. We see the world through Jake's eyes, filtering events through his wounded consciousness and often cynical lens. While generally reliable in his reporting of external events, Jake's internal narrative reveals his biases and his personal pain, coloring our perception of other characters, particularly Robert Cohn. This subjective narration deepens the psychological realism and allows for a nuanced exploration of a traumatized psyche.

#### 5. CONCLUSION: AN ENDURING PORTRAIT OF DISILLUSIONMENT

*The Sun Also Rises* remains an essential work in American literature, not merely as a historical artifact but as a timeless exploration of humanity's enduring quest for meaning in a

chaotic world. Through Jake Barnes's wounded but resilient narration, Ernest Hemingway masterfully weaves a narrative that captures the profound disillusionment of the "Lost Generation," scarred by war and searching for authenticity in a new era of moral ambiguity. The novel's groundbreaking "Iceberg Theory" style, with its understated prose and implied emotions, demands active engagement from the reader, creating a powerful sense of the characters' internal struggles and the bleakness of their spiritual landscape.

Hemingway's brilliant characterizations of Jake, Brett, and the larger expatriate circle lay bare the complexities of love, impotence, and the elusive nature of genuine human connection. The contrasting figure of Pedro Romero and the rituals of bullfighting and fishing offer a glimpse into a "code" of dignity and "grace under pressure" that stands as a fragile but enduring ideal. Ultimately, *The Sun Also Rises* is a poignant and powerful testament to a generation grappling with the aftermath of shattered ideals, a novel that continues to resonate with its honest, if often somber, portrayal of the human spirit's attempt to find order and meaning amidst chaos. It is a lasting reminder that even when the sun also rises, the shadows of the past can linger, shaping the present and defining the path forward.

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