

**A WOMAN WITHOUT ABILITY TO LOVE: LADY BRETT ASHLEY IN  
*THE SUN ALSO RISES***

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**ABSTRACT**

*This paper is activated by the similarity of the common phenomenon, global panic, and desperation among youth, between the youth after World War I (WWI) and at modern time. From the tragic scenarios exhibited in this novel and at present world, the main reason and the aura generate the popularity of the concept of Armageddon, no matter caused by nature or by people, among youth can be comprehended. The extreme unbalanced conditions from power, the postwar youth in the novel, to wealth, the present youth in our societies, trigger the lost on belief to love, faith, and tomorrow, for both of the generations. This linkage explains the popularity of drugs, alcohols, and even random sexual intercourses; the symptom interprets the so-called “history repeats itself”. The disordered behaviors generate the chaos on minds with apathetic, languid, drooping, numb, and even brutal reaction to this world. To both of the generations, the punishment by law or by Deities is meaningless; only the immediate enjoyment stimulates the feeling of aliveness. Inspecting the mental pulverization among youth, Hemingway creates the male character, Jake Barnes, with a physical disability, while the female character, Lady Brett Ashley, with the mental disability. The depiction seems to declare the fatigue conditions from outside to the inside of human beings; which incites the hopeless and turns those post-WWI youth to be entitled to *Lost Generation*. Considering of Hemingway’s mental suffering, life experiences, and even his suicide, this novel can be regarded as his self-therapy for his unhealthy mentality. Even though the contemporary world is different from WWI, the feeling of lost among youth is nothing different from the post-WWI youth; which can be seen as the reproduction of history from the perspective of rhetoric. When people claim the importance of history, the psychoanalysis to the pessimistic view among youth may offer the most accurate and sad annotation.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Post WWI, Armageddon, Lost Generation, Hemingway, Disability*

**INTRODUCTION**

**THE PULVERIZATION AND THE INDULGENCE**

The world became worse from politics to the economy after WWI, and the oppression was extended from national to international; the whole world was surrounded by the unstable and insecure aura. Comparing to the visible pulverization on infrastructure, the invisible pulverization on mentality was ignored on purpose; which is always discussed by scholars. As proposed by Gebhard (77), “sodomasochism is embedded in our culture since our culture operates on the basis of domination-submission relationships”; those characters in the novel don’t want lives corresponding to social norms.

Being a correspondent with participating experiences on wars, Hemingway had a sensitive observation with melancholy to the global situation; writing was the only thing that he could do to expel the anger and the dissatisfaction to the world, or even to nature.

Understanding the disability at the inner and outer level of contemporary human beings, Hemingway revealed disable characters, Jake Barnes and Lady Brett Ashley in *The Sun Also Rises* (SAR); when Jake appears as a role with a disability on physics, Brett, disability on mentality. From the plots developed, readers find that the content “articulates ideas currently debated within the field of disability studies” (Fore 76), and Brett’s mental suffering twists her soul and leads her to be unable to love anyone, even herself. This point of view identifies the profound trauma incited by mental disability, and explains why Brett is a character with more tortured spiritual condition; unable to love is more serious than unable to have sex, and without effective medicines and/or psychic assistance to solve the problem while physical disability still can be fixed through some medications.

Due to the psychic disability, Brett always indulges herself in alcohols as well as indecent sexual intercourses without caring of critics to her behaviors. Some consider her to be a model of New Woman because she transgresses the traditional acknowledgment to the female with the intention “in pursuit of new experiences” (Martin 67), but the remark with an indication of a suffering person without certainty seems to be more acceptable and rational.

Regarding this point, we may find some evidence from Robert Cohn, another character in the novel. Robert is a person who “learned [boxing] painfully and thoroughly to counteract the feeling of inferiority and shyness he had felt” (SAR 11); maybe this twisted condition turns Robert to “[have] a wonderful quality of bringing out the worst in anybody” (104). When Robert’s tortured mind generates his ability to bring out the evil side of people surrounding him, Brett’s adoption of indecent behaviors and habits to counteract the feeling of inferiority should be able close to Hemingway’s manifestation.

## **GENDER AND SEX INTERCOURSE**

For expediency, some distinguish Hemingway’s characters by gender, not by psychology, regardless of the distinctive indication of mentality. In fact, trauma is displayed in the novel evidently, and such symptom can be found from those people suffering fatal disaster by human and/or by nature; WWI provides the worst element to corrode human’s mentality. Most people surviving from the war have a common fear; flinching from the public and/or indulging in extreme exhilaration is popular among them.

The abnormal minds make Brett have the courage to seek joy without shame even though she still has rationality and normal feeling to the world; paralyzing with overwhelming relaxation on physics seems to be easier than facing the painful emotion and nightmare by WWI. This is nothing to do with gender, but a common feeling. While considering these characters to be complete hedonists with exciting activities and extravagant lifestyles, their fear and tear are ignored and obsolete. Showing the sign, Hemingway uses the strong beat with total liberalization on physics for Brett; in fact, there is nothing difference between men and women while encountering the uncertainty and hopelessness.

Against traditional notions of womanhood before WWI, Brett is a complete slut. Owing to her heartache at her loss of security after WWI, she has a caring nature and “loves looking after people” (SAR 206); her body becomes her curing tool to pacify men with sex but without love. “Sexual intercourse is not the prerequisite to [Brett’s] sexual

satisfaction” because she believes it’s one of the few meaningful things in life that can be controlled (Forster 32). Brett is not the only one who has a spiritual problem after the War; just like Robert, Brett is one prototype of the trauma group. Hemingway utilizes the dramatic description on Brett, a debauched female, to evoke the attention. Although without clear evidence to inform the causality between Hemingway’s feeling and his later suicide, the melancholy and the trauma after WWI seem to molest him for the rest of his life.

Due to the sympathy and empathy, Hemingway leaves Brett and most characters with the gift of oblivion for away from the past destruction and the future extinction is a general condition among people. This trend, then, leads Brett to admire Count Mippipopolous’ memory since “[he can remember] everything that’s happened” and considers his memory to be a spectacular feature comparing to the rest of the people. When readers consider the count to be the sole one with good memory, his response to Brett “So do you, my dear” (SAR 61) launches the clue to show the truth that Brett, and/or most people, still has the good memory; the count selects remembrance when most of them select to forget or even abandon their memories, for away from painful feeling. The count knows and feels the pain because “he’s quite one of [them]”; he chooses to remember the past instead of abandoning it because he has the courage to face the sadness and “old grievance” (SAR 38-40).

Maybe because of her natural warmth, Brett cannot figure out “how one doesn’t mind the blood,” just like she does not know why people can be so brutal as to kill people (SAR 215). Although she cares of life, she cannot love people, she “[is] someone so scared of her feelings that she becomes involved only with those she can hurt because she will not risk loving them” (Forster 30). To love somebody is difficult to her; she does not mean to hurt anyone and even intends to “write [Robert Cohn] and give him a chance to pull out of [the trip to keep from humiliating himself]” (SAR 90). Brett’s serious spiritual obstacle makes her indulge in sinless lives; when Jake may find the solution through medical surgery, Brett can never be cured because she is an “aimless, displaced [person] without a secure sense of meaning or value”. Love is an unbearable heavy burden for Brett because she has “lost [her] faith” (Savola 26-39); to Brett, the life in chaos and oblivion can sustain her to live instead of madness and/or suicide.

Brett chooses the intemperate life because she “only [wants] what she [cannot] have”; Jake selects another type to “try and play it along and just not make trouble for people” (SAR 39). Essentially, all the characters have the same mental problem because “everybody’s sick”; the only difference is their option of presenting fear and insecurity (SAR 23). While acknowledging the fact of insecurity and distrust:

[The contemporary] government and financial institutions [encourage] people to consume, not to save, [and the] social upheaval [is] accompanied by an extraordinary artistic ferment: The dadaists celebrate[d] the sense of absurdity and possibility of these tumultuous times. (Martin 74-5)

During “the crazy years”, women must also “learn to make choices for [themselves] and to take responsibility for those choices” as none can guarantee with future or even tomorrow (Martin 75). The loss of meaning of life and security “is accompanied by a loss of certainty about proper feminine and masculine behavior” (Martin 75). Improper manner seems to be the way for survival; which rationalizes Brett’s uncontrolled behaviors.

Fully socialized, Brett has the lost tendency on behavior as the rest of her time, she can only “[be] sitting looking straight ahead at nothing” (SAR 182). To cherish the contemporary moment, Brett doesn’t need love or morality. Such a feature, “[living] quietly in the country” is intolerable for her; thinking about the past or even “make[ing] [her]

more womanly” (SAR 62-246) is redundant to her. She does not want to be a womanly female as which can guide to more torture; play Delilah helps her with the comprehension of aliveness. Maybe she has lost her womb and with less will to become more womanly, and that wound makes her have more understanding of Jake; maybe that is why she does not care to have sex with many males if the pregnancy is impossible to her. To be labeled as filthy or not is not what Brett concerns; sex intercourse can afford more realistic life feeling.

Brett is still a traditional woman, so when she “[wants] to get out of town and she can’t go anywhere alone.” (SAR 107). Her vivid character identifies that Hemingway concerns “with truth in art”; Hemingway does not want to create a new woman who is opposed to the real world (Savola 26). A naughty girl without love but sex, Brett feels happy and released; she “can’t help it [because she is] a goner” (SAR 187). So when Romero “doesn’t want [her] to spread [the cape he gives her]” like that he does not want her to spread her life only for joy, they are doomed to separate soon (SAR 217). Lady Brett doesn’t have the ability to love and tries to be far away from anyone with the faith of love.

She does not believe in love and hates Robert’s naïve feeling to love. To her, the sex is like the air for respiration; she just wants to have the full autonomy of her own body and soul. Love is meaningless to Brett; she cannot love any man who has an intimate relationship with her. Even with her indecency, readers should not define her as a New Woman. The simplified conclusion is against the truth. Her scenarios are different from female power or female emancipation; she works hard to seek oblivion and away from the past, she is not a New Woman. From the context, we even doubt that if Brett has ever had the real joy of sex.

## **FAITH**

Faith is something away from Brett as “[God] never [works] very well with [her]”; therefore, she cannot rely on the religion to pacify her mind (SAR 249). Distrust is her sole belief in life. In fact, many people at that time suffered much since “The rich men and the big corporations have become too wealthy and powerful for their official standing in the American life” (Jillson 159). Even without religious belief, she still has a good nature; that is why she asks Jake not to “get drunk” as “[not] have to” while he still has the faith (SAR 250). She also knows that her life is the depraved symbol to many, but she cannot back to the normalcy again. She asks Jake not to “get drunk” based on tradition notion that drunkenness is a sin; if she was a New Woman, would not need to care of the traditional idea about the moral sin. Her consideration of sin mirrors her thought that Jake can be a decent man, and which is something that she cannot achieve. Neither the ordinary people’s love nor the noble love of God, Brett losses her ability to love and to be loved.

Martin informs that “Brett knows that it is the urban centers that provide mobility and choices for the new woman”; from the previous analysis, we think her option is for forgetting the profound fear through the noise and endless activity in the urban centers (79). Besides, “at moments of profound social crisis,” Brett knows that her action scares none while living with thousands of people in the urban centers; because “the melancholic process can become a general, collective condition,” and people “[refuse] to acknowledge the ‘otherness’ of others” (Forster 24-5). In the quiet country, the habitats are far away and detached from the outer crucial world, they may attack Brett for her dissipated behavior; where can be worse to Brett while the critique based on the past standard to female can reactivate her lost memory. To Brett, the oblivion is a kind and generous gift from God.

When Atherton claims SAR to be a novel “narrating of a voyage [for Jake] – not quest or a voyage of discovery” (199), he does not mention the meaning of the voyage for Brett; from the previous descriptions and identifications,

readers should consider the voyage for Brett to be a voyage of disguise. Many details inform that Brett still cannot forget the past completely, so she declares that “[horses] have some rather awful things happened to them”. Brett informs that she “[cannot] look away” as those horses remind her the wound falling on other people or on herself (SAR 169). Comparing to those horses, human beings face the more horrible massacre of other human beings during the War. Irrationality is common in battlefields; people mercilessly slaughter others, even the armless civilians, just because those victims are on the odd side or without the ability to protect themselves. Mankind is the most barbarian animal to murder the same species not for food or survival; acknowledging of human’s bestial character, Brett cannot confirm or conform to any rules, including the moral bondage to female. We even can claim that her faith was lost step by step caused by brutality.

Hemingway “[leaves] his heroine free and relatively intact both emotionally and physically” because that is the accurate record; attempt to “the destruction of the female protagonist” can transgress the rootless feature of that time (Martin 80). While Forter informs that most of the characters in the novel “have suffered the kind of disillusionment,” readers can understand why the ending is open and without destruction to our dissipated protagonist, Brett (27). The dead-alive life after the War makes everyone become rootless without the possibility to have a certain ending, and that is the most destructive catastrophe. Suffering the disaster of the fickle life, our heroine does not need to be saved from the author. And, of course, the faith is totally expelled by the author; if the faith is useful, Brett, the rest characters of the novel, and mankind at that time shouldn’t need to suffer the gloomy tragedy.

Not only happening in her present life, Brett “hasn’t had an absolutely happy life” because death is like the phantom to entangle with her all the time (SAR 207). If with love to anyone or to be loved by anyone, Brett knows that she may have the chance to face the fatal departure again. That kind of departure used to hurt her badly, and which may occur again if with the love relationship with others. To protect her heart from broken, Brett cannot show the faithful love to anyone, or trust to God, she becomes a modern Carmen. Hemingway may refer the female protagonist in Carmen while creating Brett in the novel; not only without the faithful love, Brett also “[has] got a bull-fighter,” just like Carmen (SAR211). The only difference is that Brett has never been hurt by males when she changes her love object from one man to another. Hemingway’s arrangement on the plots is because that he realizes the demand of a woman with loyal love is impractical during that time. About the passion, Brett is quite different from Carmen since Brett only considers the sexual relationship with men as her faith and a therapy to loneliness and insecurity.

## **ALCOHOL AND MATURITY**

Her indulgence in alcohol is also part of her therapy since “[the] drunkenness that avoids excessively emotional outbursts of an affectionate or violent kind”; to her, the leasing emotion can ruin and/or even endanger her and other’s lives (Forter 31). This point implies that Brett doesn’t think that she deserves a decent life and love; alcohol, just like, is her shell and shelter. Through indulgence, she declares that “the mind is inherently problematic, the body, apparently, you can trust”; when the body is the only thing that you can trust, then the physical pleasure becomes important and with meaning (Bond 57). Her indecent behaviors reflect Hemingway’s intention “to convey immediate experience – the sort of ‘feeling’” because nothing is assured and the present moment is the only truth in the turbulent world (Bond 57). Hemingway expresses that “alcohol impedes recollection by depressing the activity of the brain” (Bond 61), so that “none of [them] sober” for feeling the existence of life (SAR 147). The bitterness of alcohol floating from her throat to her stomach makes

her maintain the sense of alive; Brett is fragile and needs the wine to support.

Lady Brett is like many alcoholics; alcoholism provides her the chance to away from reality. Alcohol offers her a tool for paralyzing her mind; this tool is considered to be a mental therapy, no matter effective or not, to cure her fear. Bond informs that “alcohol may allow escape from thoughts on bankruptcy, failed marriages, abusive husbands, dead lovers and the like”; this explains why Brett becomes an alcoholic (63). She advises Jake not to “get drunk” because he “[doesn’t] have to”; she believes that Jake is brave enough, and has plenty of happy memories, to counteract the impact of misfortune instead of numbing his nerves and feelings (SAR 250). Even though Brett doesn’t want to be saved, neither regain her reason, for a normal life without alcohol, she still tries to keep Jake away from the toxic drink. From this perspective, readers realize that Brett’s heart is warmer and with a concern of her friends; she is always cruel to herself and intends to be banished from society. Indeed, she still believes that complying obligations for corresponding with social norms and public opinions are crucial for a better life; the only problem is that she doesn’t consider herself to be also with the possibility and ability with the alleviation of pain.

Away from releasing of fear and emotion, Brett cannot talk but drink. The count used to ask Brett to talk as “[She is] always drinking [without ... talking],” but she only wants to “[talk herself] all out to Jake” when she believes that Jake is the only one who understands her completely (SAR 65). Besides, she also cannot “finish [her] sentences at all” as wants to “let anyone finish them as they like” instead of her more talking (SAR 65). More words will disclosure the past that she wants to forget; silence is Brett’s shield to protect her mind. The past memories are like the “[unwelcome] unbought stuffed dogs”; they can become the “road to hell” if without disguise (SAR 78).

To Brett, a better and/or holy life is impossible; she “hasn’t had an absolutely happy life”; without the premise of happy life, she cannot utilize the remembrance to conquer her nightmare to presence as well to future (SAR 207). When Brett believes that oblivion is the most effective way to solve the problem, alcohol becomes the powerful gadget to kill past memories. Just like her sex intercourses, alcoholism favors the neglect of pain and fear; she also knows that which cannot solve problems actually. Due to her good nature, she does not want Jake to sink into the same pit as there’s still exist in front of him; she is like an angel who spends her life like a devil.

Her indulgence in alcoholism doesn’t mean her real enjoyment; on the opposite, we even can say that she must suffer more pain after away from drunkenness. Basically, Brett doesn’t believe that anything can alleviate the hurt on her mind and body; therefore, those things against social regulations, complicated sexual relationship and/or drunkenness, are considered by Brett as saviors. These poisonous elements keep her away from social norms as well as sadness. Evading negative feeling and misfortune on others, she does not want to establish the real love relationship with anyone. But, she is still a tender woman with the kind heart; that can explain why she cannot stand with Robert’s “damned suffering” (SAR 186).

We can confirm that Brett does not have the full joy from the alcohol; she drinks so much just because that can rinse her miserable life. If she does have the satisfaction from the wine, should drink alone or only with friends in the private places instead of the public places all the time. To arouse attention and commotion, Brett likes to violate any bondage to women. She enjoys the situation and believes which is funny. She has the idea of funny actions because under her mature woman’s body with the full socialized life, she is still a lonely girl in her heart; which is why Robert considers her to be young while seeing her for the first time before Jake tells him that Brett is “thirty-four now” (SAR 46). Brett



losses her recollection, so time does not stay with her, then she has the possibility to back to the childhood. This also explains why Brett insists to have the short hair and believes that long hair will make her “look a fright” (SAR 246). The long hair will remind the truth that she is no more a child, and which can kill her. All of her bad experiences and memories have appeared after her maturity; her actions are only the signs to declare her will to evade the reality.

Through the whole work, Hemingway does not indicate anything about Brett’s past life and suffering clearly. Readers can only find that Brett is a woman who does not have the ability to love by the disclosure from the conversation. With the dialogues, we still do not have the clear vision of Brett’s past, can only image by ourselves. This kind of writing matches up with Hemingway’s famous Iceberg Theory, which offers the readers to spread their imagination and will for the unclear messages; like Brett’s reply to the count that she likes to “let anyone finish them as they like” (SAR 65). This answer also reflects Brett’s naughty and childish nature because only children cannot articulate all the dialogues, and consider which is something funny. Due to her nature, she doesn’t believe in love; she makes Jake suffer humiliation and pain for reminding herself the non-existence of true love.

## CONCLUSIONS

Working hard to follow her own will, Brett still faces the moral request sometimes. So when she is in Spain, “[...] some dancers [form] a circle around Brett and [start] to dance [and wear] big wreaths of white garlic around their necks”; they seem to proceed the exorcism for curing Brett (SAR 159). When Brett considers the dance is interesting and wants to dance with them, “they [do] not want her to [dance]” (SAR 159). To them, only the painful and severe ceremony can purify and save one lost lamb; Brett is the goat for sacrifice. According to that philosophy, Brett should not have the joy from the dance. It seems that many people, even those ones lost faith and courage to life, know what the best to Brett is; nevertheless, there’s no sign to inform that these persons also realize or seek the better lives for themselves. The degeneration of virtue is the common sight of that period of time. This deduction not only identifies that Brett is not a New Woman, and also shows the aimless scenarios occurred on the rest of the characters. Lost and lust are the shared feature among many people after WWI by the strong impact from death to the environment; they provide useful proposals caused by kind nature but leave themselves away from meaningful life caused by their mindset of desperation to future. Innovative development of weapons evolves lethal elimination of property and life without refuge. None can predict when the personal ambition will provoke another world war, and even the full extinguishment. W.W.II. verifies their worried stress; the emersion of another world war is in a short-term with more astounding destruction and death. The history corresponds to their belief; the cruel truth reveals why the existence of Lost Generation makes sense.

Even from Hemingway’s writing style, the idea of New Woman about Brett cannot be confirmed. Macho is always the topic emerged in Hemingway’s works, and which provokes an attack to his pieces; the idea of molding a New Woman violates his style. Brett’s indecency epitomizes millions of people living at that time and with the same terrified and helpless experience from the original enthusiasm to war. We can only identify that the mental problems of those people after WWI are the same. Gender and/or age isn’t what Hemingway considers; therefore, Brett, Jake, and the count are bound together to unleash trauma, respectively. The three persons have joined the war by different careers, and have suffered to survive from the War; that is why Brett informs Jake that the count is “one of us”; one of our lost souls (SAR 67). Their joint is the “nothingness”; the joint is not only “the meaning of Jake’s romance,” but also the meaning of most people’s lives in the novel, they are the Lost Generation who has been destroyed by the War (Bond 71). And when

people are extinct from the earth, the sun also rises as usual; indifferent Creator helps nothing to human beings. While the good persons with religious belief and decent manners are doomed to suffer the most miserable calamity, none understands the meaning of life, or the difference of their fate from those gangsters. No escape from the disaster, the destruction is universal to everyone in the world. This cognition causes the collapse of morality and faith, which makes “love itself is dead for [...the Lost] generation” no matter with the physical wound or not. That is why “Brett unable to let her hair grow long” (Spilka 137). Hemingway “[was] shocked by the carnage of World War I and dissatisfied with what [he] perceived to be the materialism and spiritual emptiness of life in the United States” (Cincotta 253).

Nagel confirms that “The Sun Also Rises is much more a novel of character than of event, and the action would seem empty were it not for the rich texture of personalities that interact throughout the book”; therefore, the events occurred in the novel are only for sustaining the whole plots, not the major points that Hemingway intends to convey (90). Spiritual torture by those characters, we can read the meaningless of their lives; except those ones without partaking of WWI, all the characters “are all incapable of love, and in their sober moments they seem to know it” (Spilka 128). Such acknowledgment of their emotional impotence tortures them; they would like to be drunk for oblivion.

That circumstance and aura breed the different nature of humans from the past, and Brett happens to be one of the female representatives in the novel to demonstrate the change. Her behaviors embodies the “social conflict and ideological struggle”, and the change relates more to the time than to her gender; “in some senses, she is more conservative” caused by her sequent marriages and not independent on finance (Nagel 92-3). Although she refuses money from, Romero, the bull-fighter, still has to ask Jake’s financial help since she cannot afford the spending. So Nagel informs that “what she shares in common with these figures is an indomitable will and strength of character that allows her to explore her own prerogatives, to forget her own relationships, and to attempt to find pleasure and satisfaction in tragic circumstances not of her making” (93). Her promiscuity manners on sex and alcohol are her self-protection system for survival; she is not a real New Woman, and which can be identified on her will, her economy, and her reliance to men. Brett is not a New Woman, but her indecency makes her “be very much at home in the progressive atmosphere of Paris, but [cannot] be more alien in the conservative world of traditional Spain” (Nagel 96). Therefore she cannot be with Romero any longer. The conservative world still has the strict moral conduct after WWI, and which disapprove of Brett’s style of living. If staying with Romero forever, the social condemnation can suffocate Brett by guiding her to the past memory.

Talking about war, people are helpless with fear. The most miserable ones in the wars are always the civilians; without weapons and power, they must obey the games played by those politicians who rein their countries. Frustrated by the real world, the novel manifests those postwar persons with agitated souls. Brett is one of those miserable with trauma; she should be considered as a character to accuse the absurd world with the adoption of abnormal actions against conventional concepts to a woman. The improper manner can also be observed from the rest of those male characters in SAR even though the mode is different from hers. This symptom, the anxiety, can be found from many modern people; insecurity to future always leads uncontrolled behavior.



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