



---

## The sun also rises: A picture of the moral chaos after the First World War

Shagun, Research Scholar

Department of English

Baba Mastnath University

[katariashagun7@gmail.com](mailto:katariashagun7@gmail.com)

### Abstract

*We have provided information in this paper about the symbolism and theme of The Sun Also Rises. Virginia Woolf argues that thoughts are far more powerful than words, thus we must resort to symbols to convey them. Cassirer agrees that no language is sufficient to portray the complexities of daily life. Ideas and conceptions, like notions of life, are ethereal and need symbols in order to be felt and understood. Another thinker who thinks the mind operates metaphorically is A.N. Whitehead. Symbol may represent a lot of various things to a lot of different people since different authors have given it varied implications. Symbols "spiritualize literature" and the symbolist movement is "fundamentally mystical," according to Arthur Symons, Edmund Wilson, Maurice Bowra, and W.B. Yeats. The literary symbol, as defined by W.Y. Tindall, "embodies and presents a complex of sentiments and concepts that go beyond reference and the bounds of conversation." Among contemporary symbolists, Hemingway is an important figure. Symbolically, his books are big because they capture the emptiness of our contemporary era via resonant pictures and metaphors. His compositions include symbolism with deep psychological significance. Hemingway's style may seem effortless, yet behind its surface lurk profound ideas. In order to communicate these ideas, he makes effective use of symbols. The iceberg hypothesis is what Hemingway's detractors characterise his worldview. Only a fraction of the truth lies under the surface, unseen by our naked sight. What we feel is only the top of the iceberg, and our day-to-day experiences make up just one eighth of the sum of the experience. The job of the writer, in part, is to employ symbols to communicate this hidden aspect of experience.*

**Keywords:** Virginia, Symbols, World war, bridge, spiritualize literature

### Introduction

The Lost Generation the Sun Also Rises has been called a novel of the lost generation. The novel describes the moral chaos which was prevalent after the First World War. The phrase 'The Lost Generation' seemed to man to sum up an aspect of the social history of the nineteen twenties. The end of the nineteenth century was followed by the First World War. The European society was never the same after the First World War. The novelists of this period have expressed a longing for a world that had come to an end. They also described the effect of violence on the lives of the post-war generation. T.S. Eliot, D.H. Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway are all concerned with the predicament of the modern man. Some critics have called 'The Sun Also Rises' as 'The Wasteland' in prose. Like

T.S. Eliot, Hemingway also presents characters which are all inhabitants of this chaotic world. Carlos Baker has called the characters of this novel as the wastelanders. He is justified in calling them so. Jake Barnes is the hero de-sexed by and Brett Ashley is a drifter. Cohn represents the



---

romantic pre-war figure and that is why he is a failure. Mike Campbell, Pedero Romero and Bill are all the figures of this wasteland. We may agree with Hemingway. The novelist himself took a deep interest in life and spent most of his time in touring and fishing. He actively participated in the war as a reporter, which brought him close to the evil effect of war on society. A novelist of keen perception cannot help noting what changes war had brought to the society. He feels consolation from the fact that Brett shows him the letters of her lovers. When Brett goes away with Pedro Romero he does not feel as much sorrow as he feels delight in Cohn's discomfiture. Pedro Romero is a young bull fighter who also represents the old values shattered by the First World War. Brett has fallen in love with him at first sight. But this love lacks and noble qualities. This is a tempestuous love and can be rightly called lost. Poor Romero is sent away by Brett after she is satiated with him in a few days. Romero wants her to grow hair and Brett has refused as she does not want to be dominated by him. He finds that Brett represents the new emancipated women of the twenties.

The dominance of Brett is a symbol of male impotence. In this respect, Jake's physical impotence also represents the spiritual impotence of the men of that time. There is a crowd of lovers, but they have failed to impress their manhood upon Brett. Jake tells Georgette that everybody is sick. This statement is applicable to the whole atmosphere of the novel. We find that the world of 'The Sun Also Rises' is a topsy-turvy world where morals are loose and sex and wine are used as freely as water. This is a perversity of the times that Harvey has not eaten anything for five days but he does not care as he has been drinking wine all these days. He would rather have a drink than eat anything because when he got that way, he did not care whether he ate or not. "All is vanity and vexation of spirit." We agree with a critic that as far as the atmosphere of the novel is concerned, "all is vanity and vexation of spirit."

In this novel there are two sets of moral and emotional atmosphere. Something tarnished is opposed to something bright. Vanity is challenged by sanity. A world of man and rotten disorder is set off against a world of dear and entangling alliances. This Side of Paradise Fitzgerald, in his novel, 'This Side of Paradise' has also depicted the moral chaos of the modern times. Many critics believe that Hemingway based this novel on Fitzgerald's novel. Although Hemingway denied the tag of 'lost generation', yet this book was widely accepted as a document of the lost generation. Hemingway wrote to one of his friends that his novel is concerned not with the lost generation but to describe "how people get to Hell." According to him, this novel is meant to be the tragedy of modern life. 'Mrs. Dalloway' Virginia Woolf in her novel 'Mrs. Dalloway' presents Septimus Smith as a war-torn character. Similarly, Jake Barnes is a casualty of war both physically as well mentally. The war has rendered him physically impotent. He is a sort of neurotic also although he is not such a nervous wreck as Septimus Smith. He is capable of taking interest in life and the fishing trip in the novel is the happiest spot in his life.

Another war casualty is Mike Campbell who is engaged to Brett Ashley. He is equally impotent and cannot prevent Brett from going with other men. He is also a wreck and most of the time, he is drowned in wine. He does not if Brett goes with other men. He is always cross with Cohn and they have often verbal quarrels. Theme of the Sun Also Rises The theme of The Sun Also Rises is contained, to a large extent, in the title itself. It means that the sun goes on moving irrespective

---



---

of what happens to life on the earth. It arises, sets: and again arises denoting always a new day. Similarly, life also goes on whatever may happen to its course. With the passage of time, the values and ways of life move, the old values become useless, as a result some chaos grows, and out of this chaos, emerge some new values and codes to make life move on. And this is the theme of the novel *The Sun Also Rises* Hemingway, in this novel, shows the destruction of the nineteenth century, pre-war romantic values, the effects of the First World War, the chaos and bewilderment as a result, and finally finds some new: code of life emerging gradually which Hemingway thinks to be proper for guiding the course of present life. Each of the three books of the novel marks a specific stage in this serial. In the first book, the nineteenth century romantic notions are shown to have become powerless and impracticable. At the same time, some seeds of complication are thrown through Jake-Brett affair and Book Two displays this confusion while Book Three presents the solution, new values and codes of life. The character of Cohn in the novel has been presented in such a way as to attack the pre-war romantic notions. Cohn is romantic in outlook and he loves Brett. He is very happy when Brett goes away to San Sebastian with him for a week. But he does not know that in the modern world, love as a romantic notion is totally absurd. That is why, Brett discards him very soon. At Pamplona, he follows Brett and irritates her. He beats practicably everybody who comes in his way. But in spite of all this, Brett does not love him and goes away with Pedro Romero. One of the important themes of the novel is the lifelessness in the modern life. Jake lost his genitals in the war. This is a severe shock resulting in the ill temperament of Jakes. To make the things worse, he is in love with Brett but cannot indulge in sexual intercourse with her. So he cannot prevent her from going to other men and comments: "Couldn't we live together." Jake is not the only person who falls in love. As we have seen, Cohn is also a failure. Mike, though engaged to Brett, cannot hold her, himself. Before the eyes of her fiancé, Brett elopes with the bull fighter. But Romero cannot get her either, because Brett decides not to spoil a young man. Another theme of the novel is the bootlessness of the modern man. Hemingway points out the emptiness of life of the post-war generation through dialogues and symbols. Cohn and Jake hint at this often: "Listen Jake, do not ever get the feeling that all your life is going and you are net taking advantage of it ...." and Jake's answer is: "Yes, every once in a while." This is very true of the whole gang of expatriates who are the representatives of the whole post-war generation. The empty table and three empty glasses on itsymbolize the emptiness of the modern life. Violence and death, which confront us at every moment of life, occupy an important place in Hemingway's themes. Bull fighting is a symbol of the all-pervading violence in the modern life. In almost every novel, Hemingway speaks of some injury which not only handicaps some character physically but also cripples him or her morally and mentally. The abundance of war is also a symbol of the growing violence in this world. So, there seems to be a kind of darkness which has enveloped the whole generation after the post war period. This darkness frightens the characters of Hemingway's novels. Such a black and gloomy picture of the post war generation has led the critics to think that Hemingway's world is a world of despair. But this is cot Hemingway's fault. This novel is the direct impression of life itself. The very question as to how to live in this dark and gloomy world successfully becomes the Centre of Hemingway's theme in this novel. For this purpose, Hemingway's characters seek some repose in the outdoor life. Cohn wants to go to South Africa

---



---

to get some advantage of life. To escape from his nightmarish experience, Jake occupies himself in other ways He goes to Berguette for fishing and to Pamplona in order to see great Spanish fiesta. The greatest advantage of such outdoor games, fishing trips and seeing bull fighting etc. lies in the fact that they provide a new code of successful life, new values which may guide the course of life. Here bull fighting is symbolic of this emergence of new values. Jack, the nervous and frustrated victim, gets this lesson from Belmonte and Romero. Belmonte, who is now an old man (once a successful bull fighter), suffering from fistula, has been asked to compete with Pedro Romero, the young bull fighter. As the facts are, he cannot give the expected performance. The public is disappointed with him: "He had meant to have a great afternoon and instead it was an afternoon of sneers, shouted insults and finally, a volley of cushions and pieces of bread and vegetables, thrown down on him in the place where he had his greatest triumphs." But see how he puts up with it stoically. His pain increases every moment, both physically and mentally, but he does not leave the ring. He becomes utterly contemptuous and indifferent towards the crowd. If Belmonte teaches to endure pain and suffering, Romero sets for the successful aspect of life. He is in fact, an embodiment of the new values which may well be adoptable for the new generation. His idea is to be sincere is his effort, Romero never made any contortions, and always it was straight and pure and natural in line. Romero's bull fighting gave real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line his movements. In his love affair too, Romero is not a romantic and frustrated lover. He elopes with Brett when he can get it without being too proud like Cohn and so, is able to leave her without regret when the occasion demands it. So, a smooth and enduring attitude towards the lights and shades of life is the secret "of keeping life moving on and on like the sun itself. Only such an attitude which Jake adopts after bull fighting scene makes him bold enough to accept what life has given him. And can become so who may accept this code of stoic endurance and acceptance and this is what constitutes the theme of THE SUN ALSO RISES. Review of Literature T.S.Eliot, D.H.Lawrence and Ernest Hemingway- are all concerned with the predicament of the modern man. Some critics have called 'The Sun Also Rises' as 'The Wasteland' in prose. Like T.S.Eliot, Hemingway also presents characters which are all inhabitants of this chaotic world. Carlos Baker has called the characters of this novel as the waste landers. He is justified in calling them so. Jake Barnes is the hero de-sexed by and Brett Ashley is a drifter. Mike Campbell, Pedro Romero and Bill - are all the figures of this wasteland. Fitzgerald, in his novel, 'This Side of Paradise' has also depicted the moral chaos of the modern times. Many critics believe that Hemingway based this novel on Fitzgerald's novel. Although Hemingway denied the tag of 'lost generation', yet this book was widely accepted as a document of the lost generation. Hemingway wrote to one of his friends that his novel is concerned not with the lost generation but to describe "how people get to Hell." According to him, this novel is meant to be the tragedy of modern life. Carlos Baker, "Perhaps the novelist wants to hint that the world would be a better place if there were no women in it. The whole Bill Gorton visit Burguette for a fishing trip without any woman with them. Perhaps, that is why the female characters in the novel are nymphomaniacs and prostitutes. As soon as women enter the scene, it is all chaos, vanity and jealousies. The characters in the novel have been called the waste landers but it does not mean that the earth which "abideth forever" is a wasteland. The sun rises and sets over the fields and woods of Spain and France. The fresh wind blows; the rivers

---



---

run in the villas; the white roads ascend the mountain. For those who will look at it all this is available. But the waste landers pass by these things. There is no aesthetic health in them. Thus it can be concluded that the novel presents the chaotic state of post-World War I period. The emotional exhaustion, the moral decadence and the spiritual degeneration in God-fewer worlds are clearly depicted.

### References:

1. F. scott fitzgerald. This side of paradise.1920
2. A lifetime of lessons in “Mrs. Dalloway”. The new yorker.2020
3. Ernest Hemingway. The sun also rises.1926
4. <https://www.britannica.com/biography/f-scott-fitzgerald>
5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/lost\\_generation](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/lost_generation)
6. <https://www.bible.com/bible/compare/ecc.1.14-15>
7. <https://biblehub.com/kjv/ecclesiastes/1-14.htm>