



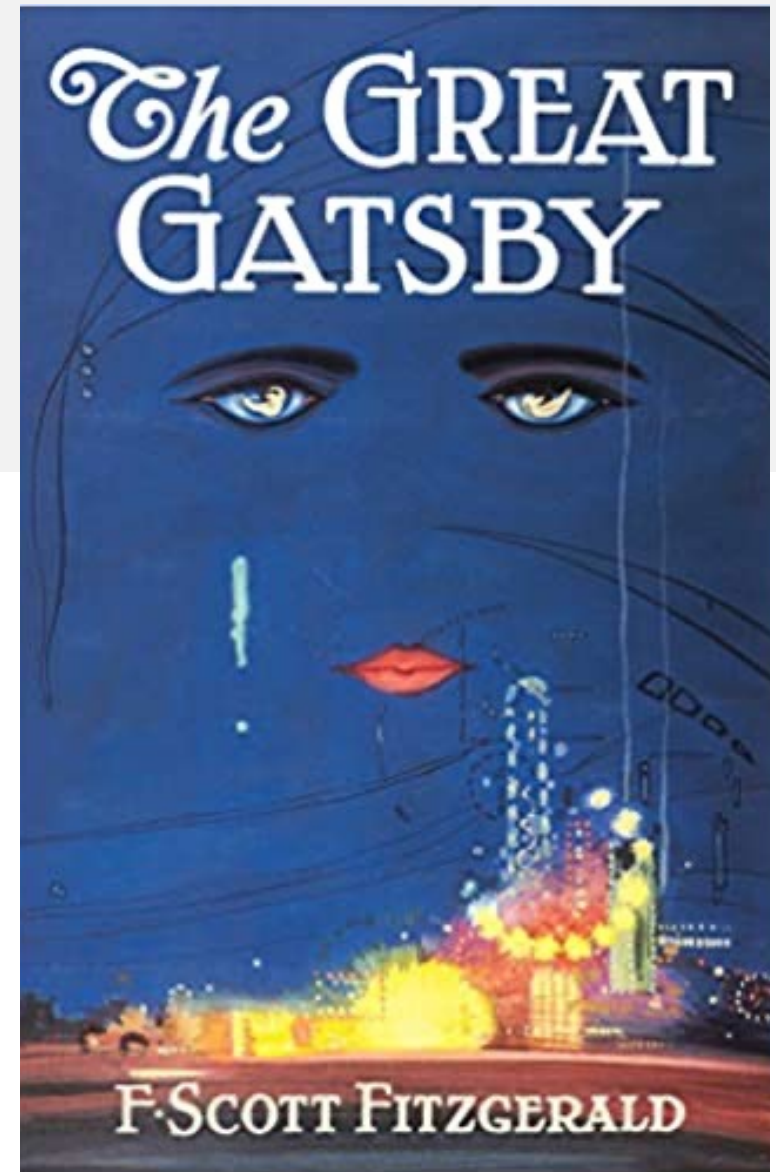
Brett Ashley as New Woman in *The Sun* *Also Rises*

By Wendy Martin



Modern Literature

- Along with *The Great Gatsby* (published in 1925) *Sun* became the novel that captured the glamor and excitement of the jazz age along with cultural dislocation and psychological malaise that were the legacy of WWI.





Gender

- Brett and Jake represent a shift in gender perceptions following WWI.
- This was a gradual shift of “the ground on which the edifice of Victorian sexual identity was built.”
- 8 million soldiers died in the trenches of WWI—thus concepts of glorious battle, honor, and heroism became completely suspect.
- Even Hemingway went into war with naïve ideas: said he thought of himself as the “home team” and the Austrians as “the visiting team.”
- Yet later concluded there were no heroes in this war.

Jake's Wound

- Postwar sensibility is exemplified by Jake Barnes' war wound. The new sensibility is "one of severe loss, emasculation, and impotence."
- Men expected to take on a stoic attitude in compensation for their new awareness of masculine vulnerability.
- For Hemingway, this stoic attitude = "grace under pressure."





Post-war Men and Victorian Women

- This stoicism an echo of the Victorian adage to women to “suffer and be still.”
- Just as the “true” Victorian woman is self-effacing, the ideal man in Hemingway’s world consciously suppresses his feelings in the name of courage or mastery.
- Forced stoicism is not natural or glorious; but it’s necessary in order to conceal masculine vulnerability and loss of cultural certainty.

Shell Shock and Hysteria

- Both Victorian women and Hemingway men experience emotional disturbance: hysteria and shell shock.
- Hysteria—female response to the inability to reconcile the need for self-expression with the cultural imperative of self-denial.
- Shell shock—a parallel response of men terrified of combat and death on the battlefield.
- Hysteria a response to excessive domestic confinement while shell shock of response to excessive exposure.
- Both produce the same systems: exhaustion, confusion, speech defects, blindness, deafness, paralysis.





Women after the War

- After WWI, female role underwent a transformation in popular consciousness—a new visibility and mobility.
- Because public space was traditionally seen as male, women could be viewed either as interlopers or as “fair game,” undeserving of respect or safety.
- Although the flapper image was largely a media construct, nevertheless the 20’s consolidated gains made by feminists over past 100 years.
- The modern 20’s woman was an outgrowth of the late 19th century “New Woman” who rejected purity, piety, submission. Frequently single, had a career. Seen as threatening the social order.

Paris especially

- Postwar feminism especially evident in Paris in the early 1920s—over 80 feminist societies with more than 60,000 members.
- New clothes by Coco Chanel, etc. designed for movement. A riot in London over woman wearing transparent sleeves.
- This new woman is seen in Lady Brett, “who has stepped off the pedestal and now roams the world.”
- Brett deeply offends Montoya when she appears with bare shoulders at his bar in Pamplona.



Yet, Brett complex— caught in the middle?

- Brett often vacillates between extremes of self-abnegation and self-indulgence.
- Her relationships with men are filled with ambivalence, anxiety, and alienation.
- Much critical reaction has mirrored traditional values—despite Hemingway’s sympathetic treatment of Brett, she’s been described as “hard-boiled,” “devoid of womanhood,” “destructive,” a “compulsive bitch,” etc.





Brett

- Brett reflects contradictions of modern world—on the one hand, a careless femme fatale, on the other, she lapses into the role of redemptive woman by trying to save men through her sexuality.
- Mike says she “loves looking after people” and she has the affair with Cohn because she feels sorry for him.
- When Cohn insists on playing the knight intent to rescue his damsel in distress, she scorns him for his inability to accept casual sex.

Paying

- Although she breaks up with men when they to exercise control over her (Cohn, Pedro Romero), Brett still financially dependent on men as well.
- In her exchange of sexual and psychological attention with men in return for financial favors and protection, Brett mirrors both the traditional wife and the prostitute. Yet, she refuses to be either.
- The count estimates (counts) the cost of his experiences—psychological as well as economic—and he consciously decides what he is willing to pay.
- Jake, too, believes in fiscal and emotional responsibility—he sees that, to be Brett's friend, he must relinquish his desire to control her.
- Economic independence and psychological freedom are related, but men in the novel control the money.



Emotional challenges

- In *Sun*, emotional challenges to Brett and Jake are opposite. Jake must learn to accept the discomfort and uncertainty that come with his loss of authority.
- Brett must learn to make choices for herself and take responsibility for those choices.
- Jake becomes more nurturing and responsive
- Brett becomes more decisive and responsible.
- Gender role reversal—women swear and men cry.



Urban vs. Rural

- Men seek relief from social tensions in pastoral interludes, such as fishing on the Irati.
- Yet, Brett knows it is urban centers that provide mobility and choices to the new women.
- Country has a limited vision of women as reproductive beings.



End



- Unlike Victorian and other early 20th century novels, Hemingway doesn't relegate Brett to the domestic realm or punish her severely for her transgressions like other female heroines are punished in literature.
- Although traditional ideals are rejected in the novel, Brett and Jake end at the beginning of a genuine friendship. The coldly beaded glasses in Madrid bar call to mind the wine bottles of Bill and Jake on the river.
- The final sharing of public space in Madrid "signals the possibility for new kinds of relationships for men and women in the 20th century.