Sexual Behavior

Regarding her sexual behavior, Lady Brett Ashley (Brett) is the star in this book. Her sexual views and activities helped to widen conceptions about how modern women may behave. She’s a thirty-five year old divorcée who is not overly conventional, but she also likes to talk about sex, and women who openly discuss sex, was a fairly taboo subject during Hemingway’s time. If coupling is a less taboo topic for today’s women, today, we may owe some of that freedom to literary characters like Brett. "Brett had affairs with men before," says one boyfriend, Mike Campbell, in the novel. "She tells me all about everything" (Hemingway 144). Hence, Campbell is discussing Brett’s sexual liberation. She feels pleasure and talent in being sexually active, and truly relishes her carnal knowledge.

Yet she is simultaneously unattached to any one man. Several suitors pursue Brett, and many would like to marry her. Those would-be husbands seek to force her into the sexual role she exchanges. Men throughout the novel would also like to fulfill their own traditional roles as (presumably) dutiful husbands. Yet Brett is a liberated woman who truly values freedom. She, a character created out of the psychological rigor and strength. She, a character created out of the personality of a “New Woman” (Yu 177). Brett’s freedom to dress as she pleases shows that her gender role is fluid, dynamic, and not bound by the rigid confines of her garments. Proudly, Brett shows off her nontraditional identity through her consciously reborn appearance.

Physical Appearance

In addition to her sexual prowess, Lady Brett Ashley’s physical appearance has also helped expand modern sociological gender norms. In the first scene of the Sun Also Rises, Jake describes Brett as wearing “a slipover jersey sweater and a tweed suit” (Hemingway 29). Her hair, he says, “was brushed back like a boy’s. She started all that” (Hemingway 29). Brett’s fashion revolution; she dresses out of tradition. As the writer Alastair W. G. Murray points out, Brett embodies certain androgynous characteristics of a “New Woman” (Yu 177). Brett’s freedom to dress as she pleases shows that her gender role is fluid, dynamic, and not bound by the rigid confines of her garments. Proudly, Brett shows off her nontraditional identity through her consciously reborn appearance.

Personal Philosophy

Hemingway created Brett as a character who is also liberated in her personal philosophy. She thinks for herself. Witty, caustic, strong-minded and independent she is a heroine who helped to widen societal definitions of femininity in this culture. Even if her character was created by a man, she is a literary role model for women to follow. For example, many women may have been traditionally taught to be mild and meek, like Little Women, fragile and in need of protection. Not Brett. She’s tough. She’s mentally tough during hand ball fights, for example, when events get bloody. Brett boldly watches with wide-eyed detachment as bulls and horses are maulled by matadors and the suffering of helpless creatures may have been supreme in the domain of manly men only. Not anymore, indicated Ernest Hemingway, and we watch Brett’s many reactions to the Pamplona bull fights. Jake attempted to warn her that bull fights are masculine and brutal. He implores her to close her delicate eyes. “Don’t look at the horror,” he says, “After the bull has them” (Hemingway 165). Brett soon surprises everyone with her ability to watch gored animals die with nary a blink. “I didn’t feel badly at all,” she reminisces (Hemingway 166). Hemingway’s overarching point is that Brett has asserted her position as a strong new woman, and she is not held down by the soft old gender traditions. Yu explains that Brett is “breaking from the stricture of Victorianism” (Yu 177). During the Victorian Age, “to mean, women were treated as delicate child bearers.” Their leisure activities might just have included biting face attendances at bull fights. Brett is a new kind of woman. She’s more involved in masculine activities; she’s more adventurous, and perhaps less inclined to bend on side-ordered cushions while sipping tea and gossiping about servants. She has masculine thoughts and actions; she acts upon her freedom with physiological vigor and strength. She, a character created out of the head and pen of Ernest Hemingway, is a rare genre of womanhood.