**TRAITS EXPANDED BY LADY BRETT ASHLEY**

- **Sexual Behavior**
- **Physical Appearance**
- **Personal Philosophy**

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**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-year-old divorcée who is not only independent, but she also likes to talk about it. Sex, and women who openly discuss sex, was a fairly taboo subject during Hemingway’s time. If coupling was a lesser forbidden topic for modern men, we may owe some of that freedom to literary characters like Brett. Brett had affairs with men before she met one boyfriend, Mike Campbell, in the novel. “She tells me all about everything” (Hemingway 149). Here, Campbell is discussing Brett’s sexual liberation. She looks pleasure and intimacy in being sexually active, and indeed relates her carnal knowledge. Yet she is simultaneously unattached to any one man. Several suitors pursue Brett, and many would like to marry her. Their would-be husbands seek to force her into the role of mother. Men, throughout the novel would also like to fulfill their own traditional roles as (presumably) dutiful husbands. Yet Brett is a liberated woman who finds pleasure in being sexually active, and indeed relates her carnal knowledge.

**Personal Philosophy**

Hemingway created Brett as a character who is also liberated in her personal philosophy. She thinks for herself. Willful, caustic, strong-minded and independent, she is a heroine who helped to widen societal definitions of femininity in the 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 Brett, who is powerful and independent. 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 redone appearance.

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**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 skirt” (Hemingway 29). Her hair, he says, “was brushed back like a boy’s.” She started all that” (Hemingway 29). Brett’s fashion rebel, she chooses to dress out of tradition. As the writer Staempfli 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 redone appearance.

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**Conclusion**

With all of her traits — sexual liberation, expanded fashion interpretations, a brasher belief system — Brett emerges from this novel as a leader and teacher of gender flexibility. Her character has widened our perceptions of what it means to be a woman. In these ways, Hemingway has created a sociologically progressive character who helps us to rework the meaning and boundaries of our genders” (Kaplan and Grover 24). The contrasting nature of static gender roles is an unhealthy concept. Hard men versus soft women is impossible traits to maintain; in order to thrive in this life, people of both genders must exhibit both hardness and softness depending upon the context. Sometimes women behave in ways that are traditionally defined as feminine, and sometimes they act more like men. So Ernest Hemingway, despite being a male chauvinist pig, has given a gift to modern culture: the flawed yet progressive heroine that is Lady Brett Ashley.

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**Works Cited**


