Title: The Sun Also Rises

Author: Ernest Hemingway, 1926 (Roaring Twenties)

Authorial origin: Illinois-born American expatriate in Paris

Characters (italicized are major):

_Jake Barnes_, a wounded World War I expatriate veteran-turned-journalist, is the protagonist and narrator of the novel. Left impotent as a result of his wounds during World War I, Jake is a largely neutral and relatable presence who is a classic example of the Hemingway hero by virtue of his honor, individualism, and endurance in the face of hardships such as alienation from society.

_Lady Brett Ashley_, a twice-divorced Englishwoman, is the lone woman of the group. An impulsive and sexually liberated woman, Brett is clearly meant to be a representative of the freer mores of the 1920s. She loves Jake throughout the novel, but the two of them cannot pursue a relationship by virtue of Jake’s war wounds.

_Robert Cohn_, a Jewish college friend of Jake, is a wealthy dilettante who flits from occupation to occupation, Cohn also serves to represent the malaise at the heart of many of the Americans flooding Paris in the inter-war period. Cohn is also a magnet for anti-Semitic remarks in the novel, and his engagement with Brett makes him a magnet for the petty cruelty of the group.

_Mike Campbell_, another World War I veteran traumatized by the experience of fighting, is a hard-drinking and perpetually-broke Scotsman who pursues Lady Brett throughout the novel. Mike is extremely insecure about his penury, Brett’s promiscuity, and therefore drinks and fights his way through the novel as recompense.

_Bill Gorton_, a World War I veteran (though not an expatriate), is a close friend of Jake Barnes whose good temper and humor buoy the group. His friendship with Jake Barnes is one of few genuine friendships in the novel, as shown by their interactions while enjoying the natural bounty of Spain.

_Pedro Romero_, a handsome and talented young bullfighter, is in many ways the antithesis of Jake’s characters, having an aim in life as a masculine sportsman. Brett pursues a relationship with him, which annoys Mike especially.

_Count Mippipopolous_ is a war-battered veteran who also becomes infatuated with Brett while in Paris, though he exhibits an independence from her that none of her other lovers manage.

_Francis Clyne_, a manipulative and controlling woman, is Robert Cohn’s significant other at the start of the novel.
Montoya is the owner of the inn in which the characters stay while at Madrid, and seeks to protect Pedro Romero from the tempting wiles of fame and foreigners.

Wilson-Harris is a fellow World War I veteran with whom Jake and Bill form an intimate bonds while spending time together in Spain.

Settings:

Paris, France: The novel begins in 1920s Paris, a hub of cosmopolitan artists and writers along with American expatriates and battle-scarred World War I veterans. The city depicted by Hemingway is a refuge for the shell-shocked young people of World War I, and it is in this setting that Jake Barnes works as a journalist. The city itself is an inter-war oasis, depicted as being calmer in temperament than the raucous Spain of the novel, and indeed the characters engage in notably less drinking in Paris. Hemingway therefore uses Paris as a setting in which the characters and their status as members of the Lost Generation can be established.

Pamplona, Spain: The novel shifts between multiple places in the vicinity of Pamplona, Spain, with many of the characters enjoying everything from the bullfights to the natural bounty of the area. Indeed, everything in Spain, from the bountiful fishing and hunting to the passion of bullfights, is imbued with a sense of life and a masculinity which seems noticeably more pronounced than in effeminate Paris. The rawness of emotion and action in Spain is clearly demonstrated in the dramatic structure of the book; the characters of the novel drink and fight more heavily in Spain, and Spain is where the majority of the book takes place.

Plot Outline:

Book 1: Jake Barnes, a Paris-based journalist and World War I veteran, meets up with his friend Robert Cohn to play tennis. Cohn describes a possible trip to South America, and attempts to rope Jake into joining him. Leaving the office, Jake briefly has dinner with the prostitute Georgette before stumbling upon Lady Brett Ashley and Count Mippipopolous at a large party. Brett tells Jake that she loves him in a taxi-cab on the way back, but both acknowledge the fact that a relationship between them would be untenable.

Book 2: Jake meets with Bill Gorton (who has just arrived from New York City) and Scotsman Mike Campbell. Jake, Bill, and Robert Cohn decide to take a fishing trip through the Spanish wilderness, but Robert Cohn drops out at the last minute to wait for Brett and Mike. Jake and Bill enjoy a few days of genuine happiness exploring the countryside near Berguete, and they meet a fellow British war veteran named Wilson-Harris. Jake and Bill soon reunite with Brett, Mike and Robert Cohn in Pamplona, where they drink their way through the fiesta. Robert Cohn becomes a magnet for resentment due to his attraction to Brett and being Jewish as the group watches the running of the bulls. Jake then introduces Romero, a young and talented bullfighter, to Brett and the group; Brett immediately seduces Romero, causing Cohn to beat him up, though Romero still is able to perform in the ring.

Book 3: The fiesta ends and the group disperses, with Jake heading to San Sebastian (small town near the border between Spain and France), Bill to Paris, Cohn somewhere (he flees to an unspecified location), and Brett with Romero to Madrid. The novel ends in Madrid, with Jake receiving a telegram from Brett seeking help and a meeting at a hotel. There, she states that she will go back to Mike, and the novel concludes with Jake and Brett discussing what their relationship could have been like.
Major Themes of the Work:

The Nature of Masculinity: The nature of masculinity is one of the most discussed topics in The Sun Also Rises. Jake himself is physically emasculated (ironically in the pursuit of the masculine ideal of war), and exhibits especial resentment towards homosexuals in a bar, who he feels have squandered their masculinity. Jake is happiest when in the company of other men enjoying the thoroughly masculine sport of fishing, and indeed his equilibrium is broken by Brett’s femininity, which lures him to the fiesta. Hemingway also demonstrates the consequences of a lack of true masculinity: Robert Cohn first displays his lack of masculinity by being unable to stand the bullfight and attract Brett, and then proceeds to fight Romero as recompense.

The Traumas of Life: Many of the characters in the novel have endured tremendous trauma, most of which is indirectly or directly linked to the horrors of World War I. Jake, Bill, and Mike are all World War I veterans, although only Jake bears the physical scars of the war in the form of his impotence. Brett has also suffered at the hands of her former husband Lord Ashley, an officer in the British Army who abused Brett and forced her to sleep on the floor while he slept with a loaded revolver. The only person not to suffer by virtue of the Great War is Robert Cohn, a status which is especially appropriate given the fact that he symbolizes pre-war values.

The New Morality: Hemingway directly establishes the contrast between the new morality of the 20s and the staid pre-war morality through the characters of Brett and Robert Cohn, respectively. Brett is a modern, liberated woman who drinks, smokes, and embodies the new feminist perspectives of the age. In contrast, Cohn is a sturdy Princeton man, steeped in money and tradition, a noncombatant who nevertheless seeks to cling onto pre-war gentleman aspirations of chivalry and honor. Cohn’s constant desire to shake hands with all those he has fought is perhaps the most telling symbol of his pre-war morals, and indeed is portrayed as ultimately pathetic in the face of the strong, cold men of the world with which he contends.

Symbols:

Bullfighting: Bullfighting in the novel is representative of masculinity, strength of character, and artistic purity, and Hemingway contrasts the sweeping grandeur of the sport with the petty cruelty of Jake’s group of friends. The symbol of bullfighting is most obvious in two points: the initial bullfight the characters witness, and the character of Pedro Romero. In the course of the first bullfight Jake, Bill and Brett watch during the fiesta, Jake warns Brett not to look at the goring of the bull. Such an attitude codifies the role of the masculine Jake (who is thoroughly enamored of bullfighting) in conjunction with the seemingly feminine Brett, who proves capable of stomaching the whole scene. In addition, Cohn’s own squeamishness regarding the whole affair clearly demonstrates his effeminate status as a dilettante compared to Jake and the others. As a bullfighter, Pedro Romero is characterized as a man seized with clean masculinity and an unswerving devotion to his craft. Hemingway himself greatly admired the sport of bullfighting, and wrote numerous short stories about what he saw as the clean purity of the struggle of man against beast.

Other significant imagery:

The Ear of the Bull: Hemingway uses the ear of the bull which kills a drunk in the fiesta as a symbol of the moral depravity and narcissism which characterized the Lost Generation. This is best shown by the passage below:
“The bull who killed Vicente Girones was named Bocanegra, was Number 118 of the bull-breeding establishment of Sanchez Taberno, and was killed by Pedro Romero, who, in turn, gave it to Brett, who wrapped it in a handkerchief belonging to myself, and left both ear and handkerchief, along with a number of Muratti cigarette-stubs, shoved far back in the drawer of the bed-table that stood beside her bed in the Hotel Montoya, in Pamplona.” (Chapter 17, pg. 147)

What truly makes this passage so powerful in its representation of the banality of death are the specific details, the minor exchanges which lead to the ear’s final resting place inside of a drawer. By elaborating on the individual details of the ear’s journey, Hemingway both immerses the reader in the scene while also showing how personal concerns such as Brett’s love for Romero can subvert even the cold horror of the death of a fellow human being.

Jake and Bill’s Fishing Trip: Nature is symbolic of a restorative cleanser of the spirit and soul in *The Sun Also Rises*; indeed, Jake is most able to escape the turmoil of Brett when in the Spanish countryside with Bill and Wilson-Harris. This is best exemplified by the passage below:

“We stayed five days at Burguete and had good fishing. The nights were cold and the days were hot, and there was always a breeze even in the heat of day…We found a stream with a pool deep enough to swim in. In the evenings we played three-handed bridge with an Englishman named Harris…There was no word from Robert Cohn nor from Brett and Mike.” (Chapter 12, pg. 95)

In his last line, Hemingway clearly establishes a divide between the good characters of the novel (Jake and Bill) and the morally ambiguous characters (Cohn, Brett, and Mike). His use of nature to divide the characters is telling, and Hemingway contrasts the masculinity and purity of nature with the sterile and cruel interactions of the group in the fiesta in Spain.

Alcohol for Solace: The sheer amount of alcohol the characters all consume in *The Sun Also Rises* is symbolic of their mutual desire to blot out the tension between them and the internal pain they experience. This is perhaps best shown by the passage below:

“It was like certain dinners I remember from the war. There was much wine, an ignored tension, and a feeling of things coming that you could not prevent happening. Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy. It seemed they were all such nice people” (Chapter 13, pg. 110)

Hemingway displays how the characters of the novel use alcohol as an escape from the tension inherent to the group, and indeed alcohol influences many of the decisions the characters make during the raucous celebration of the fiesta.

Significance of the title:

Aside from the lascivious pun on Jake’s impotence, the title powerfully codifies the themes of ambivalence, love, and gender norms present in the events of the novel proper. The idea of the constancy of the sun (and by extension life) lends additional poignancy to the horrors the characters have all endured, from Jake and Bill’s war experiences to the domestic violence Brett endures. Hemingway’s ultimate message – that the Lost Generation will and must surmount the horrors it has seen in World War I – is truly codified by the fact that *The Sun Also Rises*, regardless of whatever does occur in the quiescent lives humans all lead
Authorial techniques in use:

The Declarative Sentence: In *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway makes use of what soon became his trademark style: short, declarative, and descriptive sentences. Below is a passage emblematic of this new, modern style:

“The bus climbed steadily up the road. The country was barren and rocks stuck up through the clay. There was no grass beside the road. Looking back we could see the country spread out below. Far back the fields were squares of green and brown on the hillsides. Making the horizon were the brown mountains. They were strangely shaped.” (Chapter 11, pg. 83)

Hemingway’s use of the short, declarative sentences establishes laconically the bliss of the natural setting, and sets a tone of calm for Jake and Bill’s fishing trip (their only true solace in the novel). This hard-hitting and masculine style serves to further emphasize the vividness that characterizes Hemingway’s writing while also lending an additional profundity to the events of the novel.

The Stream-of-Consciousness Monologue: Hemingway’s sentences, however, are not exclusively declarative narrative bullets; rather, he employs enormous and long-winded monologues as well. An example (all of which is one sentence) is shown below.

“I knelt and started to pray and prayed for everybody I thought of, Brett and Mike and Bill and Robert Cohn and myself, and all the bull-fighters, separately for the ones I liked, and lumping all the rest, then I prayed for myself again, and while I was praying for myself I found I was getting sleepy, so I prayed that the bull-fights would be good, and that it would be a fine fiesta, and that we would get some fishing.” (Chapter 10, pg. 75)

This soliloquy is as notable for its dramatic placement as it is for its significance to Hemingway’s writing style. Jake is, in a sense, praying for all the events that transpire in the rest of the book, since Jake and Bill leave for their fishing trip (and the start of the Spanish adventure) in the next chapter. The stream-of-consciousness style monologue serves to immerse the reader more fully in Jake’s thoughts, allowing for a greater understanding of Jake as a character and the narrator.