

The Sun Also Rises, Character List and Plot Overview

Jake Barnes - The narrator and protagonist of the novel. Jake is an American veteran of World War I working as a journalist in Paris, where he and his friends engage in an endless round of drinking and parties. Although Jake is the most stable of his friends, he struggles with anguish over his love for Lady Brett Ashley, his impotence, and the moral vacuum that resulted from the war. Jake positions himself as an observer, generally using his insight and intelligence to describe only those around him, rarely speaking directly about himself. However, in describing the events and people he sees, Jake implicitly reveals much about his own thoughts and feelings.

Lady Brett Ashley - A beautiful British socialite who drinks heavily. As the novel begins, Brett is separated from her husband and awaiting a divorce. Though she loves Jake, she is unwilling to commit to a relationship with him because it will mean giving up sex. Indeed, she is unwilling to commit fully to any of the many men who become infatuated with her, though she has affairs with a number of them. However, she does not seem to draw much happiness from her independence. Her life, like the lives of many in her generation, is aimless and unfulfilling.

Robert Cohn - A wealthy American writer living in Paris. Though he is an expatriate like many of his acquaintances, Cohn stands apart because he had no direct experience of World War I and because he is Jewish. He holds on to the romantic prewar ideals of love and fair play, yet, against the backdrop of the devastating legacy of World War I, these values seem tragically absurd. As a Jew and a nonveteran, Cohn is a convenient target for the cruel and petty antagonism of Jake and his friends.

Bill Gorton - Like Jake, a heavy-drinking war veteran, though not an expatriate. Bill uses humor to deal with the emotional and psychological fallout of World War I. He and Jake, as American veterans, share a strong bond, and their friendship is one of the few genuine emotional connections in the novel. However, Bill is not immune to the petty cruelty that characterizes Jake and Jake's circle of friends.

Mike Campbell - A constantly drunk, bankrupt Scottish war veteran. Mike has a terrible temper, which most often manifests itself during his extremely frequent bouts of drunkenness. He has a great deal of trouble coping with Brett's sexual promiscuity, which provokes outbreaks of self-pity and anger in him, and seems insecure about her infidelity as well as his lack of money.

Pedro Romero - A beautiful, nineteen-year-old bullfighter. Romero's talents in the ring charm both aficionados and newcomers to the sport alike. He serves as a foil (a character whose attitudes or emotions contrast with, and thereby accentuate, those of another character) for Jake and his friends in that he carries himself with dignity and confidence at all times. Moreover, his passion for bullfighting gives his life meaning and purpose. In a world of amorality and corrupted masculinity, Romero remains a figure of honesty, purity, and strength.

Montoya - The owner of a Pamplona inn and a bullfighting expert. Montoya sees bullfighting as something sacred, and he respects and admires Jake for his genuine enthusiasm about it.

Montoya takes a paternal interest in the gifted young bullfighter Pedro Romero and seeks to protect him from the corrupting influences of tourists and fame.

Frances Clyne - Cohn's girlfriend at the beginning of the novel. A manipulative status-seeker, Frances was highly domineering early in their relationship and persuaded Cohn to move to Paris. As her looks begin to fade, she becomes increasingly possessive and jealous.

Count Mippipopolous - A wealthy Greek count and a veteran of seven wars and four revolutions. Count Mippipopolous becomes infatuated with Brett, but, unlike most of Brett's lovers, he does not subject her to jealous, controlling behavior. Amid the careless, amoral pleasure-seeking crowd that constitutes Jake's social circle, the count stands out as a stable, sane person. Like Pedro Romero, he serves as a foil for Jake and his friends.

Wilson-Harris - A British war veteran whom Jake and Bill befriend while fishing in Spain. The three men share a profound common bond, having all experienced the horrors of World War I, as well as the intimacy that soldiers develop. Harris, as Jake and Bill call him, is a kind, friendly person who greatly values the brief time he spends with Jake and Bill.

Georgette - A beautiful but somewhat thick-witted prostitute whom Jake picks up and takes to dinner. Jake quickly grows bored of their superficial conversation and abandons her in a club to be with Brett.

Belmonte - A bullfighter who fights on the same day as Pedro Romero. In his early days, Belmonte was a great and popular bullfighter. But when he came out of retirement to fight again, he found he could never live up to the legends that had grown around him. Hence, he is bitter and dejected. He seems to symbolize the entire Lost Generation in that he feels out of place and purposeless in his later adult life.

Harvey Stone - A drunken expatriate gambler who is perpetually out of money. Harvey is intelligent and well read, yet he cannot escape his demons of excessive drinking and gambling. Like many of Jake's friends, he is prone to petty cruelty toward Cohn.

Plot Overview

The Sun Also Rises opens with the narrator, Jake Barnes, delivering a brief biographical sketch of his friend, Robert Cohn. Jake is a veteran of World War I who now works as a journalist in Paris. Cohn is also an American expatriate, although not a war veteran. He is a rich Jewish writer who lives in Paris with his forceful and controlling girlfriend, Frances Clyne. Cohn has become restless of late, and he comes to Jake's office one afternoon to try to convince Jake to go with him to South America. Jake refuses, and he takes pains to get rid of Cohn. That night at a dance club, Jake runs into Lady Brett Ashley, a divorced socialite and the love of Jake's life. Brett is a free-spirited and independent woman, but she can be very selfish at times. She and Jake met in England during World War I, when Brett treated Jake for a war wound. During Jake and Brett's conversation, it is subtly implied that Jake's injury rendered him impotent. Although Brett loves Jake, she hints that she is unwilling to give up sex, and that for this reason she will not commit to a relationship with him.

The next morning, Jake and Cohn have lunch. Cohn is quite taken with Brett, and he gets angry when Jake tells him that Brett plans to marry Mike Campbell, a heavy-drinking Scottish war veteran. That afternoon, Brett stands Jake up. That night, however, she arrives unexpectedly at his apartment with Count Mippipopolous, a rich Greek expatriate. After sending the count out for champagne, Brett tells Jake that she is leaving for San Sebastian, in Spain, saying it will be easier on both of them to be apart.

Several weeks later, while Brett and Cohn are both traveling outside of Paris, one of Jake's friends, a fellow American war veteran named Bill Gorton, arrives in Paris. Bill and Jake make plans to leave for Spain to do some fishing and later attend the fiesta at Pamplona. Jake makes plans to meet Cohn on the way to Pamplona. Jake runs into Brett, who has returned from San Sebastian; with her is Mike, her fiancé. They ask if they may join Jake in Spain, and he politely responds that they may. When Mike leaves for a moment, Brett reveals to Jake that she and Cohn were in San Sebastian together.

Bill and Jake take a train from Paris to Bayonne, in the south of France, where they meet Cohn. The three men travel together into Spain, to Pamplona. They plan on meeting Brett and Mike that night, but the couple does not show up. Bill and Jake decide to leave for a small town called Burguete to fish, but Cohn chooses to stay and wait for Brett. Bill and Jake travel to the Spanish countryside and check into a small, rural inn. They spend five pleasant days fishing, drinking, and playing cards. Eventually, Jake receives a letter from Mike. He writes that he and Brett will be arriving in Pamplona shortly. Jake and Bill leave on a bus that afternoon to meet the couple. After arriving in Pamplona, Jake and Bill check into a hotel owned by Montoya, a Spanish bullfighting expert who likes Jake for his earnest interest in the sport. Jake and Bill meet up with Brett, Mike, and Cohn, and the whole group goes to watch the bulls being unloaded in preparation for the bullfights during the fiesta. Mike mocks Cohn harshly for following Brett around when he is not wanted.

After a few more days of preparation, the fiesta begins. The city is consumed with dancing, drinking, and general debauchery. The highlight of the first day is the first bullfight, at which Pedro Romero, a nineteen-year-old prodigy, distinguishes himself above all the other

bullfighters. Despite its violence, Brett cannot take her eyes off the bullfight, or Romero. A few days later, Jake and his friends are at the hotel dining room, and Brett notices Romero at a nearby table. She persuades Jake to introduce her to him. Mike again verbally abuses Cohn, and they almost come to blows before Jake defuses the situation. Later that night, Brett asks Jake to help her find Romero, with whom she says she has fallen in love. Jake agrees to help, and Brett and Romero spend the night together.

Jake then meets up with Mike and Bill, who are both extremely drunk. Cohn soon arrives, demanding to know where Brett is. After an exchange of insults, Cohn attacks Mike and Jake, knocking them both out. When Jake returns to the hotel, he finds Cohn lying face down on his bed and crying. Cohn begs Jake's forgiveness, and Jake reluctantly grants it. The next day, Jake learns from Bill and Mike that the night before Cohn also beat up Romero when he discovered the bullfighter with Brett; Cohn later begged Romero to shake hands with him, but Romero refused.

At the bullfight that afternoon, Romero fights brilliantly, dazzling the crowd by killing a bull that had gored a man to death in the streets. Afterward, he cuts the bull's ear off and gives it to Brett. After this final bullfight, Romero and Brett leave for Madrid together. Cohn has left that morning, so only Bill, Mike, and Jake remain as the fiesta draws to a close.

The next day, the three remaining men rent a car and drive out of Spain to Bayonne and then go their separate ways. Jake heads back into Spain to San Sebastian, where he plans to spend several quiet days relaxing. He receives a telegram from Brett, however, asking him to come meet her in Madrid. He complies, and boards an overnight train that same day. Jake finds Brett alone in a Madrid hotel room. She has broken with Romero, fearing that she would ruin him and his career. She announces that she now wants to return to Mike. Jake books tickets for them to leave Madrid. As they ride in a taxi through the Spanish capital, Brett laments that she and Jake could have had a wonderful time together. Jake responds, "Yes, isn't it pretty to think so?"