

Michelle Graves

T.L. Pagaard

English 124/0795

10 May 2000

Lady Ashley's Ring of Indiscretions in Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises*

Like a bull with poor vision, Brett Ashley from Ernest Hemingway's *The Sun Also Rises* has a lack of vision or direction in her life. Each man in her life is like a matador who must find the strength, courage, and skill to maneuver and break her magnificent control. She charges with the force and the spirit of the bull as each matador enters her arena, but she does so for her own selfish purposes. She wounds each matador as he attempts to slay her, but the battle scars rest with her too. Brett remains in a vicious cycle of using and abusing the men in her life, and in turn, she never finds true love or happiness. As a result of her lack of self-esteem, her controlling tendencies, and her unwillingness to change, Lady Brett Ashley is destined to live a superficial, lonely, and insignificant life.

The bull is a handsome animal to look at. The smooth skin, muscular physique, and robustness gives the bull its power and fascination which catches the eye of all spectators. This is similar to the way most men look at Brett Ashley. Her mannish characteristics—her short hair, her curvaceous figure, and the way she interacts (flirts and talks with the guys as if she is one of them)—attract them. All of this, along with her openly blatant aggressive sexual prowess, gives her some kind of animal magnetism. But, like the bull, this is a dangerous combination, and the men in her life get jabbed by her—like the bull's horns jabbing the matador for its own protection. Brett's great skills in manipulation and her daredevil ways of using them somehow intrigue each of the men in her life so that they blindly pursue her. Again like the bull, she is beautiful to look at, but very dangerous to play with, and she is unwilling to be tamed. But, one by one, each matador enters the ring.

Count Mippipopolous is the eldest of the men vying for Lady Brett Ashley's attentions. He is a wealthy, good-natured Greek who enjoys having a good time by eating, drinking champagne, and partying with Brett Ashley. He is very attracted to Brett and would love to have a liaison with her, but when she tells him of her love for Jake, he takes her to him. Brett has no interest in the Count as relationship material. Her interest in him is strictly in that he is wealthy, interesting company and shows her a good time. The Count values life and enjoys it to the fullest. He points out that getting to know your values is very important in life. Falling in love is a wonderful thing for him, and he is always in love (67). The only thing Brett understands of the Count's wisdom is its irrelevance to her own philosophy about love. She replies, "You haven't any values. You're dead, that's all" (67). This tells us that Brett has had bad luck with love and the men in her past. She is bitter and as stubborn as a bull. She has not learned from her mistakes. It is too bad that she is blind to the Count's positive outlook on life. The Count will not fare well with her in the ring, and so he exits; yet he is seen to be the oldest, wisest, and one of the more honorable of her suitors.

Robert Cohn is seen stepping next into the arena. With Brett he steps all over himself. He is so love-stricken that he can't see straight. He sees Brett as pure and innocent. He thinks that there is absolutely no way she would marry without being in love (46). He does not see clearly when it comes to Brett Ashley. He does not know that she operates by doing things impulsively and irrationally. He does get her to go with him to San Sebastian where they have an affair, and he believes it is love. But Brett's reason for going with him, she says, is that "She rather thought it would be good for him" (89). She tries to make it look like she went with him for his sake. In reality, she went with him because she was lonely, bored, and he paid for it—in more ways than one. She has no interest in him whatsoever, and she was only with him for the short duration of the trip. Cohn is ridiculed by his other friends, who call him a "steer." To add insult to injury, he finds the matador Pedro Romero with Brett. Cohn then attempts to fight Pedro, but Pedro does not

back down. Cohn cowers, and leaves the ring for good. Cohn never understood why anyone liked bull-fighting in the first place.

Mike Campbell is engaged to be married to Brett. He is blindly in love with her, and he will endure all of her affairs. Mike idolizes her as if she were his trophy. He calls her “quite a piece,” as if she is his work of art. Mike lacks the intelligence and the social skills to keep Brett’s interest in him. He is loud, boisterous, and obnoxious, especially when he is drinking, and that is most of the time. He is embarrassing to be around, and he always makes himself look like an idiot. He is irresponsible and owes everyone money. He is not good relationship material for Brett. Like the bull, Brett is too high-spirited and strong for this matador. She would never be happy with him. The only reason she goes back with him is because she knows she can.

The one “true matador” is Pedro Romero, and he does bull-fighting justice. Romero is a passionate bull-fighter and is incredibly handsome. He is not afraid of the bull and controls it like a master. He does not fake any of his movements, and he is smooth with his techniques of the cape and the sword. Brett gets her first taste of bull-fighting in Pamplona, and she cannot take her eyes off of Pedro Romero with his skin-tight green pants. She is hooked while she watches the beauty of his artistry with the bull. “These bull-fights are hell on one,” Brett says. “I’m limp as a rag” (173). She is so worn out after watching him, it is as if she has been sexually drained. He is the first one who breaks through her self-control and comes close to slaying her. They have a love affair that is short lived, but he does want to do the honorable thing and marry her. He wants her as his woman solely. But he wants to change her. He wants her to grow her hair long. He wants her to look more womanly (246). But Brett will not change for him or for any man.

Pedro Romero is the most skilled and the most honorable of the matadors in and out of the bullring. He fights his last fight in the bullring bruised and sore, and he performs wonderfully. He always keeps high standards for himself. He is a “real man.” He pays for his hotel room and leaves Brett without a whimper. He leaves Brett with dignity;

he doesn't whine like Mike or go off sulking like Cohn.

Jake Barnes has the most history with Lady Brett Ashley. When he first met her she was an army nurse in World War I. He fell in love with her. But, now that he's back in civilian life, he must adjust to a new world. He must reconcile with life outside the war zone and accept being sexless. He was injured in the war, and his manhood was literally taken away from him. He harbors memories of a frustrated romance with Brett. He knows that he will never be able to be with her since he can not satisfy her. So the relationship between them becomes one of friends and confidants. This is difficult for them in that they both need physical love, and Jake fantasizes about her often.

In the beginning of the novel, Jake is a sad, weak character who grovels with Brett. He begs for her to live with him, and he declares his love for her. As he observes all his friends, he learns many lessons and develops new values for himself. He learns from observing Brett. He sees that she is going down an endless road of excessive drinking, one of continuously chasing shallow liaisons. He does not want to go down that "rotten" path. He wants to break away from the destructive patterns and people he knows. He sees that he can stop the pattern of self-destruction by trying something new and different for himself. He sees that by finally letting Brett go he can go on with his life and find happiness.

What may be a redeeming value for Brett is that she is truthful with Jake in the end. She confesses to him that she was mean to Cohn and ruined him and that she is not good for Mike. But in the next breath she says that she will go back to Mike (247). By her settling for Mike in the end, she shows us her lack of self-esteem. She admits her mistakes, but she doesn't learn by them in order to change her life. So she is just setting herself up for more of her self-destructiveness.

Lady Brett Ashley has been no lady, and Brett is not even a feminine name. She has been like a bull, raging through her life and aimlessly roaming. She has not settled down or found any meaning in her life. She has continuously used and abused herself and

the people in her life. She has been too stubborn and unwilling to learn from all the men in her life—the Count, Cohn, Mike, Pedro, and Jake. Brett will end up all by herself, alone, and lonely. But Jake will run free to find some happiness in his life. He does not want to die like Brett, a lonely bull.

Works Cited

Hemingway, Ernest. *The Sun Also Rises*. New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1954.