

# Hemingway's Medievalist Impulse: Its Effect on the Presentation of Women and War in *The Sun Also Rises*

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Most critics regard Ernest Hemingway—that hard-boiled proponent of tough, masculine writing—as scornful of sentimental love, and thus necessarily scornful of the courtly love that is at its base. Such critics see this scorn manifested most obviously in *The Sun Also Rises*. Martin Light, for example, in “Sweeping out Chivalric Silliness: The Example of *Huck Finn* and *The Sun Also Rises*,” states that Hemingway was “trying to do once more ‘that good work done by Cervantes’ (as Mark Twain put it) by purging our culture of its foolishness again” (21).<sup>1</sup> And Robert W. Lewis, in *Hemingway on Love*, asserts that “romantic love is examined and rejected” (20) in this novel.<sup>2</sup> However, Mark Spilka, in “The Death of Love in *The Sun Also Rises*,” qualifies this majority view. Though he holds that *The Sun Also Rises* is indeed critical of the courtly love tradition itself, he suggests that this novel focuses largely on the *irrelevance* of this tradition in the modern world (241). Spilka’s qualification might, however, be pushed yet further, since Hemingway’s revelation of the impossibility of

courtly love in the modern world need not imply a rejection of the tradition itself as inferior. To the contrary, evidence of a surprising nostalgia for the courtly love tradition, as well as for the related chivalric tradition, exists in a number of his novels.

Hemingway’s own interest in medieval life, literature, and history is not widely acknowledged. However, Michael Reynolds reveals in his book *Hemingway’s Reading, 1910-1940, An Inventory* that Hemingway read a number of medieval romances and histories, such as *Chronicles of Crusaders*, *Life in the Middle Ages*, *Decisive Wars of History*, and *Source Book of Medieval History*. Reynolds suggests that this reading may have had a powerful influence on his writing: “The reading reveals one other warrior, little connected with Hemingway, whom we should have suspected long ago: the medieval knight. Baker called our attention to Colonel Cantwell’s ‘chivalric code,’ but no one followed his lead” (26). In various conversations and letters, Hemingway made reference to particular texts of medieval history, but in addition, he made a number of more generalized references to medieval life. Most telling is the comment that he makes in a letter to Bernard Berenson, in which he imagines himself as a medieval knight: “Do you ever have the feeling that you lived at all times in many different countries? Or is that crazy. I can smell the horses in the morning and I know exactly how the different types of body armour felt” (*Letters* 785). Carlos Baker reveals that on a trip somewhat later through France’s Loire valley, “Ernest amused himself by imagining that he was a

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<sup>1</sup> See also Robert O. Stephens (218).

<sup>2</sup> Robert Lewis very kindly read my essay before publication, and offered the following qualification: “I would point out that...I don’t think courtly love is the basis of sentimental love any more or less than it is the basis of other loves. Sentimental means ‘feeling in excess’ to me. Another definition problem is romantic love. It should be banned from the lexicon.”

medieval knight riding his horse along the riverbank. The notion stayed with him all the way south through Dax and St.-Jean-de-Luz to Hendaye, where he had worked [on *The Sun Also Rises*] long ago" (*Life* 648). In another letter to Berenson, Hemingway wrote of his *work* in the terms of courtly love and indicated, revealingly enough, that women were a kind of lesser substitute for that work: "[Work is the] Liege lord<sup>3</sup> that I had sworn to serve and would serve always until I die. . . . We all need some discipline and I need more than most. So I take it from writing. Women provide the local discipline" (*Letters* 789).

Given Hemingway's own awareness of and attachment to the medieval traditions of courtly love and chivalry, it is not surprising that his first novel is marked by these medieval traditions. The general situation of *The Sun Also Rises* is reminiscent of the situation in a medieval romance: Brett Ashley, a beautiful married woman who bears her husband's title, is at the center of a group of men—Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, Pedro Romero, Mike Campbell, even Bill Gorton and Count Mippipopolous—who love and serve her. Of course, Brett acknowledges the suffering of those who have fallen in love with her, a suffering whose inevitability and severity recalls that of the courtly knight. Despite this suffering, the men nonetheless persist in dedicating themselves to Brett; that is, they persist in trying to act like knights.

However, the many parallels between the events in this novel and the courtly love tradition are skewed, as though seen through a distorted and distorting lens. These distortions certainly suggest the breakdown of romantic love in the modern

world, yet it is important to recognize that each of the male protagonists continues to feel a powerful nostalgia for romantic love, and specifically for the courtly love tradition which is at its base. This nostalgia is shared by Hemingway, though he, along with each of the male protagonists with the exception of Robert Cohn, also recognizes the distortions of this tradition that have rendered it ineffectual in the modern world. But though the tradition may no longer "work" in the modern world, and though only a fool or a naif, such as Robert Cohn, could act as though it still does "work," nonetheless the courtly love tradition itself is not called into question. Rather, the forces which have undermined its effectiveness are criticized.

The distortions of the courtly love tradition that are revealed in *The Sun Also Rises* primarily result from and thus act implicitly to criticize Brett's morals, actions, and personality, and therefore the morals, actions, and personality of the new modern woman. Though Brett holds the position of "lady," again and again she proves herself unworthy of the title, and of the admiration afforded her by the various men who love and serve her. The actions performed in behalf of such a lady must themselves either demean the knight or diminish in intrinsic value. The novel thus presents an indictment of the modern woman, who makes true knighthood an impossible goal for the modern man. Because the modern man cannot be a true knight, falling short of the ideal with depressing regularity, he too is found wanting; he is, however, regarded with some sympathy, especially if—as in Jake's case—he is critical of his own shortcomings. Modern technological warfare also reveals itself as an enterprise which is something less than noble, and which no longer affords modern man the opportunity to act in knightly fashion, and so it too is indicted. But this

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<sup>3</sup> C. S. Lewis notes that a courtly knight called his lady "mi dons," which means etymologically "my lord" and not "my lady" (22).

indictment of the modern woman, modern warfare and, to a lesser degree, modern man, must not be misinterpreted as an indictment of the courtly love and chivalric traditions. Rather, in revealing the ineffectuality of knightly behavior in the modern world, Hemingway is exhibiting a nostalgia for the days when such behavior was properly rewarded because the courtly love and chivalric traditions were successful as a system of values.

Brett Ashley, like the medieval lady who serves as the ideal of the courtly love tradition, is a lady of title because of the position of her husband. However, unlike the medieval lady, Brett has been previously married and is now on the point of divorcing this, her second, husband. Though Brett does not regret losing her husband, she *does* regret her prospective loss of the title. Her regret does not stem, however, from any sense of *noblesse oblige*, but rather from a sense of the advantages—particularly economic—that the title provides. Hence, when drinking champagne with Jake and the count, Brett's toast—"Here's to royalty" (59)—is ironical at best and cynical at worst. The appropriate attitude toward this "lady" is thus suggested by her own attitude toward her title. In contrast to the medieval tradition, the title betokens no moral, but only an economic and a social superiority. Similarly, though Brett's position at the center of a group of enamored men is consistent with the courtly love tradition, her promiscuity is certainly not. She neither remains literally faithful to her husband while granting her love to a single other, nor does she deceive her husband because of the "fault" of love—a single grand passion for a worthy knight, as Denis de Rougemont in *Love in the Western World* describes it, which is enjoined yet is somehow more magnificent than morality. Rather, she engages in casual affairs, first with one man and then with another.

Though the individual men are dissatisfied with such behavior, they can do nothing to prevent it.

No one, not even the other characters in the novel, would dispute that Robert Cohn responds to Brett with behavior that is both sentimental and romantic. Indeed, in the literary criticism of *The Sun Also Rises*, much is made of the degrees of sentimentalism and romanticism exhibited by the male protagonists, and when such critics assume a state of absolute romanticism, Robert Cohn is typically located at the nearest proximity to it, while the other male characters are located at varying degrees of distance from it.<sup>4</sup>

But Cohn's behavior is not merely sentimental and romantic, for, in a yet more specific sense, his behavior approximates that of the medieval knight. In the medieval tradition, as C. S. Lewis points out in *The Allegory of Love*, the source of love is physical beauty and its goal is most often consummation. Significantly, Cohn falls in love with Brett at first sight, struck by her great beauty. As a result of this love, Cohn follows Brett about in a kind of perversion of the knightly quest, going so far as to track her and Mike to San Sebastian where, as Mike states, "he hung around Brett and just *looked* at her. It made me damned well sick" (143). Mike's irritation is shared in

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<sup>4</sup> Earl Wilcox argues that Robert Cohn is a deluded romantic in the tradition of Tom Sawyer, while Jake Barnes is a realist in the tradition of Huck Finn (322-24). With similar intent, though appealing to a different set of literary archetypes, both Robert O. Stephens and Martin Light suggest that Robert Cohn is the Don Quixote to Jake's Sancho Panza, and Stephens argues that "quixotic delusion by romance" (216) is thus undercut by realism. Stephens further suggests that Pedro Romero is a foil for Cohn, and that Romero reveals the ineffectuality of the rules of courtesy when he "refuses to shake hands, be carried to his bed, or forgive Cohn [after their fight]. Indeed he emphasizes his scorn of the rules by hitting Cohn without warning or challenge" (217).

part by Jake, who notes at dinner in Pamplona that Cohn cannot stop looking at Brett. Of course, Cohn has earlier had that which he so eagerly desired—sexual consummation—but, as Brett points out, his mistake is that “he can’t believe it didn’t mean anything” (181). Though it means nothing to Brett, it very clearly means something to Robert Cohn, for in the courtly love tradition, sexual consummation with one’s lady transcends even morality.

Cohn attempts to serve Brett at every opportunity, to be her protective knight-errant. After first meeting her, he argues with Jake because Jake seems to be impugning her reputation. Much later, when Brett has gone off with Romero at the fiesta, Cohn has a fight with both Jake and Mike because he is angry that they have let her go. He then goes to the room where Brett and Romero are staying together and, as Mike says: “He nearly killed the poor, bloody bull-fighter. Then Cohn wanted to take Brett away. Wanted to make an honest woman of her, I imagine. Damned touching scene” (201). Mike mocks the sentimentality of Cohn’s assumptions and, by extension, his nostalgia for a tradition that no longer works. Mike thereby presents himself as a hard-boiled realist, a man who rejects the illusions that weak or foolish men such as Cohn require. Similarly, Jake and Bill deride Cohn’s attempt to improve his appearance so that it will be worthy of Brett—an attempt which on one level is simply a mark of good manners, yet which, given Cohn’s knightly behavior throughout, is also consistent with the pattern of self-improvement that results from adherence to the courtly love tradition. Jake reveals that he never hated Cohn until “he went through all that barbering” (99). Yet Bill, who is another of Brett’s knights, though certainly a more self-conscious one, somewhat later undergoes without criticism a similar bout of barbering in preparation for *his* meeting with Brett.

Cohn’s reward for his devoted service to Brett is not only the derision of his fellows but also the suffering that he experiences from very early in their relationship. At first, merely his tennis game falls apart, but his composure soon follows. His suffering increases in intensity until he finally claims in Pamplona that losing Brett has made him crazy. He lies on his bed, crying at the thought of Brett’s new affair with Romero, and insists to Jake that he has suffered greatly. Even Jake, though he is angry at having been beaten earlier by Cohn, and though he too is suffering at the thought of Brett with another man, nonetheless feels enough sympathy for Cohn’s misery to shake hands at Cohn’s request. But the unsympathetic Brett, upon spying Cohn lurking about under an arcade, can only announce that she hates him and his suffering. Cohn’s earlier accusation—Brett is a sadist because of her enjoyment of the bullfight—thus demands consideration.

The attitude toward Cohn of the majority of critics is governed by Jake’s own cynical judgment of his behavior:<sup>5</sup> “Somehow he seemed to be enjoying it. The childish, drunken heroics of it. It was his affair with a lady of title. . . . He stood . . . proudly and firmly waiting for the assault, ready to do battle for his lady love” (178). However, Jake’s cynical judgment of Cohn’s chivalric behavior is not so much a criticism of Cohn’s naiveté in unselfconsciously believing that the modern world will reward such behavior with the hand of the lady. Each of the other male protagonists, including the ironical Jake, behaves in as chivalric a manner as is possible in the modern world, but each of the others is also sophisticated enough to recognize that this behav-

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<sup>5</sup> Arthur Mizener thus calls Cohn a “high-school Lancelot” (138). Robert O. Stephens asserts that Cohn “wants credit for having had a mistress as the courtly and literary traditions demand” (217).

ior will reap at best some momentary pleasures, rather than the grand passion of medieval days. In a yet larger sense, the cynical response of the male protagonists is a criticism of the modern woman who, in refusing to behave as did the medieval lady, makes the glory of courtly love impossible for modern man, who nonetheless desires it.

Jake, for all of his cynical comments to Cohn about Brett, nonetheless responds to her in much the same fashion.<sup>6</sup> Like Cohn, Jake too is awed by Brett's physical beauty, but the glorious "fault" of love—sexual consummation—is not possible for Jake as it was for Cohn. Paradoxically enough, Jake's impotence transforms him into the kind of *ideal* knight described by C. S. Lewis and Denis de Rougemont, who grant that while consummation was the goal for many courtly knights, chaste love was honored yet more highly. Jake's physical problem causes him to love and serve his lady without the ultimate sexual reward. It is an ironic commentary on the modern world, and perhaps even on modern man, that Jake is transformed into the ideal knight by an accident of modern war rather than by a moral choice. Nonetheless, Jake seems more or less satisfied by the behavior possible for him. This behavior is similar to the love "par amours" and "pure love" which, according to D. W. Robertson, was considered acceptable for a knight: love "par

amours" was "a love for the sight of the beloved [which] may lead to a kiss or a chaste (not nude) embrace, . . . [but whose] chief satisfaction arises from the contemplation of the beauty of the beloved" (454), and "pure love" was "the kiss, the embrace, and contact with the nude beloved, but with the final solace omitted" (437). Jake thus asks, after kissing and touching Brett: "Couldn't we just live together, Brett? . . . Couldn't we go off in the country for a while?" (55). The wistfulness of Jake's request is touching, for even he realizes that Brett will never accede to it. Jake's desire for a pastoral idyll is an escape, however brief, into a fantasy validated by the courtly love tradition. Yet since, as Erich Auerbach suggests more generally, the power of the courtly love tradition is undercut whenever the tradition is viewed not as an ideal but as a practical response to reality, such an escape into fantasy is doomed to failure. Brett is unwilling to be satisfied with the love "par amours," the "pure love," that Jake is offering. Unlike the medieval lady, she rejects his love in favor of sexual experience. Though Jake is certainly foolish for trying to actualize this fantasy (if not for momentarily escaping into it), Brett nonetheless bears the burden of the blame. Indeed, Brett goes so far as to blame herself for making such pure love impossible, thus taking the onus of accusation from Jake who need only acquiesce silently with her judgment. Earlier, she had similarly judged herself and found herself wanting, when Jake offered to leave her because of the sexual frustration that results for her from their relationship: "We'd better keep away from each other,' [Jake said]. 'But, darling, I have to see you. It isn't all that you know,' [Brett replied]. 'No but it always gets to be.' 'That's my fault,' [she said]." (26). The modern woman thus reveals herself as "made"—that is, constituted—differently from the medieval lady, and this difference makes the pure love offered by

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Lauter argues that Cohn is a romantic idealist and that Jake must fight against the seductive pull of just such idealism. Mark Spilka perceives Jake as yet closer to the position of Cohn, but like the other critics cited, assumes that such a position is somehow misguided. Arthur Mizener regards these similarities in perhaps the most positive light for romanticism, arguing that both Cohn and Jake are romantic, but that whereas Cohn is falsely so because his values are maintained by a literary distortion of the actual conditions of his life, Jake's values are earned insofar as they do depend on the actual conditions of his life.

Jake, and so valued by the medieval lady (according to the courtly tradition), valueless to the modern woman. Since even Brett places the blame for this situation on herself, the narrative generates sympathy not for her, despite her evident sexual frustration, but for Jake, who wishes that Brett could be satisfied with the love he *can* offer her. Of course, this sympathy may be qualified on the reader's part by the recognition that a sexless relationship is not, as one version of the courtly love tradition would have it, intrinsically superior to a sexual relationship; however, even such a qualification does not absolve Brett, whose promiscuity is a rejection not only of sexless love, but also—as is clear from her relationships with Mike and Romero—of faithful sexual love.

Despite Brett's rejection of Jake's pure love, he continues to serve her, though he does so with the full consciousness that she is not the lady he would like her to be, the lady who would reward his pure love with her own love and fidelity. Jake's confusion of Brett with Georgette, the prostitute whom he had picked up at a café, thus serves as an implicit judgment of Brett: "I heard Brett's voice. Half asleep I had been sure it was Georgette. I don't know why" (32). Though Jake is somewhat ingenuous here, the reader of course knows that the similarity in voices—not to mention the rhyming names—betrays a yet more important similarity between the women, and judges Brett accordingly.

However disillusioned Jake may be about Brett—and he takes great pains to disillusion Robert Cohn as well—he nonetheless persists in his service. For example, when he escorts Brett and the others to their first bullfight, he takes particular care to warn Brett about the unattractive aspects of bullfighting. Mike, yet another of Brett's knights, reassures Jake that he will take care of her. Similarly, Jake and Bill worry

about Brett's financial situation when she goes off with Romero, though they worry not one bit about the more serious financial straits of Mike. But Jake's most significant service for Brett concerns her affair with Romero. Because Brett asks Jake to introduce her to Romero, he does so, though he knows full well that she is sexually interested in him. A bit later, Brett prefaces her request that Jake find Romero for her by asking whether Jake still loves her. Jake proves that he does by serving her yet once more. Jake not only sacrifices his own feelings for Brett, but he also betrays his "aficion" for bullfighting when he introduces the two, for he knows that this affair will be bad for Romero. The final service requested of Jake occurs after Brett's affair with Romero ends. Having gone to San Sebastian—an interesting selection, given that it is the place where Brett had consummated her affair with Cohn, and where Brett and Mike had vacationed together—Jake receives a telegram from Brett asking that he rescue her from Madrid. Just as Jake had earlier ended his fishing trip as soon as a telegram arrived with news of Brett's presence in Pamplona, so too does he now immediately pack up and mount a train—the modern equivalent of the knight's horse—in order to go to her rescue. Though Jake's ironic commentary on his actions signals a recognition of his own degradation in performing this degraded version of knightly service, this commentary also signals a recognition of Brett's degradation, for it is the modern woman alone who makes such ignoble requests of her knight. Unlike the medieval lady, whose influence serves to ennoble the knight, to spur him to self-improvement, Brett influences her knights for the ill, spurring them to moral degeneration. As Robert Cohn so aptly puts it, Brett is Circe, turing men not into chivalric knights, but rather into swine.

Jake's service, like that of Robert Cohn, reaps him only suffering. The jealousy that is the lot of the courtly lover—particularly the courtly lover who loves purely rather than sexually—is certainly manifested in Jake's response to the affair between Brett and Cohn. But Jake must take this affair "as a matter of course" (99) only because Brett is incapable of fidelity—whether to him in a sexless relationship, or to any one of the lovers with whom she is involved in a sexual relationship. Jake's recognition results in a contempt that is curiously mingled with his love for her: "To hell with Brett. To hell with you, Lady Ashley. . . . I suppose she only wanted what she couldn't have" (30, 31). Of course, Jake's accusation can be turned on himself for, given his impotence, he too wants what he cannot have: not merely a sexual relationship which is physically impossible for him, but also fidelity from Brett.

Pedro Romero is yet another of Brett's knights, and he, like Cohn and Jake, dedicates himself to serving her.<sup>7</sup> Romero's service closely approximates the archetypal knightly service, for he, in slaying the bull, slays the modern equivalent of a dragon for Brett. However significant the bullfight may seem in *The Sun Also Rises*, its general significance for Hemingway is made yet clearer by even the most cursory reading of *Death in the Afternoon*. There, Hemingway asserts that the bullfight is not a sport but a tragedy which is "well ordered and . . . strongly disciplined by ritual," and that "the aficionado, or lover of the bullfight, may be said, broadly . . . to be one who has this sense of the tragedy and ritual of the fight" (8, 9). Hemingway's sense of the relationship between the bullfight and the

tragedy, and his evident admiration for a ritual which aesthetically shapes passion—in particular, the passion for death, which is one of the "two things that are necessary for a country to love bullfights" (*DIA* 265)—can be interpreted with an eye to Denis de Rougemont's comments about the medieval tournament; indeed, Hemingway virtually invites an interpretation of the bullfighter as a type of the medieval knight, for he suggests that bullfighters and "the crusaders in the middle ages" (*DIA* 101) share particular occupational hazards. Just as Hemingway asserts the relationship between the bullfight and the tragedy, de Rougemont suggests that the tournament is a source of the modern tragedy. And just as Hemingway emphasizes that the bullfight is governed by a ritual which aesthetically shapes the passion for death, de Rougemont suggests that the tournament is governed by chivalric ritual that functions to order aesthetically the erotic and fighting instincts. For Hemingway, then, the bullfight is the modern analogue of the medieval tournament. The modern knight who, like the chivalric knight, loves danger for its own sake, can there indulge his erotic instinct—by performing for his lady—and his fighting instinct—by killing his enemy—within a rigorously defined set of rituals. In pursuing such an adventure, the individual, according to Erich Auerbach, engages in an act of self-definition. He becomes his best self: a true knight. Romero is thus in one sense the moral avatar of *The Sun Also Rises* because he takes full advantage of his opportunity—and a unique opportunity it is in the modern world of *The Sun Also Rises*—to behave gracefully within this rigorously defined set of rituals, dedicating himself both to his lady and his enemy, to loving and fighting.

The bull that Romero confronts in the ring has already killed another man, there-

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<sup>7</sup> Arthur L. Scott compares Romero with Cohn and suggests that the two have a great deal in common, including a certain chivalric sensibility (312).

by troubling the peace of the city. In true knightly fashion, Romero—a stranger to the city—arrives only to slay the bull. He thereby avenges the death of a husband and father whom the bull had gored. Further, he makes clear that his valorous deed is dedicated to Brett, the lady who in true medieval fashion sits above him and observes his knightly adventure. He first has his sword-handler present her with his cape. He also controls the locality of his actions so that he can perform directly in front of Brett whenever possible. Yet Romero's knightly service, though dedicated to Brett, is not completely selfless.

Because he did not look up to ask if it pleased he did it all for himself inside, and it strengthened him, and yet he did it for her, too. But he did not do it for her at any loss to himself. He gained by it all through the afternoon. (216)

Though such behavior deviates from the absolute selflessness of the knightly service celebrated by C. S. Lewis, it nonetheless does suggest the knightly behavior that Erich Auerbach describes. Auerbach calls into question the supposed selflessness of the medieval knight, arguing that though love serves as the motivation for knightly adventure, the focus in the romances is most often on the adventures themselves and on the knight's self-actualization through adventures. In serving his lady, then, Romero ennobles himself.

Romero is the most successful of Brett's knights because he is able most nearly to approximate the ideals of courtly and chivalric behavior. Yet when Romero presents Brett with a token of his adventure—the ear of the bull that he has slain—her response to this noble gesture is a damning self-indictment, for she leaves the ear, along with some cigarette stubs, shoved far back in a hotel drawer. By valuing the ear no more than the cigarette stubs, she reveals herself to be unworthy of the noble deed performed by Romero and dedicated

to her, the deed by which he proves himself a courtly lover and a chivalric knight.

Romero, like Brett's other less successful knights, also suffers because of his love for her. For example, Romero is physically injured during his fight with Cohn. This duel for the hand—or whatever—of the lady is, of course, a direct result of her fickleness, her promiscuity. Then, too, Montoya recognizes the harm which would ultimately result to Romero's bullfighting from Brett's influence. Brett herself acknowledges, with some self-congratulation at her moral astuteness, the problems that she causes Romero. However, the most painful situation for Romero is no doubt one that the reader does not actually witness, but only hears about: Brett's rejection and abandonment of him in Madrid. Brett claims with some justice that she has rejected Romero in order to protect him from her own bad influence. This stated motive for a presumably selfless moral act is qualified, however, by her repeated self-congratulations. Moreover, Brett's rejection of Romero conforms to a general pattern of behavior which she has exhibited with other men. Just as she rejected the increasingly love-sick Cohn only after satisfying her sexual curiosity, so too does she choose to "protect" Romero only after their sexual relationship leads him to demand real love of her. Romero wants their relationship to be permanent, and he demands that Brett be "more womanly" (242) by letting her hair grow long, a telling request given the magical powers attributed to hair by the chivalric tradition.<sup>8</sup> That is, Romero—the nearest approximation to the courtly and chivalric knight in the modern world—wants Brett more nearly to approximate the ideal lady. When Brett

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<sup>8</sup> Robert W. Lewis (46) refers to J. Huizinga's discussion of the significance of hair in medieval traditions.

rejects Romero, this modern woman implicitly rejects the courtly tradition itself, thereby revealing herself once and for all as absolutely unworthy of knightly adoration. Her inability to remain sexually faithful to this single most worthy knight suggests that she is fooling herself when she claims at the end of the novel that all would have been well if only Jake—that other worthy knight—had not been rendered impotent.

Because Hemingway presents Brett's rejection of Romero off-stage, he is able to retain for Romero the image of the single successful courtly lover in the novel. Though Romero, like Jake and all the rest of Brett's lovers, is ultimately rejected by this fickle and promiscuous modern woman, Hemingway highlights Romero's brief moments of glory when, in dedicating himself to Brett, he becomes his best self—a true knight in the courtly and chivalric traditions.

A distorted version of the courtly orders of love exists in *The Sun Also Rises* as one of several secret societies to which the men belong. Of course, secret societies are a constant in Hemingway's fiction and occur in several oft-noted manifestations in this novel. That society which is suggestive of the courtly order of love—the society of men who love Brett and who have been given to believe that she loves them—is unfortunately not very secret, not very exclusive, however. Thus, the courtly order of love differs in significant ways from this distorted order of love. First, though a number of medieval knights might dedicate themselves to a single lady and thereby enroll in the courtly order of love, she must grant only the single most worthy knight the favor of her love. Second, the knight to whom she grants this favor has the duty of secrecy, for her reputation is of great concern. Third, as Erich Auerbach suggests, the knights enrolled in the courtly order have the sense that they are set off, as members of an elect society, from the

mass of common humanity.

Because Brett is not worthy of such an order of love, the order that is dedicated to her necessarily deviates radically from these three principles. Brett's rampant promiscuity denies, in effect, the worth of any particular knight, since her choice of men depends largely on sexual curiosity rather than on any determination of particular merit. Moreover, her lack of compunction about revealing her sexual liaisons makes any secrecy on the part of the knights irrelevant. Granted that the other knights criticize Cohn for his lack of discretion about his week-long affair with Brett, nonetheless she herself reveals the affair to the unsuspecting Jake. And Jake, recognizing that secrecy is in this case superfluous, later reveals the affair to Bill during a casual conversation. Brett even goes so far as to provide Mike with Cohn's love letters, but Mike reports with pride that he refused to read them. Jake's reply—"Damned noble of you" (143)—is ironic only because such nobility is totally out of keeping with Brett's own lack of discretion; the secrecy which Mike strives to maintain with regard to Brett's affair is irrelevant given the fact that Brett herself does not value such secrecy. While speaking with Jake and Bill, Mike is not so discreet about his own relations with Brett. Brett's comment—"Don't be indecent, Michael. Remember there are ladies at this bar" (79)—is telling insofar as it distinguishes her from "ladies" who, like the medieval lady, would demand secrecy in the event of such a liaison. The ultimate result of such promiscuity and indiscretion on the part of Brett is that her knights have no sense of being set off from the common mass as members of an elite society. Their scorn at the undesired presence of Robert Cohn in this order of love undercuts any sense of personal superiority deriving from membership in this order: "[Mike said,] 'What if Brett did sleep with you? She's slept with lots of bet-

ter people than you” (142). Thus, although these modern knights, like their medieval counterparts, are enrolled in an order of love, their order is unsatisfying. This dissatisfaction results in part because they themselves act badly, but yet more importantly because Brett, by refusing to act as a “lady” should, necessarily undermines the worth of behavior in accordance with the rules.

Just as the modern man fails in his attempts at being a courtly knight in a love relationship with a lady, so too does he fail at being a chivalric knight in war. And just as the modern woman is criticized because of an implicit comparison with the medieval lady of the courtly love tradition, so too is modern warfare criticized because of an implicit comparison with chivalric warfare. The absolute horror of World War I causes a nostalgia not, bizarrely enough, for an age of peace, but rather for the aesthetically ordered and self-contained medieval warfare of chivalric romance. Indeed, the horror of World War I is so overwhelming that any discussion of it, no matter how critical, is considered necessarily reductive—even banal. This “calamity for civilization” (17) has negatively affected the lives of nearly all the characters, Jake perhaps most permanently of all. Jake’s impotence—the result in his case of a wound—is a horror that is shared, according to Denis de Rougemont, by a great many others:

Countless doctors and soldiers testified to the way in which a war of material was accompanied by a “sex disaster.” A widespread impotence—or at least its premonitory symptoms, chronic onanism and homosexuality—was the result vouched for by statistics of a sojourn of four years in the trenches. That is how it came about that presently for the first time there was a general revolt of soldiers against war, because war, from being an outlet for the passions, had become a kind of vast castration of Europe. (266)

De Rougemont suggests that World War I’s special horror resulted from its substitution of a war of material for a war of men.

This break with the chivalric tradition—in which the strength, courage, and integrity of individual knights determined the outcome of battles—had been occurring for centuries, but did not occur decisively until modern technological advances took hold in the twentieth century.

Jake’s impotence, however, is not simply a horror, but also a terrible indignity. It is Jake’s bad fortune that he is not only wounded on “a joke front,” but that, as Brett points out, even his wound “seem[s] like a hell of a joke” (27). Jake must agree. Such a wound, however devastating personally, lacks the nobility of glorious death in battle—the kind of death one might expect to meet in chivalric combat. But even when death comes on the battlefield in World War I, it presents itself in an ignoble guise. Brett’s first war love, for example, died of dysentery. In those individuals who survive the war, its psychological impact often results in aberrant behavior; hence, Brett’s husband, Lord Ashley, after returning from the war, slept on the floor with a loaded service revolver and threatened to kill Brett. Others are able to deal with its horror only by treating it lightly; Mike, who never sent for the medals he had honorably earned, thus “borrows” some medals and then passes them out as a form of souvenir to girls in a nightclub. And the count, who has participated in seven wars and four revolutions, is celebrated as “one of us” because he suffered his arrow wounds not while in the army—at present, an ignoble occupation—but instead while on a business trip; the bourgeois occupation of the businessman has replaced the aristocratic occupation of the knight. Modern warfare is indicted because it, like the modern woman, makes knightly behavior impossible for the modern man.

In several of Hemingway’s later novels—most notably, *A Farewell to Arms* and *Across the River and Into the Trees*, but also *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—he again

presents modern knights struggling to behave in accordance with medieval traditions.<sup>9</sup> They, like the male protagonists of *The Sun Also Rises*, attempt to act both as chivalric knights in war and as courtly knights in love relationships. The focus of these later novels is on the protagonists' role as chivalric knights, and they, like the male protagonists of *The Sun Also Rises*, experience only a limited success on the battlefield. In contrast to the knights of *The Sun Also Rises*, however, the male protagonists of these novels are able to dedicate themselves to ladies who actually do approximate the medieval ideal lady. As such, these modern knights gain a measure of satisfaction from their courtly behavior. In all three cases, however, relationships are doomed because one of the partners dies. These deaths are necessary for several reasons. First, the courtly aspects of the original relationships would be undermined by marriage. Second, were these ideal ladies to undergo the strains that real life—in the guise of marriage and children—must inevitably provide, they would crack, thereby proving themselves less a worthy ideal than the one-dimensional and unadaptable creatures they are. The death of one of the partners thus forestalls a recognition by the male protagonist, the reader, and perhaps even by Hemingway himself, of the limitations of such an ideal—limitations which result from flaws inherent in the courtly love tradition itself. The lady of the medieval tradition is often a mere collection of attributes, an "occasion" for the troubador to demonstrate his skill as a poet and his increasing worth as a man; the modern lady who

develops from this model is similarly flawed.

Hemingway's nostalgia for the courtly love tradition results, then, either in the creation of a Brett Ashley—a modern woman who is vividly real though presented unsympathetically—or a Catherine Barkley, a Maria, a Renata—modern women who are one-dimensional though presented sympathetically. This nostalgia suggests *why* Hemingway's women are caught in this double-bind, *why* they are seldom both sympathetic and real. It further suggests why Hemingway's male protagonists are presented so sympathetically. Their flaws, their failures, their self-pity—all is justified, at least within the texts, because these are men with the expectations and sensibilities of the Middle Ages who must nonetheless live In Our Time.

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<sup>9</sup> In this regard, it might also be noted that Hemingway composed pseudo-medieval epigraphs for *Winner Take Nothing* and for Martha Gellhorn's *A Stricken Field*.

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#### Lignano Commune Donates Tape

The Commune of Lignano Sabbiadoro gave Lignano Conference program director Bob Lewis a copy of a 50-minute RAI-TV tape of Ernest Hemingway's life and work (with special emphasis on his Italian connections). Lewis is, in turn, donating the tape to the Hemingway collection at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston.

