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**LOST GENERATION: LOVE AND LIFE FOR A GENERATION OF
SOULS LOST IN THE WORLD**

The “Lost Generation” defines a sense of moral loss or aimlessness apparent in literary figures during the 1920s. World War I seemed to have destroyed the idea that if you acted virtuously, good things would happen. Many good, young men went to war and died, or returned home either physically or mentally wounded, and their faith in the moral guideposts that had earlier given them hope, were no longer valid...they were “lost”.

The term was popularized by Ernest Hemingway who used it as one of two contrasting epigraphs for his novel “The Sun Also Rises”. In that volume Hemingway credits the phrase to Gertrude Stein, who was then his mentor and patron¹.

The status of affairs in America in the years following the First World War spawned a generation of authors termed “the lost generation”. In response to the political and social atmosphere of the United States these authors sought cultural refuge in European cities. Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald are two prominent authors who followed the path to becoming the lost generation. In their works “The Sun Also Rises” and “Tender Is The Night”, listed respectively, Hemingway and Fitzgerald provide works of literature that embody the spirit of the lost generation. Through provision of an account of the lost generation and analysis of Hemingway’s and Fitzgerald’s texts, the textual embodiment of lost generation values will be highlighted. In its most literal definition it would seem as if a lost generation would not have a history. Contrary to logic the lost generation of Hemingway and Fitzgerald heralded their cultural and social achievements through texts that mimicked the life of the ex-patriot. Although Hemingway and Fitzgerald did not provide us with autobiographical accounts of their lives, post-analysis of their works in accordance with real life events leads scholars to believe that more truth existed in their words than an interpretation of simple fiction would yield.

¹ Charmed Circle: Gertrude Stein and Company. Mellow. James R. (1991). New York. P. 273.

Analysis as semi-biographical then allows the reader to highlight the works as statements on social ethics. Prior to dissection of "*Tender Is The Night*" and "*The Sun Also Rises*" it is important to understand objectively the common life of an ex-patriot. Certainty rests only in the notion that these people really liked to drink alcohol. The paradigm of accounting for the truths of the lost generation and being constantly intoxicated presents an interesting account of truth. Without doubt the action of the lost generation stemmed from drinking spirits. However a paradigm again exists in that the lost generation most likely used alcohol to heal the wounds of their pasts, personal or collective, and at the same created new wounds due to their poor decision-making. The role of alcohol is complicated, existing in a self-reaffirming cycle, however certainty rests in the implication that the lost generation medicated their desires through the use of alcohol.

Alcohol may have been the source of the action however looking at the activities the lost generation took part in also becomes important. In varied form the lost generation were culture junkies. Post war America had become institutionally obsessed with the protestant ethic. This application provided a great place to conduct business but a poor place to enjoy the arts and humanities. The lost generation posited themselves as more in tune to the climate of culture and society. As such their lives and writings were statements against the chimera of American capitalism. This can be seen as the characters - and the author's themselves - often spending the money they had carelessly. Not seeing themselves as counter culture they were the remnants of a people who respected the simple nuances art and culture offered. The migration of the authors to Paris and London was the only course that could have been taken.

Further mention of the lives of the lost generation must include the role of sex and love. The value set embodied by the lost generation was often contemptuous of religion. In lieu of religious affiliation worshiping women, love, and the pursuit of sex seems to have become the purest pursuit a man endeavored toward. Explanation much further seems unnecessary. Simply put, sex, women, and love dominated the space left when religion was discarded. Although this statement might seem obtuse considered in terms of the American protestant majority, consider the cultural relevance of Greek mythology in its multi-deity demigoddess worship. These statements mean very little if they cannot be seen displayed in the musings of the lost generation. As previously stated, F. Scott Fitzgerald's "*Tender Is The Night*" and Ernest Hemingway's "*The Sun Also Rises*" will be used to display the value set of the lost generation. Alcohol seemed to be a predominant theme in the works of the lost generation. It functioned as a setting and as a source of the action. Alcohol, never far from the

stories words, seems to control, limit, and free the characters of rationality and the control of their former American lives.

Furthermore, the alcohol was used by many to heal the wounds of war, love-lost, and a multitude of other scars. Hemingway points this out for the reader saying, "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" (*The Sun Also Rises*). Here the use of alcohol as a social stimulant and wound healing elixir is highlighted. Hemingway and Fitzgerald seem to use alcohol in a similar manner. Everybody is always drinking alcohol and because of this the action in the novels center on this. Whether explicitly or implicitly alcohol serves a very important purpose in the selected novels.

While alcohol is central to the action, the reasons for the lifestyle are of further importance. The lost generation can be seen as making a statement against post-war capitalist America. The authors found the atmosphere and culture in America stifling. Fitzgerald hints at why he, and the other authors, flew the coup writing, "Either you think – or else others have to think for you and take power from you, pervert and discipline your natural tastes, civilize and sterilize you" (*Tender Is The Night*). Essentially Fitzgerald's statement is that if one does not chart a course for his or her life then it is inevitable that someone else will. In large part this was the sentiment of the ex-patriot. America, to the lost generation, had become a place where the authors no longer felt free to exact their will.

Due to this they left the states, charting their own destinies on the drunken winds of change. Hemingway offers even more explicit statement for becoming an ex-patriot when he includes, "we all ought to make sacrifices for literature. Look at me. I'm going to England without a protest. All for literature" (*The Sun Also Rises*). Hemingway here inserts a comment on why his ex-patriotism was important to the world. Although not an autobiography it would be crass to assume that the personal lives of these authors did not in a strong and effective manner influence their work.

Ultimately the alcohol-fueled cultural lifestyle was caused by the repressive and dominating protestant ethic of the Post World War I United States. However disinclined to accept the life of the average American, the quest of the lost generation became romantic and sexual dealings. While writing literature and providing a commentary on the world was their purpose the inspiration and explanation of their actions was the pursuit of sex and romance. In both of the selected novels torrid sexual desires and complicating sexual relations dominate

the major emotional work done by the novel's characters. Hemingway provides a quote interlacing the concepts covered previously in this paper as well as the obsession with sex when he writes, "Fake European standards have ruined you. You drink yourself to death. You become obsessed by sex. You spend all your time talking, not working. You are an expatriate, see. You hang around cafes" (*The Sun Also Rises*).

The important and complex interplay between various factors ultimately centers itself on the obsession with sex. Secondarily this quote shows the dominant American attitude that sex is in opposition to work. In the 'fake European' view, cafes, talking, drinking and its penultimate quest, consummation of a romantic relationship, leads to the death of the opposed. In any light however, Hemingway provides a baseline for the importance of sex and romance obsession in both novels. Hemingway and Fitzgerald provide much complicating insight into why the lost generation behaved as they did. It is with confidence that the bleak capitalist, post-war sentiments dominating American society drove some away.

Furthermore, the wounds of love and war in unison with the advent of technological advances in travel fused into a lifestyle that was nothing less than novel worthy. Nonetheless, those viewing the lost generation objectively see that the generation's labors seemed fruitless. In fact more than one lost generation author ruined themselves on alcohol and the fear that their lives work was an utter failure. Sadly the authors were most often only immortalized after they departed from the earth. In this way many authors of this literary generation may have been more lost than previously assumed. It is with the same objective lens that one so heartfully reads of the wounds that love caused these giants.

While at times living as gods, the ex-patriots, truest feelings often reduced them to simple creatures unable to feel true love. Ultimately this depiction may be somewhat raw and bleak. The saying "It is better to have loved and lost" may have served this generation beneficially. Conclusively, these are novels about nothing and everything, love, war, and the drive to achieve glory beyond the brief time given each of us on earth. One conclusion, however, can be clearly drawn from this analysis. While in its time the generation may have been lost, in modernity the raw and explicit passion, written so honestly one can feel it as they read, has served to immortalize these authors in their own right. In some ways then, these authors were never lost.