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The Lost Generation in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novel This Side of Paradise

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Abstract: *The "Lost Generation" refers to a community of American writers who emerged after 1st World War and gained prominence during the 1920s. It is worth noting that both male and female writers who emerged during or after the war experienced emotional and social instability. This instability can be attributed to their war experiences or the overall social instability prevailing during that time. The term "Lost Generation" originated from a remark made by French author Gertrude Stein to Ernest Hemingway, stating, "You are all a lost generation." Hemingway later used this remark as an epigraph in his work of fiction, The Sun Also Rises (1926), which focuses on a disillusioned group of young expatriates living in post-war Paris, characterized by their indulgence in drinking and fast-paced living. The present research paper explains about the 'Lost Generation' in F. Scott Fitzgerald's Novel This Side of Paradise.*

Keywords: *World War, Literary Activities, Epigraph, Instability, Social Aspects.*

INTRODUCTION

The "Lost Generation" in literature refers to a group of writers and poets, both male and female, who emerged during the time of World War I. While they were predominantly American, many of them migrated to Europe. Prominent members of the Lost Generation included Ernest Hemingway, T.S. Eliot, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Gertrude Stein. The central theme in the works of these poets of the Lost Generation is the sense of corruption. For instance, Fitzgerald's novel *The Great Gatsby* depicts the extravagant parties of Jay Gatsby and the disillusioned characters of the Jazz Age. Hemingway's works like *The Sun Also Rises* and *A Moveable Feast* portray purposeless travel, drinking, and parties of expatriates. The war had eroded morality, leading to a pleasure-seeking culture among many individuals. The Lost Generation poets depicted the decadent, superficial, and frivolous lives of the young and independently wealthy as a consequence of the war.

As the writers shifted their focus in the 1920s, they became scattered, and their writings began to lose significance in the 1930s. The last notable works during that time were Fitzgerald's *Tender Is the Night* (1934) and John Dos Passos' *The Big Money* (1936). World War I, initially known as the Great War, disrupted the lives of over nine million people. The assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria, the successor to the Austro-Hungarian throne, ignited the war. The conflict escalated due to well-prepared armies, imperial tensions, and complex alliances, which divided into two opposing sides. Ernest Hemingway, an American Red Cross volunteer, vividly depicted the divisions and tensions during the war in his experiences in Milan and Italy.

The Great War saw the emergence of trench warfare, where armies dug trenches and used barbed wire for protection. These trenches were situated in No Man's Land, an unprotected area between opposing forces. Soldiers had to cross this hazardous area to attack the enemy. Chemical weapons were still in use during this time, and Wilfred Owen's poem "Dulce et Decorum Est" portrays the severe effects of a gas attack on soldiers. Living conditions in the trenches were unbearable, with

widespread illness and infection. Soldiers suffered from muddy and wet conditions, leading to gangrene and other infections. Many soldiers experienced eye infections, skin rashes, headaches, mouth ulcers, and other painful ailments. Before the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, at least two million soldiers died from diseases in the trenches.

The aftermath of the war gave rise to a generation known as the "Lost Generation." These young people, who grew up and lived through the war, were in their twenties and thirties and were left disillusioned by the horrors and disappointments of the war. Witnessing the massive loss of life and the destruction caused them to question and abandon traditional values such as courage, patriotism, and masculinity. Many of them became aimless, irresponsible, and focused on accumulating wealth and power, disregarding moral values. This sense of aimlessness and disillusionment is reflected in the character of Amory in F. Scott Fitzgerald's novel *This Side of Paradise*.

Famous writers of the time, including Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, were known for their conventional writing styles but also embraced new forms of expression. They were deeply affected by the human loss in the war and, in their depression, overlooked many prevailing social aspects. After the significant casualties of the war, these writers sought sensitivity and new values in life. They strongly criticized the prevailing social and artistic values, aiming to establish new traditions and advocating for new values. Young writers began to move to new places like Chicago, San Francisco, and other cities, seeking to establish these new values. Some artists chose Europe, particularly Paris, as their creative haven, becoming expatriates. Gertrude Stein labeled them the "Lost Generation," a term they accepted. Their distress and disillusionment led to the adoption of new forms of literature that were prevalent in the 1920s, the period immediately following the war.

However, not all Americans had the opportunity for improvement. Many were deprived of upward mobility, and racial discrimination was a significant issue, particularly for Black Americans. They faced immense suffering and were denied their rights by society. Women also did not enjoy equal rights compared to men, as they were not allowed to vote. Disillusionment with their living conditions and dissatisfaction with the government led to a growing resentment among the American people. Groups with common opinions formed, such as labor unions, as a means of fighting for their rights. However, there were citizens who viewed these leftist groups and labor unions as a threat to the nation, leading to strong government actions against them. Unfortunately, in such a scenario, innocent people often suffered, and some individuals were unjustly targeted and charged.

The Lost Generation had distinct characteristics. The early 20th century was a time of rapid change, with the industrial market growing at a fast pace. Innovations like automobiles became popular modes of transportation, and the Wright Brothers successfully flew their airplane. Sigmund Freud also gained prominence as a writer with his book "The Interpretation of Dreams." During this period, many people immigrated to America in search of better job opportunities and a better life, leading to increased competition for jobs and a widening gap between social classes. These circumstances fostered independence of thought among the members of the Lost Generation, who felt less reliant on guidance from their elders.

The Lost Generation was deeply dissatisfied with existing authorities and even received advice from their parents to exclude themselves from societal norms. They had a strong desire to establish their own traditions and values that went against the prevailing ones. Ultimately, they succeeded in establishing their own values during the 20th century. This period saw a shift towards a more comfortable and leisure-oriented lifestyle.

Ernest Hemingway, a member of the Lost Generation who later moved to Paris, made significant contributions to the movement. He expressed his thoughts in his novel *The Sun Also Rises*, emphasizing contemporary values and displaying less interest in modern values in his writings.

F. Scott Fitzgerald's works also played a significant role in the era of the Lost Generation. In his first novel, *This Side of Paradise*, he portrayed individuals who had fought in the war and, feeling disillusioned, had lost their faith in God. In his later

writings, Fitzgerald focused on the materialistic age, where people sought values and leisure in their lives. His novel *The Great Gatsby* explored the connection between moral values and wealth.

John Dos Passos, the only novelist among the writers of the Lost Generation who incorporated European culture into his works, had a unique background. Although born in America, he spent his early years in Europe and later returned to the United States for college. After college, he moved to Spain. His first anti-war novel, *Three Soldiers*, depicted the aftermath of war. In his subsequent writings, Dos Passos presented his own political views and ideologies, which diverged from the prevailing ones.

Considering the conditions that Americans experienced during Fitzgerald's writing career, it is evident why the Lost Generation occupied a significant portion of his novels. Fitzgerald's first work, *This Side of Paradise*, had both thematic and structural flaws. However, it held great importance for the author himself and in the history of 20th-century American fiction. The novel incorporated many personal elements from Fitzgerald's life, which had a profound impact on his later works. It revealed that the author may not have written anything else had it not been for its success. The novel's significance stemmed not only from Fitzgerald's poetic and dignified technique but also from its portrayal of a new age in American history.

The series of stories in *This Side of Paradise* established F. Scott Fitzgerald as the storyteller of a new postwar America characterized by flappers, alcohol, and the Jazz Age. Although Fitzgerald's books were not commercially successful during the flourishing time of 1920s America, he and his wife Zelda enjoyed a lavish and often indulgent lifestyle. They had a memorable time in Europe, mingling with renowned artists, royal families, and wealthy American expatriates. Fitzgerald particularly enjoyed his time on the Southern Coast of France, known as the Riviera, where he was hosted by socialites Sara Murphy and Gerald, who were highly influential and associated with figures like Picasso.

The story series in *This Side of Paradise* follows the development of the protagonist, Amory Blaine. Amory grows up under the care of his sophisticated mother, Beatrice, until he is sent to boarding school. After completing his schooling, he enrolls at Princeton University, where he engages in multiple love affairs with various women. However, his relationship with Rosalind leaves a profound impact on his mind. Amory is handsome and self-centered, enjoying himself with his friends, showing interest in literature, and ultimately aspiring to develop his knowledge, even at the expense of money and companionship.

Amory falls deeply in love with Isabella when they meet at The Minnehaha Club in Minnesota. After returning to Princeton, they continue their relationship through love letters. The characters of Tom and Amory reflect the conformist social culture at Princeton. Amory has a memorable time with his friends at a gathering. On their way back from the party, Amory learns that Dick has been involved in a fatal car accident. Isabella visits Amory to console him after this tragic incident, and their bond strengthens. They plan a visit to Amory's hometown with Isabella's family.

During an intimate moment when Amory embraces Isabella, a button on his shirt leaves an impression on her neck. This incident leads to a small argument in which Isabella accuses Amory of being self-centered, and their relationship comes to an end. Amory fails a course before the semester ends and returns to school to make up the course and take a makeup exam. However, he fails the makeup exam as well, resulting in his expulsion from the newspaper and campus. Amory realizes that he has followed many rules and regulations for social success but believes that his failure in the exam reveals the true essence of his character, which he refers to as "the fundamental of Amory."

After the death of Amory's father, he attends the burial without displaying any emotional connection. He is attracted to his family's wealth, which has been depleted due to investments in the wrong business. On his way back to the East, he visits Monsignor in New York, where Darcy discusses the differences between personality and personage with him. While the distinction is not entirely clear, Darcy explains that both are unchangeable aspects of a person. Meanwhile, Amory collects awards, but they have no real impact on him, whether he achieves or loses them. Darcy tries to persuade Amory that he is recovering by creating new opportunities for himself, and Amory moves forward with a renewed sense of purpose.

Amory disappears from school and begins writing disrespectful poems about the new participants. Monsignor Darcy later communicates with Amory, suggesting that he should go to a poor neighborhood in Philadelphia to understand the true situation. Amory meets a poor girl named Clara, but he is not fully satisfied as she does not reflect the true image of poverty. Despite that, he starts to fall in love with her. Clara is beautiful and attractive, and she also starts to develop feelings for Amory. However, she confesses that she has never loved anyone and cannot love him. Clara notices that Amory is gentle and not overly self-centered, and she appreciates that he is open-minded. Amory believes that Clara is the only girl whose thoughts and feelings he can understand. Meanwhile, the war arrives in America, and people begin enlisting. Burne, one of Amory's acquaintances, claims to be a pacifist and sells his property to move to Pennsylvania on a shabby bicycle.

Amory and others start searching for reasons for the war and trying to assign blame. In a poem, Amory points to the Victorians as the cause of the war. Eventually, Amory and Tom leave Princeton, reflecting the situation during the war. This part of the story is depicted through two letters and a brief paragraph. The narrative then shifts to the relationship between Amory and Eleanor. They spend a significant amount of time together, experiencing adventures they never imagined. Eleanor is unhappy in her marriage because her husband is intellectually inferior to her. On their last night together before Amory leaves, they go on a horse ride. Amory contemplates Eleanor becoming a nun at some point in her life. As they ride up a cliff, Eleanor jumps off the horse just before reaching the peak. This marks their final moment together, as there is no more love between them. Amory moves to New York, but they exchange beautiful poems in remembrance of their shared moments years later.

Fitzgerald presents *This Side of Paradise* as a quest novel. At certain points, the narration of a character is considered more prominent than the quest itself. Throughout the series, Amory Blaine tries to position himself uniquely in the world, embarking on a journey of self-discovery. He is lured by three main things: tradition, women, and wealth. However, he ends up deceived by all three. According to Kirk Curnett, in *This Side of Paradise*, Amory is bewildered when academic, financial, and romantic setbacks undermine his sense of complete and unquestioned superiority.

Amory's novels are influenced by various factors throughout his life. The primary influence is his unconventional mother, Beatrice. He tries to conform to traditional norms at school, attending a Midwest school, a boarding school, and ultimately Princeton. However, he feels alienated when he adopts these traditional habits. At Princeton, he discards fifty percent of his traditional habits and embarks on a journey of rediscovery. Early on in his life, Amory is fascinated by romantic involvement with women. After many failures and the war, he and Rosalind fall deeply in love with each other. Amory experiences profound sadness when Rosalind betrays him based on his economic status. He attempts to have an affair with Eleanor but soon realizes that he is incapable of falling in love again after his breakup with Rosalind. Ultimately, he renounces women and finds inspiration in his self-discovery. He loses his identity in his love for Rosalind, and it is only without her that he truly discovers himself.

In the latter part of the novel, Amory's financial situation takes a downturn. Despite his affluent upbringing, his family's bad investments and his mother's decision to donate to the church result in Amory becoming penniless. This financial downfall poses significant challenges for Amory in his journey of self-discovery. With limited resources, Amory is forced to confront the harsh realities of poverty and its impact on his life.

Amory's experiences with poverty lead him to develop a strong aversion towards it. He becomes determined to raise awareness about the social evil of poverty and sees himself as a preacher who can bring about a revolution in society. Despite his own financial struggles, Amory embarks on a mission to enlighten people and advocate for change.

Without the safety net of money, Amory is compelled to engage in deep self-analysis. He seeks to find a sense of direction and purpose in life, even in the face of adversity. This period of financial hardship prompts Amory to reevaluate his values, beliefs, and goals, and pushes him to explore new avenues for personal growth and fulfillment.

Amory's journey without financial means underscores the importance of self-discovery and resilience in the face of challenging circumstances. Despite the difficulties posed by his lack of money, Amory's experiences force him to confront his own limitations and push him towards a path of self-reflection and transformation.

In the novel *This Side of Paradise*, Amory undergoes a transformative journey where he loses faith in traditions, love, and wealth. As a result, he experiences a profound self-realization and discovers his own self-centeredness. The closing sentence of the novel, "but that is all," serves as a powerful statement that encapsulates the moral of the story. It signifies that Amory has finally come to understand and accept himself, but it also suggests that self-realization alone is not enough to navigate life's complexities.

F. Scott Fitzgerald, the novelist of the Lost Generation, demonstrates his creative prowess in *This Side of Paradise*. He has a unique way of depicting characters and situations, showcasing his talent as an artist. Amory, the protagonist, is disinterested in his preceding generations and instead focuses on his infatuation with Gloria's allure and his desire for his grandfather's wealth. Gloria, on the other hand, takes pride in her beauty and seeks to exploit it to her advantage. Both characters also turn to alcohol as they navigate their lives.

CONCLUSION

Now we can point out that the traumatic aftermath of the war left the residents of America in a state of instability, where old values and traditions no longer held sway. This lack of stability during the 1920s compelled renowned writers of the time to seek refuge in Paris, where they could engage in literary pursuits. The literary scene in America at that time was not conducive for their artistic endeavors, prompting the shift to Paris. Now overall, *This Side of Paradise* explores themes of self-discovery, the disillusionment of the post-war era, and the search for meaning and identity in a rapidly changing society. Fitzgerald's artistic portrayal of these themes and his ability to capture the spirit of the Lost Generation contribute to the enduring significance of the novel.

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