

# The Lost Generation: Melancholy and Joy for the Detachment from Reality in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*

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**Abstract:** A group of authors takes the lead in representing the concept of lost generation in American literature which defines the generation who are at the beginning of their adulthood witnessing the First World War, including Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald. The lost generation mainly unmasks the senselessness and disillusionment of the American Dream due to the disastrous impacts of the First World War on individuals. In this respect, the traumatic confrontation of disillusionment of the American Dream echoes the characteristics of escapism and disconnectedness in Hemingway's *Sun Also Rises* and Fitzgerald's *Great Gatsby*. Throughout this information, this article aims to reveal how Hemingway and Fitzgerald mirror the concept of the lost generation through the pointless images of the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby*. On the other hand, this paper reflects how these characters disconnect themselves from the reality of the catastrophic effects of the two decades by arousing joy and melancholy through the use of alcohol at parties and bars in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises*.

**Keywords:** corruption, materialism, escapism, disconnection, disillusionment.

## 1. Introduction

The majority of American society has witnessed the progression of technological advances, which emphasizes the endless progression of science till the countries end up converting the usage of this progression into the creation of weapons to eliminate the populations. Witnessing the resistance of this kind of progression after the haunting influence of the American Dream over society causes the birth of disillusionment in individuals, and the majority of the adulthood to be traumatized. As John Milton Cooper in his work, *The Great War and American Memory* states that: "two decades intervened in which memories of this war were strong and affected many aspects of American life" (2003, p. 76). Therefore, the pursuit of the American Dream brings about corruption in individuals. In this respect, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald profoundly portray the disillusionment and traumatic effects of the wars in the portrayal of their characters. However, the way Hemingway and Fitzgerald frame the fate of the characters subverts the promises of the concept of American Dream, yet it rebuilds their attitudes that mainly corrupt the landscape of society (Callahan, 1996, p. 374). As the reality of the wars profoundly impacts the characters, alcohol becomes a prominent symbol that helps them escape from the reality of the bloody age despite its time of prohibition. However, Fitzgerald and Hemingway approach the detachment from reality for the characteristics of escapism in different ways through the use of alcohol at the bars and parties. While alcohol arouses emotion of joy to escape from reality in *The Great Gatsby*, it arouses emotion of melancholy in *The Sun Also Rises*.

As far as the lost generation is concerned, Fitzgerald explicitly reveals the deteriorating morality and pointless actions of the characters within the portrayal of the lost generation in the characters in *The Great Gatsby*. Thereby, Fitzgerald's characters are much more inclined to feel joy by

losing themselves in lavish parties and spending time recklessly. The use of alcohol is a significant motif since it becomes a tool that distances the characters from reality in these lascivious parties. Therefore, *The Great Gatsby* reveals the guests of those parties as aimless yet they attend and enjoy the illegal income of Gatsby. Most of the guests unlock the chains of their desires for transgression. Thus, the use of alcohol disconnects the characters from the harsh reality of this age by taking them under the spell of joy. In this light, the numerous aimless characters gather at Gatsby's parties and then release themselves to the breeze of passion. However, the reality behind the enchantment of joy remarks on how they are lonely and lose their faith in the promises of the American Dream since they become part of lost generation. Thereby, the use of alcohol in these parties helps the characters to gain joy at the edge of the catastrophic age, yet the power of awakening triggers the emergence of hidden truths in the characters. Therefore, the characters intend to drink too much alcohol to feel a loss of connection, though there was alcohol prohibition during the era in the United States. For this reason, *The Great Gatsby* mainly mirrors the aura of carelessness and the Jazz Age through lavish parties, fashions, flappers, music, orchestra, dancing, trombones, and saxophones (Breitwieser, 2000, p. 363). Thus, Gatsby's parties buries significant issues under the soil since these parties boost the motivation of aimlessness that the characters lose themselves under the magic of fashion. Thereby, Gatsby's richness shadows the source of illegal income of his wealth since the guests never wonder where Gatsby seizes this legendary status and richness yet they recklessly participate these parties. Thus, Gatsby's wealth is the light of all these fantasies since Gatsby believes that his fame might attract Daisy like others. Thereby, The Sheik of Araby has a very predominant motif to reflect Gatsby's aspiration and his efforts to have an affair with Daisy, while Jordan Baker is telling about Daisy's past with Gatsby:

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“I’m the Sheik of Araby.  
Your love belongs to me.  
At night when you’re are asleep  
Into your tent I’ll creep ——”  
(Fitzgerald, 1999, p. 50)

This song concretizes their love affair in the past and, also reveals the deep and true connection that started years ago. Even though the concept of the lost generation spreads the aimlessness of the characters. However, Gatsby’s delusional metaphorically target the “incarnation of the romantic sexual desire and material wealth” (Marsh, 1992, p. 7). Thereby, the characters devote themselves to the mission of Gatsby while their idleness detaches them from the pain of the age. However, it also signals that the pursuit of wealth blinds the characters as it remarks on the unattainability of dreams as lost. As money becomes a vehicle for arousing joy, Gatsby as one of the explicit lost associates Daisy’s voice with money instead of musical notes, unlike Nick Carraway (Mellard, 1966, p. 855). While the guests disconnect themselves reality of the age through Gatsby’s organizations, Gatsby’s happiness depends on Daisy, whose voice sounds like money to him. On the other hand, his addiction to materialism decreases his moral values and his inner sense since his ambition of getting Daisy back drags him to the reality of his despair and disillusionment. Even though Gatsby’s return with an elegant image bestows a great chance to the union of this couple, Daisy turns her back to Gatsby by choosing her husband, Tom Buchanan once again. Her choice extinguishes the pursuit of happiness within the concept of the American Dream in Gatsby even though her marriage with Tom reflects deep unhappiness. Tom betrays Daisy with a married woman, Myrtle Wilson whose forbidden affair also unveils the corruption of materialism in Myrtleas Judith P. Saunders (2008) in her work, *The Great Gatsby: An Unusual Case of Mate Poaching* states that:

Since her husband has failed to deliver the reproductive resources that provide the *raison d’être* for long-term mating, she has nothing to lose and much to gain—in terms of fitness—by testing her fertility with a different man (p. 44)

The only remedy to fulfill Myrtle’s materialistic desire is betraying her husband and resisting Tom’s abuses. However, this conflict gives a temporary satisfaction, while Tom’s desires and needs predominate over her freedom. However, Myrtle is enchanted by the corruption of the material side of the world till it eliminates her with a symbolic car accident. Consequently, the reality of the First World War disrupts the image of the American Dream since the endless progression in technology has been used to eliminate people in wars instead of fulfilling the dreams of individuals. Thus, this harsh confrontation points out their need for escapism from reality as Gatsby’s parties motivate the guests to drink alcohol for entertainment by becoming drunk.

In the case of the detachment from reality in *The Sun Also Rises*, Hemingway’s characters are much more pessimistic and cling to the emotion of melancholy to sustain their lives. As Leo, & Gurko (1944) compare the approaches in the novels: “Fitzgerald, in the psychological sense, is a kind of

lesser Hemingway” (p. 373). Therefore, the characters in *The Sun Also Rises* are more pessimist and spend their time aimlessly in bars. For example, Bill consumes alcohol excessively, and drinking alcohol causes him not to remember what he has done for days. The usage of alcohol in *The Sun Also Rises* is one of the potions that soothe most of the characters in the novel. Although the catastrophic impacts of the era haunt the characters, they find a way to distract themselves from reality and embrace the emotion of melancholy. Because the characters are helpless and senseless as they never manage to complete themselves. Therefore, Hemingway’s approach to detachment from reality is much more based on melancholy and pessimism. On the other hand, Hemingway’s *Sun Also Rises* also reflects the characteristics of escapism through the corruption of the characters’ moral codes. In this respect, the portrayal of Hemingway’s characters seems more trapped yet pursues their paths in hopeless ways. For instance, bullfighting becomes a key factor in representing the lack of spirit for achieving dreams in the characters since many characters passionately watch bullfighting yet do not even dream of becoming a hero as a bullfighter. Therefore, the characters feel desperate and senseless that they live their lives without pursuing any goal to achieve yet they love wasting their time aimlessly. For instance, Brett tests her fertility with her partners, though she is infertile to be a mother. Therefore, she never names her affairs yet she keeps men in her life to oppress her fear of loneliness. For instance, the way Jake describes her concretizes her fear of loneliness: “She wanted to get out of town and she can’t go anywhere alone” (Hemingway, 2006, p.136). Thus, she keeps integrating with the other characters to overcome her fear of loneliness and being part of the lies of her love affairs that temporarily distract her from reality. Because she aspires to reverse reality, something impossible to reach, as Jake once claim that: “I suppose she only wanted what she couldn’t have. Well, people were that way” (Hemingway, 2006, p.41). Thus, Jake is aware of how Brett demands impossibility as lost just like himself. Because, Jake is the epitome of the lost generation, who struggles with being impotent and unable to continue his life since his impotence stages a sense of insignificance to the top. Thus, his impotency symbolizes the lies of the American dream and the unreachable desire or pleasure for life. Therefore, Jake also heavily drinks to disconnect himself from reality. In this regard, the use of alcohol in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* motivates the characters to lose themselves arousing the feeling of melancholia to escape from reality of the age. Taken all these together, Hemingway’s characters are the lost generation that makes them move from one place to another, yet never makes them feel complete and fulfill their missions or themselves..

## 2. Conclusion

In conclusion, the concept of the American Dream ends up with the characteristics of escapism with the division of melancholy and joy since the lost generation that experiences disillusionment after the age of wars, intends to distance themselves from reality through alcohol consumption. While Fitzgerald’s *Great Gatsby* focuses on the emotion of joy, and Hemingway’s *Sun Also Rises* fuels the emotion of melancholia in the characters of the

disconnection from reality of the impacts of decades. Therefore, the pursuit of the American Dream brings about corruption in individuals since the characters in *The Great Gatsby* and *The Sun Also Rises* transgress the moral values of society and arouse emotions of joy and melancholy to escape from reality in *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Sun Also Rises*.

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