

# Lost Generations in American Literature

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**Analýza motivu "ztracenosti" ve vybraných dílech autorů různých generací (4-6 děl).**  
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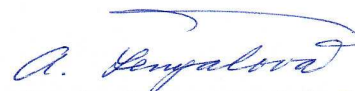
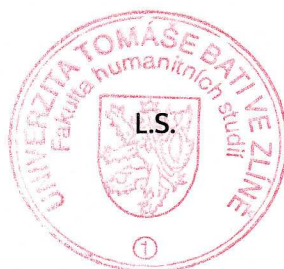
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## **ABSTRAKT**

Tato práce se zabývá americkou společností dvacátého století a dělí ji na jednotlivé generace se zaměřením na ztracené generace. Zkoumá, jak se situace ve společnosti odráží v literatuře a popisuje tvorbu nejvýznamnějších autorů ztracených generací. Na základě analýz vybraných děl srovnává obě ztracené generace a hledá mezi nimi podobnost. Práce dochází k závěru, že existuje paralela mezi motivem ztracenosti v dílech první a druhé ztracené generace.

Klíčová slova:

Generace, ztracená generace, nová ztracená generace, Generace X, první světová válka, dvacáté století, americká společnost, deziluze, ztracenost.

## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis deals with the American society of the twentieth century, divides it into separate generations with focus on the lost generations. It examines how the situation in the society is reflected in literature and describes work of the most significant authors of the lost generations. Based on the analysis of selected writings, it compares both lost generations and searches for the similarity. The thesis concludes that there exists the parallel between the motif of being lost in writings of the first and second lost generation.

Keywords:

Generation, Lost Generation, New Lost Generation, Generation X, First World War, twentieth century, American society, disillusionment, being lost.

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## INTRODUCTION

The topic of my bachelor thesis is *Lost Generations in American Literature*. In my bachelor thesis I deal with the authors of the Lost Generation and Generation X, also called the New Lost Generation, and their writings. I want to find out if their motifs were similar or the same and where is the parallel between these two generations of authors.

In the first part of my thesis I try to explore and describe the background of the Lost Generations' literature including American culture, society, and political situation. My goal is to discover in which ways these two generations are similar and why both of them use the "being lost" theme. In other words, this is the question that I want to answer. What is "being lost" and how this phenomenon influenced the literature of these two generations. It is also important to explain what preceded and followed these generations. I describe the American society through the whole 20th century.

In the second part of my thesis I introduce the most important authors of the Lost Generations with focus on writings which contain the "being lost" theme. I emphasize those of their writings which have some connection with the "being lost" phenomenon.

The third part of my bachelor thesis is made by the analysis of particular writings. On the specific extracts I highlight those findings I learnt while studying the background. Based on Richard Gray's *A History of American Literature*, I have chosen four most significant representatives of the lost generations and analyze their writings. Finally, I compare all four writings to find the connection between them.

## 1 AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

American society of the twentieth century can be divided into several generations. According to Neil Howe and William Strauss, the historians and the authors of *Generations*, members of the lost generation were born between 1883 and 1900. The following one, the G. I., is made by those who were born between 1901 and 1924.<sup>1</sup> Vann Wesson points out the following generations of the twentieth century. Silent generation is made by those born between 1925 and 1942. The Boomers, born between 1943 and 1960, were followed by the Generation X, which is made by people born between 1943 and 1960. Americans born between 1982 and 2003 are called Generation Y.<sup>2</sup>

### 1.1 The Lost Generation

The members of the Lost Generation were born between 1883 and 1900. According to Howe and Strauss, members of this generation grew up in the period of massive immigration and their youth was accompanied by the First World War which brought bitterness to the society. Their independent attitude caused that they got a label of bad children. The peak of their career was influenced by the Great Depression and their old-age by the high tax rates. The novelists of the Lost Generation gave a roar to the 1920s and made this decade significant literally period.<sup>3</sup>

### 1.2 G. I.

According to Howe and Strauss, the G.I.s are those born between 1901 and 1924. These historians claim that, on the contrary to previous generation, this one has a reputation of good children. They were brought up in the period when the society emphasized education, and the labor of children was restricted. When being young adults, they became members of corps, lived through the depression and adjusted to the immigration. Their midlife was influenced mainly by the Vietnam War, and consequently by the G.I. Bill.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See Life Course Associates

<sup>2</sup> See Vann Wesson, *Generation X: Field and Guide Lexicon*. (San Diego: Orion Media, 1996),

<sup>3</sup> See Life Course Associates

<sup>4</sup> See Life Course Associates

### 1.3 Silent Generation

Members of this generation had a formidable role in the American society. They were born too late to be war heroes but there still was not the age supporting the open-minded youth. They had to conform to a lot of changes during their lives so they could feel unclassified. This attitude followed them to the retirement age which these children of the Great Crash entered with prosperity.<sup>5</sup>

Their childhood was signed by the economical crisis. The Republican Party could not find any way from the crisis, so, in 1932, the situation influenced in a fall of the government. The Democrats took the power over and Franklin Roosevelt became the president. New laws that had to help the economics were passed, e.g., the bank law – the banks were closed and restructured. The new government also successfully fought with unemployment. Roosevelt's reforms are often called as a "New Deal".<sup>6</sup>

Gray says that the Great Crash was not only the economical crisis but also the psychological one.<sup>7</sup> After the First World War, the period of great changes in American culture, particularly literature, started. The cultural boundaries were denied and the expatriate movement was a natural result of this situation. Number of writers and artists left the United States and started to work in Europe.<sup>8</sup>

Ethnic minorities started to be active in literature and art as well. African Americans moved from Southern States to modern urban centers. In 1925, Alain Locke's essay on the New Negro was published and so the New Negro Movement was established. Those African American authors who wrote in Harlem formed Harlem Renaissance. African American inheritance was rich and this is reflected in slave narrative.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.4 The Boomers

The Boomers are sometimes characterized as those who stay teenagers for the whole life. Geoffrey T. Holtz says that the fifties and sixties were exciting period for young

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<sup>5</sup> See Life Course Associates

<sup>6</sup> See Vratislav Čapek et al., *Světové dějiny II: Dějiny lidských civilizací od poloviny 17. století po současnost*, (Praha: Fortuna, 1994),156.

<sup>7</sup> See Richard Gray, *A History of American Literature*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2004), 342.

<sup>8</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 340.

<sup>9</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 342.

Americans.<sup>10</sup> The Hippies movement was born, the Woodstock festival was its flashpoint, and Jimmy Hendrix, Elvis Presley, Rolling Stones, and other musicians and artists became the idols. Feeling the need of change, the Boomers were often demonstrating in streets for the rights of minorities, like African Americans, or gays.<sup>11</sup> David Leavitt, American writer, sociologist and journalist, as a member of the following generation, describes one of the demonstrations, which he joined with his older sister, skeptically: “It’s hard to say, in retrospect, which meant less – the speech, or the protestors’ endless declaration that the people, united, would never be defeated.”<sup>12</sup>

Changing their home, exploring the world, expanding their minds, and supporting the revolution were their aims. Movement is the word that briefly describes this generation. There were feminist movement, environmental movement, black power movement, and many others often expressing their ideas by urban riots. When entering adulthood, the Boomers experienced the protests against the Vietnam War. Some of these rebels and flower children became typical yuppies with a perfect lifestyle and a conservative job at the beginning of 1980s.<sup>13</sup>

The United States came through a lot of changes during their lives, especially during their youth. Harry Truman became the president and continued in Roosevelt’s New Deal politics. In 1950, he sent the American soldiers to the Korean War and, in consequence, the republican candidate Dwight Eisenhower was elected the president in 1952. He managed to lead the Korean War to its end. However, his politics of refusing segregation did not succeed in most of the Southern states. Sputnik-era made the American society to doubt about the level of education. In 1960, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was elected the president.<sup>14</sup>

## 1.5 Generation X

Holtz claims that “[t]he generation of Americans, born during the 1960s and 1970s, remains, to many, an enigma.”<sup>15</sup> Their young adulthood was accompanied by individualism

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<sup>10</sup> See Geoffrey T. Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*. (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 1995)

<sup>11</sup> See Wesson, *Generation X*.

<sup>12</sup> David Leavitt, “The New Lost Generation,” *Esquire*, May, 1985, 86.

<sup>13</sup> See Life Course Associates

<sup>14</sup> See Vratislav Čapek et al., *Světové dějiny II*, 200.

<sup>15</sup> Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 1.

and pessimism.<sup>16</sup> They were born in the period when rock and roll was not rebellious music and equality of minorities was not anything they had to fight for because it was already here. The twentysomethings, as they are called, are thought that they do not appreciate enough the changes induced by the Boomers. For the Generation X, the affairs fought by the Boomers, were something familiar. According to Rushkoff, they are criticized by people who are not members of Generation X to be “illiterate, unmotivated, and apathetic couch potatoes”.<sup>17</sup> However, they perceive themselves grateful for the society they were born in.<sup>18</sup>

There are a lot of names of this generation. Douglas Coupland, the Canadian novelist, popularized the term Generation X to call these Americans. Howe and Strauss came with the tag “13er”<sup>19</sup>, which means nothing more than the chronological order of all generations in American history.

They also got a name “a new lost generation”<sup>20</sup> as a parallel with the lost generation of 1920s. Holtz prefers label “the free generation”<sup>21</sup>. *Free* in this case bears a meaning of liberty, they are not limited as the generations before, they can choose from the wide range of opportunities. Neither any events like Vietnam War nor any stereotypes restrict them. On the other hand, the freedom came together with the responsibility of creating their own possibilities and setting the trends.<sup>22</sup>

David Leavitt describes the Generation X as the “tail end”<sup>23</sup> of the Boomers. They were reminded by the elders that they had more of everything than any other generation before them. They could watch MTV and had their own Apple Macintoshes.<sup>24</sup> They are said to be children of shopping malls and McDonalds. Consumerism was spread and the people had to defend against the marketing strategies that TV started to use.<sup>25</sup>

The 1970s and 1980s brought new phenomenon, the feeling of perfect appearance. Due to this fact, eating disorders like anorexia nervosa and bulimia started to spread among

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<sup>16</sup> See Life Course Associates

<sup>17</sup> Douglas Rushkoff, *GenX Reader*. (New York: Ballantine, 1994), 3.

<sup>18</sup> See Rushkoff, *GenX Reader*, 3-6.

<sup>19</sup> Life Course Associates

<sup>20</sup> Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 3.

<sup>21</sup> Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 3.

<sup>22</sup> See Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 1-4.

<sup>23</sup> Leavitt, *The New Lost Generation*, 88.

<sup>24</sup> See Leavitt, *The New Lost Generation*, 88.

<sup>25</sup> See Rushkoff, *The GenX Reader*, 4-5.

young girls. Social climate strongly contributed to their dissatisfaction with themselves.<sup>26</sup> Disco became a new trend together with cocaine in the late 1970s. Cocaine influenced lives of a lot of people, but most of them did not allow it to destroy them, it was just a part of their enjoyment.<sup>27</sup> McNerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* describes these problems in details.

Generation X had to face to many changes also in the fields of economics and politics. The minimum wage was decreasing during the whole 1980s. However, Reagan's conservatives claimed that increasing of minimum wage would have threatened employment opportunities of young people and the market competition. In 1987, when the "13ers" started their own households, an average family paid ten percent of incomes on federal taxes. The same family in 1979 would have paid two percent. The eighties also noted two tax reforms. The first act, in 1981, caused decreasing of taxes paid by the wealthy group of the Americans. This change did not have any beneficial effect on people with low incomes. The second act, in 1986, unified the tax rates for all inhabitants regardless the income. The Free generation started to work at the time of declining income and dropping job benefits, the nineties was the period when the young people became poorer. The Boomers became a bit richer in the same period.<sup>28</sup>

After the coming of Generation X, traditional family changed its form as well. Mothers wanted to make their own career and, as the result, the number of children brought up in their own home background fell on half. When the Thirteeners entered their middle childhood, in late 1970s, the divorce rate in the United States had already doubled the number of 1965. One in three pregnancies was terminated by abortion.<sup>29</sup> Leavitt's words prove that the orderly family was a valuable phenomenon at that time: "In a community where the divorce rate had reached a record high, and every family seemed to have at least one child in prison, or in a hospital, or dead of an overdose, my parents had never even separated."<sup>30</sup>

In eyes of their forerunners, they were the generation which preferred more shopping and playing to working or studying. Whether they worked as messengers or health-care trainees, they were primarily workers of low-wage and low-benefit economy. By the elders

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<sup>26</sup> See Holtz, *Welcome to the Jungle*, 65.

<sup>27</sup> See Rushkoff, *The GenX Reader*, 36-37.

<sup>28</sup> See Rushkoff, *The GenX Reader*, 161-64.

<sup>29</sup> See Rushkoff, *The GenX Reader*, 293.

<sup>30</sup> Leavitt, *The New Lost Generation*, 88.

they were regarded skeptically, but in their own opinion, the Thirteeners were sharp-eyed people with a pragmatic perception of the world. In 1980, the first graduating Thirteeners were facing the record high crime and drug-abuse rates.<sup>31</sup> Their chances were almost unlimited in contrast to their parents' whose goals were marriages and raising children. Generation X could see the result of this alternative. They decided to trust themselves and money.<sup>32</sup>

## 1.6 Generation Y

The Americans born between 1982 and 2003 are called Generation Y, or the Millennial Generation. They came when the divorce rate and number of abortion in the United States decreased. Complete families and raising children became valuable life aims. Child safety started to be often discussed topic. The politicians deal the affairs of adults with having respect to children needs. Children generally are viewed very positively.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> See Rushkoff, *The GenX Reader*, 290-92.

<sup>32</sup> See Leavitt, *The New Lost Generation*, 94.

<sup>33</sup> See Life Course Associates

## 2 LOST GENERATIONS' LITERATURE

In the twentieth century, the motif of being lost appears in American literature twice. First, it is in 1920s, after the First World War, for the second time with coming up of Generation X. Similar political, economical and social background naturally brought the state when the topics of writings are similar as well.

Based on Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, the area of the United States was untouched by the battles but they were strongly influenced by the results of the First World War. In literature, it meant, among other things, the boom of war and postwar novel. Some of the writers took part in battles or military training and used this in writings, or they just dealt with psychological trauma from wartime experience. John Dos Passos, Ernest Hemingway, and Francis Scott Fitzgerald were those who had their own experiences from battlefields.<sup>34</sup> Gray also deals with war and postwar novels. Based on his *A History of American Literature*, John Dos Passos in his *Three Soldiers* reflects the postwar depression and disillusionment. The main characters are three sensitive young men who or the immediate participants of the war. In this confrontation, Dos Passos expressed the struggle between the humanity and the system, between sensitiveness and cruelty. The system is named in different ways, whether it is called army or law, it is always something impersonal.<sup>35</sup> Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms* is also set in the First World War. In this work, Hemingway focuses on individual, emotions, and immediate experience. He learnt this style of writing from Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound. The main protagonist, Frederic Henry, prefers the real world to the abstraction, as the plain and abstract words would have described just the ideas, not the experiences.<sup>36</sup> Except the fact that William Faulkner was first of all the Southern writer, in his writings with Southern theme could be found resources of experimental Modernism. He also touched military theme, his first novel *Soldier's Pay* describes the postwar unrest through its main character, the blind veteran from the First World War.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> See Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism: A History of American Literature* (New York: Viking, 1991), 295.

<sup>35</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 440.

<sup>36</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 445.

<sup>37</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 308-9.



## 2.1 The Lost Generation

The culture and literature of 1920s featured the development of decadence and purposelessness. The political situation after refusing the League of Nations, and the rise of isolationism, caused that this decade was a period of conservatism, Puritanism, and Prohibition. On the other hand, there was a boom of film, new technologies, psychoanalysis, consumption, new urban areas, and the excitement of life in big cities. All these innovations brought the feelings of nostalgia. The American novel of this period contains both the enthusiasm of the novelty and the awareness of losing the past.<sup>38</sup>

The American authors started to experiment with Symbolism, Surrealism and Dadaism, but first and foremost, they were involved in Modernism. Modernist authors are innovative in many ways. They are not afraid of mixing those levels which used to be separate so far, so they risk some incoherence with the view of being more associative. Modernist writers name things authentically and clearly to make the reader recognize the truth.

Feminism had a great influence on establishing Modernism as a cultural movement. Women were able to vote, they could control their lives, be educated, to choose a new profession and, what is important, they could choose if to have children and when. Even though some profitable occupations, e.g., medicine or law, were still men's domain and nearly a half of women were still occupied in their households, women's position in society remarkably changed.

Changes in society of the 1920s were evoked not only by coming of feminism, but also by other factors, among them by immigration. The American culture and literature was not so united any more so the identities, languages and forms started to mix. Ethnic minorities toss between the wish to be absorbed into the majority and saving the original identity. The most numerous ethnic group, the African Americans, established already mentioned the New Negro Movement. Dualism did not touch only minority groups, the 1920s was for most Americans the period of celebrating the new and nostalgically leaving the old at the same time. This dualism in culture and literature caused that some of the artists and writers were interested in recovering the past. Jean Toomer and Mourning Dove used the history of Native Americans and African Americans as an important source of information. Through literature they could restore their people, culture, and history.

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<sup>38</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 296-97.

The Wall Street Crash in 1929 and the Depression that followed change the American mind and caused a turnover in literature writings.<sup>39</sup> According to Ruland and Bradbury, the writings like Gertrude Stein's *The Making of Americans* (1925), Sherwood Anderson's *Dark Laughter* (1925), John Dos Passos's *Manhattan Transfer* (1925), and Willa Cather's *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927) are principle pieces representing this remarkable period of American literature. Particularly Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and Francis Scott Fitzgerald are the most significant authors of this period and those who left lasting heritage to their followers. In their novels they masterly use experiments of Modernism when describing the new and when looking backward.<sup>40</sup>

Gertrude Stein was the first swallow among the American expatriates. She left in 1903 and spent most of her productive years in Paris. This author associating with experiment writing placed emphasis on catching each moment without needless assembling. She refused putting associations, but preferred clear and systematic adding information. This style which had many successors Stein initiated. Altogether she wrote more than five hundred literally pieces including prose, poetry, and drama.<sup>41</sup>

### 2.1.1 Francis Scott Fitzgerald

Fitzgerald is another member of expatriate movement of the 1920s and one of those who managed to express the being lost with bravura due to his personal experiences. As Ruland and Bradbury say: "Fitzgerald still appears more than stylish chronicler – a man so immersed in the social life, the amusement, the illusory promises of his time, with its fashions, its wealth, its changing sexual habit – and its charm that he could never stand back far to consider, and test it."<sup>42</sup> In his essay "The Crack-Up", Fitzgerald admits he paid a price for his literally development. In "The Crack-Up" he also describes his personal shift from euphoria of early 1920s to the trauma at the end. *Tender is the Night*, his third novel, brings the development of this decade observed in 1930s.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 340-46.

<sup>40</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 314-15.

<sup>41</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 429-31.

<sup>42</sup> Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 298.

<sup>43</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 298-99.

Gray agrees that Fitzgerald was of all American Modernists the most autobiographical. Not only *Tender is the Night*, but also *This Side of Paradise*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *The Last Tycoon* contain expressive marks of their author's life but Fitzgerald managed to capture the dreams that fascinated him and his friends in a real world. His very first published book, a collection of stories *Flappers and Philosophers*, meant an immediate success. In *Tales of the Jazz Age*, Fitzgerald intended to be a chronicles of this generation. It includes *The Diamond as Big as the Ritz*, which is considered to be one of the most destructive interpretation of perceiving of capitalism.<sup>44</sup>

### 2.1.2 Ernest Hemingway

Hemingway is another author whose early writings are influenced by the war and its after-effects, he dealt with this theme e.g., in his first real book *In Our Time* (1925). *In Our Time* also established his specific style of writing. Hemingway came with a new style of writing where he played with language and form. With his typical precision, he focused on “inner strength”<sup>45</sup>, something what one cannot lose.

On the contrary to Fitzgerald, whose use of language and way of thinking was more open and general, Hemingway always tried to be specific. His writings are tight and enclosed worlds - brightly specified and limited. In his times, this technique made him an experimenter.

In some his best writings – in *Men without Women* and *A Farewell to Arms*, Hemingway deals with essential life losses. *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*, published in 1926, included two epitaphs, one of them by Gertrude Stein. Here she used for the first time label “the lost generation”. Even if Stein later refused calling the postwar writers “the lost generation”, this name remained.<sup>46</sup> Stein was Hemingway's model, he learnt a lot from her. Hemingway, personally, called his art “the art of omission”. Through omitting some parts he made the reader think more and kept the space for imagination.<sup>47</sup> In *The Sun Also Rises* could be found a lot of disillusionment of the war as this novel is a big treatise on the lost generation.

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<sup>44</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 435-36.

<sup>45</sup> Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 302-3.

<sup>46</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 302-4.

<sup>47</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 444.

### 2.1.3 William Faulkner

Faulkner remains, for many, an American Southern fiction writer, but he was also a modernist experimenter with language and form and significant member of the lost generation. His personal conception of Southern history differs him from his contemporaries. Most of his Southern fictions are set in the imagined Yoknapatawpha County, based on his native soil, which first appeared in *Sartoris* (1929). Nearly all his life he spent in the South, apart from a few visits of Hollywood where he worked as a screenwriter to earn some money. His short bohemian time of life he spent in New Orleans where was influenced by Sherwood Anderson. From this period *Mosquitoes* (1927), *Dark Laughter* (1925), and *Soldier's Pay* (1926) come. His writing, which combines modern experiments with classic Southern romance, made him a great novelist.<sup>48</sup>

Gray believes that what was for Hemingway omitting, for Faulkner it was repetition and cycling. When telling the story, he is coming back to the old events but with new feeling and understanding. Faulkner perceived writing as a communication between writer and reader. His major Modernist novels are *As I Lay Dying*, *The Sound and the Fury*, *Sanctuary*, *Light in August*, and *Absalom, Absalom!* From all these novels, *The Sound and the Fury* reflects his life the most. The memories and the repeating of the past are the main elements of this novel's language.<sup>49</sup> Faulkner himself qualified these books as written in his most talented period.<sup>50</sup>

## 2.2 The Second Lost Generation

The American literature of 1960s was strongly influenced by the postmodern movement and the novel got a new face. Daniel Grassian claims that what was stream of consciousness for modernists, for the postmodernist authors it is metanarrative. Metanarrative writings deny a linear narrative and prefer more irregular form with more standpoints and aspects. The beginning of 1970s brought another shift in American culture and literature, so called, minimalism. John Barth was the first who used the word minimalism as a name of a new literary genre. Other authors who published their novels in

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<sup>48</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 308-9.

<sup>49</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 447-50.

<sup>50</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 311.

1970s and 1980s as the minimalists were e.g., Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie, or Richard Ford.

Grassian points out that the 1980s were also the era when Bret Easton Ellis, Jay McInerney, and Tama Janowitz published their most famous and most significant novels. Ellis's *Less Than Zero* (1985), McInerney's *Bright Lights, Big City* (1984), and Janowitz's *Slaves of New York* (1986) are all set in large cities – Los Angeles or New York. Even if these writers are not so excellent in structure and form, they are an important shift from American modernism to the style, which Grassian calls “Hybrid fiction”<sup>51</sup>. The feature of their writings and of this generation generally is ironic satire.<sup>52</sup> Gray says that McInerney's and Ellis's writings are the very beginning of this generation's writing.<sup>53</sup> These authors are members of Generation X.

Grassian believes that during the next decade, in 1990s, this generation of authors got into the foreground of the American literature. They are not considered to be postmodernists any more, as the postmodernism experienced its boom in the previous decade. Or, in better words, postmodernism of the 1990s has got a different shape. It is influenced by a pop-culture and media. Grassian named the writings of Ellis, McInerney, and Janowitz as a “literally brat pack”<sup>54</sup>, as well as image fiction, punk fiction, downtown writing, or neo-realism. Their characters often do not want to become a part of American consuming society and deals with the feelings of emptiness and psychic isolation.<sup>55</sup>

### 2.2.1 Jay McInerney

When, in September 2000, Lynn Barber made an interview with Jay McInerney for *The Observer*, he was just after the break up with his third wife, sad, selling his flat, moving to New York's downtown, and experiencing another period of self-underestimation. This marriage made him a father of two children, who were brought to the country by their

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<sup>51</sup> Daniel Grassian, *Hybrid Fictions: American History and Generation X* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 2003), 12.

<sup>52</sup> See Daniel Grassian, *Hybrid Fictions*, 10-12.

<sup>53</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 617.

<sup>54</sup> Grassian, *Hybrid Fictions*, 11.

<sup>55</sup> See Grassian, *Hybrid Fiction*, 13-14.

mother and so, he stayed alone in the city with the prestige “balancing on the edge”<sup>56</sup>, as he said.

Lynn Barber claims that his first novel, *Bright Light, Big City*, published in 1984, made him, in the eyes of critics, a new Francis Scott Fitzgerald and a New York’s celebrity – a participant of a number of parties and a face in newspapers and magazines. When remembering this period with a long dosing interval, he knew that he liked this kind of lifestyle without realizing it was damaging him at the same time. His life was accompanied by a lot of relationships, mostly with models. The longest and most breakable one was his already mentioned last marriage with seven-year-old Helen Bransford from Tennessee. Their marriage was the point that should have helped him to lead a different life. Together they moved to Nashville and after a number of miscarriages, she gave a birth to twins. Despite this fact, the marriage was not happy and whether it was the age gap or the other problems, after nine years it came to its end. McInerney said that it was Helen’s emotional balance why he loved her and what differentiated her from his other partners.

His next novel *Model Behavior* (1998) reflects his comeback to New York City, to the roots of his writing. Time he spent in Nashville made him to think about New York with some distance. Having children and watching them grow helped him as a writer to perceive experiences on a larger time scale. Finally the marriage was divorced in 1999.<sup>57</sup>

In July 2009, McInerney was interviewed again for *The Observer* by Rachel Cooke and this time his personal situation was different. Married, for the fourth time, to Anne Hearst, a granddaughter of a newspaper magnate, actually promoting his new collection of stories named *The Last Bachelor*. The period of *Bright Lights, Big City*’s fame, when he was involved into the big city’s life with all the parties, women, and cocaine, seems to be definitely over. This is also reflected in his characters. Still these are people who are favored and attractive, but the privilege of money was replaced by the privilege of education. The financial crisis changed the people’s mind also in the Big City. A lot of wealth people lost their wealth and consumption way of life lost its charm. In this millennium it is already the second shift in New Yorkers’ life.

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<sup>56</sup> See Lynn Barber, „The Beautiful and The Damned,“ *The Observer*, 2000, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/sep/10/fiction.features> (accessed March 27, 2010).

<sup>57</sup> See Lynn Barber, „The Beautiful and The Damned,“ *The Observer*, 2000, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2000/sep/10/fiction.features> (accessed March 27, 2010).

The first came after the terrorist attack in 2001, which he captured in *The Good Life*. However, McInerney observes these changes with some kind of satisfaction, especially when realizing how he spent his money.<sup>58</sup> McInerney says: “I made a lot for literary novelist. Not only did I support myself but a bunch of ex-wives and kids and restaurateurs and club owners and drug dealers.”<sup>59</sup>

### 2.2.2 David Leavitt

David Leavitt got known in 1980s as an essayist and story writer. His early writings were distinguished by a rigorous form without needless sentiment and that is why he earned a label *minimalist*. Throughout the years, Leavitt’s writing became more sensational, but did not lose anything of its clarity. He is a representative of a gay literature but his main themes are of wider variety. Leavitt deals mainly with relationships in families, homosexual – heterosexual friendships and marriages. Regardless the theme, his works always contains mark of his Jewish origin as well as his homosexuality.

Some of his pieces shows the attitude of women, e.g., *The Lost Language of Cranes* or “Aliens”, where he also deals with the topic of motherhood. Leavitt’s later works like *Black Box* or *The Infection Scene* made him an excellent fiction writer.

This American expatriate finally settled down in Italy and it brought him quietness after being raised in Bronx and after years spent in different places. Life in Italy is reflected e.g., in *Roads to Rome*.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> See Rachel Cooke, „The Interview: Jay McInerney,“ *The Observer*, 2009, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2009/jul/12/interview-jay-mcinerney> (accessed March 27, 2010).

<sup>59</sup> Rachel Cooke, „The Interview: Jay McInerney.

<sup>60</sup> See Edmund White, „Truth upon Truth,“ *The Guardian*, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2005/nov/05/featuresreviews.guardianreview16> (accessed March 27, 2010).

### 3 ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LOST GENERATIONS LITERATURE'S WRITINGS

#### 3.1 The Great Gatsby

Fitzgerald's novel, published in 1925, presents a number of different characters. Exactly the nature of all characters makes the story special. According to Ruland and Bradbury, the main hero – Jay Gatsby – is expressively described gradually changing from the “product of his material world”<sup>61</sup> at the beginning to “the victim of its massive carelessness”<sup>62</sup> at the end. The narrator, Nick Carraway, manages to detail Gatsby's consuming inclinations and, consequently, has an impress that he perfectly understands Gatsby's nature with all his wishes.<sup>63</sup>

All the descriptions are made without headstrong conclusion. The narrator keeps the reader's eyes open and just inform without the aim to be influent. The narrator refuses conclusions even at the very beginning of the novel, saying: “reserving judgments is a matter of infinite hope.”<sup>64</sup> Nick, due to this fact, at some moments, takes a naïve impress. Nevertheless, thanks to this, Nick presents the story without subjective feelings.

At the beginning of the story, Nick Carraway describes his neighbor Gatsby as a mysterious, wealthy, and lavish man, living in a luxurious mansion in Long Island, giving parties nearly each Saturday for people he mostly does not know. Some of his secrets he keeps during the whole story, e.g., the origin of his wealth. Even if Nick listens to a lot of theories about Gatsby's money, he, again, does not make a definite conclusion. Gatsby alone makes the aura of secrecy around him even stronger when he supplies Nick with different information about his money and family. Quite early, Nick gets known Gatsby's true face. He is a lonely man, desperately in love with one woman. Daisy, love of Gatsby's life, is Nick's cousin, and Nick is forced to arrange their meeting after years. Gatsby's true love to this woman puts him into the role of sensible man. On the other hand, the way how he tries to attract her attention lacks the capacity of inventiveness. His mansion, cars, money and even his shirts are going to be right allurements. At one moment Daisy holds

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<sup>61</sup> Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 299.

<sup>62</sup> Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 299.

<sup>63</sup> See Ruland, Bradbury, *From Puritanism to Postmodernism*, 299.

<sup>64</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby* (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions, 1993), 3.



his shirts, cries, and says: “It makes me sad, because I’ve never seen such – such beautiful shirts.”<sup>65</sup> Her obsession with money makes one feel sorry with her in this situation.

Daisy functions as a symbol of superficiality. According to Gray, she “measures the contradictions of the dream, its heady mix of mystery and the material, moral perfection and economic power.”<sup>66</sup> Always bored lady, looking for some enjoyment, is behaving like a spoilt child despite the fact she is already a mother. She fulfills her life with activities typical for people who have nearly everything and cannot recognize what they really miss. Once, bored again, she asks: “What’ll we do with ourselves this afternoon, and the day after that and the next thirty years?”<sup>67</sup> She married Tom Buchanan and broke her promise to Gatsby to wait for him until he comes back from the World War battlefields. Daisy for a short time yields to temptation and meets Gatsby. However, when time comes to decide whether to leave Tom, she is helpless and confused. She is not even able to orientate in her feelings and during a row between her, Gatsby, and Tom, Daisy says: “I did love him once, but I loved you too.”<sup>68</sup>

Tom Buchanan, Daisy’s husband, seems to be representative of moral emptiness. He likes to play a role of orderly husband and father with all the wealth and money around, but this and his second life do not fit together. Tom has a lover, an unhappily married Myrtle Wilson. Myrtle lives with her husband, a garage owner, in an unattractive part of the city and she longs for something more. She believes that with Tom her wishes could come true and she will live the life of rich and beloved women. Sometimes, they have a party in their flat and so she lives, for a while, her dream. Still, it is only desperate try to be someone else and incapability to come to terms with her fate. Myrtle is floating on when talking about the first meeting with Tom: “All I kept thinking about, over and over, was ‘You can’t live forever, you can’t live forever’.”<sup>69</sup> For her, meeting Tom was a gleam of hope, delivery from her poverty. Tom behaves as typical hypocrite when he judges Daisy for her weakness for Gatsby. His faithlessness is similar to the Daisy’s one, it is escapism from reality.

The most discrete character of Fitzgerald’s novel is Jordan, Daisy’s friend. Jordan is level-headed single lady, playing golf and enjoying her life. In compare to Daisy, she has

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<sup>65</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 59.

<sup>66</sup> Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 437.

<sup>67</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 75.

<sup>68</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 84.

<sup>69</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 24.

nothing to hide. Paradoxically, it is Daisy who labels her as being unmoral. At the beginning, Daisy tends to put Nick and Jordan together, but they stay friends and objective observers of the events.

Irony of fate causes that Daisy finally becomes Myrtle's killer. She hits her by the car after a row with Gatsby and Tom at the moment when Myrtle runs out of the house after the row with her husband. Altogether, it all seems to be a punishment for chronic dissatisfaction. Gatsby also dies as a victim of people's selfishness. Wilson shoots him to revenge the death of his wife. The real killer is not punished because Tom Buchanan told Wilson that it was Gatsby's car which hit his wife. Not even Daisy expressed regret for Gatsby's death, she continued, unscrupulous, in her careless life. "They were careless people Tom and Daisy – they smashed up things and creatures and then retreated back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together, and let other people clean up the mess they had made..."<sup>70</sup> Wilson killed himself after he murdered Gatsby and "and the holocaust was complete."<sup>71</sup>

Gatsby's love to Daisy was true. After the accident, when Myrtle died, Gatsby kept the secret and did not say it to anybody. His father, at the end of the story, says to Nick: "Do you notice what he's got about improving his mind? He was always great for that."<sup>72</sup> When Nick remembers his friend, he admires especially his will to let the dreams come true and the ability to keep hope.

Gray sees in Nick and Gatsby similarity, they both are typical Midwest natives who came to East to establish themselves. Nevertheless, what makes the story dramatic is the difference between the main character and the narrator. Gatsby is romantic dreamer and Nick is realistic person. What Gray claims is that Gatsby's story is also America's story. Gatsby wanted to change his dreams into reality and have a good life of his imagination. Fitzgerald put an American dream into the dream of one singular man.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 114.

<sup>71</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 103

<sup>72</sup> Francis Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*, 110.

<sup>73</sup> See Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 436-38.

### 3.2 The Sun Also Rises

Richard Gray labels *The Sun Also Rises* as the “seminal treatment of the ‘lost generation’ and its disillusionment in the aftermath of the First World War.”<sup>74</sup> It is a treatise of a group of people, living actually in Paris in a postwar period. The story begins in Paris, continues and finishes in Spain, but during that time the characters do not move anywhere in their lives. They just survive by looking for activities that would somehow fulfill their lives. Whether it is sitting in cafés, restaurants, fishing, or watching bullfights, it is mostly some kind of entertainment what they deal with. They need money, but look for the easiest way how to get them. They do not care much about a deep sense of life. The protagonists just admit what life offers without thinking about circumstances. Influenced by the war, they are strongly skeptical about it: “it was in reality a calamity for civilization, and perhaps would have been better avoided.”<sup>75</sup>

The main heroes of *The Sun Also Rises* are Jake Barnes, Robert Cohn, and Brett Ashley. Jake and Robert are both American expatriates, that time working in Paris. Brett is a thirty-four-year-old Lady, Jake’s old love from war. The relationship between Jake and Brett makes a central line of the novel. Other protagonists are Bill Gorton and Mike Campbell, both war veterans as well as Jake. Jake is also the narrator and his presentation is accompanied by his subjective feeling, on the contrary to Nick in *The Great Gatsby*.

The first part of the novel is an illustration of everyday life of Jake, Robert, Brett and their friends in Paris. Most of their lifetime they deal with such problems like where to have lunch, or which bar to go in. This aimless lifestyle rises from the postwar disillusionment which was established in 1920s. Alcohol seems to be the most effective medicine for this apathy. Generally, alcohol is an integral part of protagonists’ lives. Jake describes it: “Under the wine I lost the disgusted feeling and was happy.”<sup>76</sup>

Jake has to cope with his war injury that caused his impotence and badly influenced the rest of his life. Jake and Brett met in a hospital after he was wounded so she knows well about his disability. His love to Brett is not returned. Even if Hemingway does not explicitly express her feelings, her attitude to Jake is shifty. Once, when they enjoy another evening in bar, Jake asks her if she was in love with him. Brett responds: “Love you? I

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<sup>74</sup> Gray, *A History of American Literature*, 445.

<sup>75</sup> Ernest Hemingway, *Fiesta: The Sun Also Rises*. (New York: Random House, 2004), 14.

<sup>76</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 127.

simply turn all in jelly when you touch me.”<sup>77</sup> At that time, Lady Ashley is waiting for her divorce, but it does not hamper her to meet other men, always very rich. Having a lot of money is something so ordinary to her that she even does not mask her love to it. The same evening, when Brett visits Jake with her new suitor, a Greek duke, she informs him that he “offered [her] ten thousand dollars to go to Biarritz with him.”<sup>78</sup> This kind of behavior makes Jake to feel sorry about her. “This was Brett that I had felt like crying about.”<sup>79</sup> Brett Ashley acts as a careless woman for whom her own welfare is a highest priority. Nevertheless, her easy-going and entertaining nature makes her popular and attractive among men.

Brett Ashley soon becomes an object of interest of Robert Cohn. He says about her: “She’s a remarkably attractive woman.”<sup>80</sup> Jake, when talking to Cohn about Brett, wants to stay unprejudiced: “She’s a nice girl, she’s getting a divorce and she’s going to marry Mike Campbell.”<sup>81</sup> Hemingway describes Cohn as a former boxing champion of Princeton, who remember more being treated as a Jew than being the champion.<sup>82</sup> Cohn, feeling he misses something in his life and need a change, decides to divorce with his wife Frances and presently asks Jake to accompany him in his journey to South America. There is a fear in his questions: “Don’t you ever get the feeling that all your life is going by and you’re not taking advantage of it? Do you realize you’ve lived nearly half the time you have to live already?”<sup>83</sup> Cohn summarizes his life so far and realizes that one should leave some heritage in this world. However, he finds a solution of this crisis in an adventurous journey to South America.

Jake and Robert finally decide to leave for some time to Spain, having a fishing trip and then enjoy the fiesta at Pamplona and watch the bullfights. Another friend of them, Bill Gorton accompanies them. Brett and Mike Campbell plan to join the group of friends at Pamplona. Bill and Jake have a lot in common, particularly their war experiences. Before Brett and Mike’s coming, Cohn is very nervous. He is worried they would not come and his behavior soon makes Jake and Bill impatient and disgusted. Jake describes his stubborn

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<sup>77</sup>Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 22.

<sup>78</sup>Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 28-29.

<sup>79</sup>Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 30.

<sup>80</sup>Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 33.

<sup>81</sup>Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 33.

<sup>82</sup>See Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 3.

<sup>83</sup>Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 9.

confidence: “He said it with an air of superior knowledge that irritated both of us.”<sup>84</sup> Cohn’s childish nature becomes a target of jokes from his friends and they start to perceive him with some distance. When going to the station to meet Brett and Mike, Jake is “enjoying Cohn’s nervousness.”<sup>85</sup> It may be his inexperience with war that causes Bill and Jake do not understand his eagerness. They saw the cruelty of war, so that is probably the reason of their misunderstanding Cohn’s enthusiasm. The discussion about Irony and Pity is an instance of their lost illusions. Jake says: “Say something pitiful.” Bill answers: “Robert Cohn.”<sup>86</sup> Not only the war experiences, but also the fact they are both American expatriates causes they are not ‘naive’ at all. Several times their native soil is mentioned in a doubtful way. When travelling to Spain, Bill comments the Americans on train ironically: “So, that’s what they are. Pilgrims. Goddam Puritans.”<sup>87</sup> Sarcasm could be also seen when Bill finds out, the Catholics eating in a dining room have an advantage to Protestants. Father’s question “Haven’t you got tickets?”<sup>88</sup> Bill responds “It’s enough to make the man join the Klan.”<sup>89</sup>

Soon after Jake and Bill return from the fishing trip back to Pamplona, the fiesta starts. “*Aficion* means passion. An aficionado is one who is passionate about the bullfights.”<sup>90</sup> The group of friends enjoys the atmosphere of bullfights, particularly those where nineteen-year old bullfighter named Pedro Romero takes part. Hemingway describes his fights in details and very explicitly in order to involve reader into the atmosphere. One is made to think about the bullfighter’s mind and motives. It is like a dialogue between the fighter and the bull. “Romero’s bullfighting gave a real emotion, because he kept the absolute purity of line in his movements...”<sup>91</sup> During the fiesta, Brett has a romance with Pedro, which makes Mike angry and Cohn sad. When Brett talks to Jake about it, she again is not able to understand her feelings. After seven days, fiesta is over.

Jake’s love to Brett finally does not come to fulfillment. After she leaves Mike, Jake visits her in Madrid. The story ends nearly in the same way as it begins. In a bar, having a

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<sup>84</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 83.

<sup>85</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 86.

<sup>86</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 100.

<sup>87</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 75.

<sup>88</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 77.

<sup>89</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 77.

<sup>90</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 115.

<sup>91</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 145.

drink, the protagonists seems that nothing changes in their lives. However, Brett, influenced by the earlier events, says: “We could have such a damned good time together”. “Isn’t it pretty to think so?”<sup>92</sup> Jake answers. In this could be seen a realization of a sense of life and perceiving the world they live in. During the whole narrating, Jake tries to stay pure and liberal in evaluation Brett’s lifestyle and her attitude to men. Once, at Pamplona, when thinking about her and about women generally, he is disgusted: “To hell with women, anyway. To hell with you, Brett Ashley.”<sup>93</sup> His perceiving Brett as a friend means to pay for that. A friendship with woman is only a result of love to this woman. Making compromises, giving up something to get something else and realizing the priorities in life is the best way to enjoy the life.<sup>94</sup>

### 3.3 Bright Lights, Big City

The story of a young journalist and not so much successful writer takes place in Manhattan of 1980s. The main character, who is unnamed, narrates the story in the second person, which involves the reader into the narrator’s feelings. Sequence of events makes him to realize the deep sense of his life during a short time. Title of the novel is symbolic – bright lights of the big city are only glitters under which one have to find own valuables and not get lost in a shallow world of parties. The protagonist is coping with two principal losses of his life, death of his mother and his wife’s leaving. He drowns the feelings of abandonment in alcohol and cocaine and so he finds himself in a vicious circle. “Somewhere back there you could have cut your losses, but you rode past the moment on a comet trail of white powder and now you are trying to hang on to the rush.”<sup>95</sup> On the contrary to his fellow Tad Allagash, the main character realizes the emptiness of this lifestyle. “Tad’s mission in life is to have more fun than anyone else in New York City...”<sup>96</sup>

The narrator has to deal with absurdity of everyday life. His job of verification facts for a magazine does not fulfill his aim and still he dreams of writing a novel. He does not lose

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<sup>92</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 216.

<sup>93</sup> Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 128.

<sup>94</sup> See Hemingway, *Fiesta*, 129.

<sup>95</sup> Jay McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), 1.

<sup>96</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 2.

belief in well-being and possibility of future success. These short moments of belief and hope are usually followed by a disappointment.

When he meets his colleague from the department of fiction, Alex Hardy, a man who is said to discover a talent of writers who, as the narrator says, “[he] grew up on”<sup>97</sup>, he dreams: “Under his tutelage, you begin to write and publish. You become a team, Fitzgerald and Perkins all over again.”<sup>98</sup> After several drinks he already knows that this “Faulkner’s friend”<sup>99</sup> has not published anything for a few last years. Memories seem to be the only thing that remains to him and alcohol helps him to believe in his own importance. The main character is finally dismissed off his job. For his boss, Clara Tillinghast, he is an eyesore and so he does not believe her regret when sacking him off his job. The feeling of guilt for those who trusted him comes immediately: “You remember how excited your father was when you got the job, and know how he’s going to feel when he hears you have been fired.”<sup>100</sup>

He decides to revenge, to buy a ferret and let it out in Clara’s office. At night, in Clara’s office, accompanied by Tad Allagash, they are surprised by Alex Hardy. Alex, drunk again, tells them: “I worked with the giants. The guys whose words went out into the world and kicked ass... I’m talking about talent. Not these precious turds around here. These goddamned pygmies.”<sup>101</sup> Then he falls on the floor. This situation may be comic, but Tad Allagash recognizes a symbol in Alex’s fall: “Who is this dwarf calling me a goddamned pygmy?”<sup>102</sup>

Amanda, the protagonist’s wife, a model, is a cause of his disappointment. He feels disused, hurt and ashamed and is not willing to admit the people that his wife left him. On the other hand, Tad’s advice to fabricate stories about her death goes astray. Regret that people express to him does not help. Amanda, a girl from Kansas City, fascinated by a life in Manhattan, which she knew from magazines, moved to New York with him a soon they got married. She was able to take from this life what she need. With a little naivety and a

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<sup>97</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 60.

<sup>98</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 60.

<sup>99</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 60.

<sup>100</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 102.

<sup>101</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 107.

<sup>102</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 109.

little selfishness, she caught a chance and after she had quickly orientated in the world of fashion business, left to Paris without explanation.

Once, when the main hero walks the street, sees the figurine in shop window which is based on Amanda's face. The figurine is a symbol of her transformation. "You stand in front of the window and try to remember if this was how she really looked."<sup>103</sup> Only two times during the whole novel, he meets her, face to face. For the first time, at a fashion show, he has problem to recognize her face. He describes her with a bit of skepticism: "Whoever she is, you don't know her."<sup>104</sup> The second time they meet, he is at a party and she is with another man, Odysseus, her fiancé. It is nearly at the end of the novel, and the main protagonist opens his eyes and looks through the superficiality of the world he lives in. Amanda asks him: "How's it going?"<sup>105</sup> "It's funny. People are funny. Everything's so funny you could die laughing."<sup>106</sup>

Here, the irony reaches its top. At this moment of the story, he calls to Vicky, Tad's cousin, he met recently. Meeting her made him happy but he displaced her of his mind. And now, after meeting Amanda and after her 'funny' question, he remembers this girl. When talking to her, he unreservedly speaks about his mother: "we have a responsibility to the dead – the living, I mean."<sup>107</sup> When going from this party, he gets some bread from a baker in exchange for his sunglasses. The sunglasses have also a symbolic role. He puts them off just at the moment when he really opens his eyes. It seems like he was blind so far, like he did not want see and admit his problems. He was hidden behind them and now he realizes: "You will have to go slowly. You will have to learn everything all over again."<sup>108</sup>

The narrator interlaces the story by memories on his mother. Despite the fact he tries to escape the memories: "You have made such a point of not dwelling on the incidents associated with your mother's death, almost denying it was a consideration at all."<sup>109</sup> The memories find him – together with his brother Michael who makes him angry when saying: "Mr. Wonderful, who galloped in from New York last year like some kind of fucking

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<sup>103</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 64.

<sup>104</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 119.

<sup>105</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 168.

<sup>106</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 168.

<sup>107</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 172.

<sup>108</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 174.

<sup>109</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 154.



knight in his British sports car, just in time for the dramatic finale of Mom's life."<sup>110</sup> When Michael falls asleep, he starts to think about last meeting to mother. They were talking about the life, about girls, about Amanda, very openly and truly. The very end of her life is described very nostalgically.

Another symbol of the novel is a story of a pregnant woman in coma, whose baby is alive. This story comes into the narrator's life through newspaper and makes him to think of it. Once, he is dreaming about this baby. This dream takes place in his office which represents the hospital room, his table is a bed and Clara Tillinghast is a doctor who decides about the life and death. He admonishes the baby to go out because mum is dying. However, the baby decides to follow the mother whenever and wherever.<sup>111</sup>

### 3.4 The Lost Language of Cranes

Rose and Owen Benjamin, the main protagonists of Leavitt's novel, have been married for twenty seven years so far, and have one son, Philip. Rose seems to be satisfied with the marriage but reader is, at the very beginning, warned that Owen has secret: "No matter what he pretended..."<sup>112</sup> This marriage is going through a transformation caused by Owen and Philip's coming out with their homosexuality. Leavitt, in the third person, describes the heroes' attitudes and feelings to make the reader understand their inner grounds.

Philip perceives his parents' relationship as a functional long-term marriage, "for him, one particular image of his parents had a kind of primal character."<sup>113</sup> Rose and Owen have to deal with purchasing a flat as their place is not going to be rented any more. After so many years spent there, it is a difficult situation for them. Philip sees them "suddenly helpless in the face of change."<sup>114</sup> When Philip was born, he was for them "a relief, a welcome"<sup>115</sup> From the beginning of their marriage, Rose felt she is not so much for Owen as he was for her. "She dreamed about him and longed for him..." but "[f]rom the start he was distant."<sup>116</sup> As time passes, Rose starts to realize that she is alone more and more as

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<sup>110</sup> McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 150.

<sup>111</sup> See McInerney, *Bright Lights, Big City*, 51-2.

<sup>112</sup> David Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, (London: Penguin, 1986), 3.

<sup>113</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 11.

<sup>115</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 88.

<sup>116</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 88.

her husband is not often at home. “Twenty seven years of marriage, and I hardly know him.”<sup>117</sup> She starts to think there is a woman and they meet on Sundays.

Meanwhile, Owen deals with a secret of being gay. On Sundays, he visits a homosexual theatre and in his rest time, he plays a role of responsible husband, father and professor. For twenty seven years he has been tossing between two lives. His longings are occasionally fulfilled by an unknown man in the theatre. Despite the fact he is ‘lost’ in this schizophrenic life, he does not have enough of courage to leave this lifestyle and the state. Nevertheless, he knows that at home, nothing can surprise him. “At home, he knew, there was cake; there was always cake.”<sup>118</sup> In his heart, remorse and wish fight against each other. Once in the theatre, he finds a note with name and phone number. Thinking it is from a man sitting next to him, this phone number is becoming his gleam of hope.

Philip’s homosexuality has been a secret for his parents for twenty five years. When he was born, he was “an angel sent down to save them.”<sup>119</sup> During the whole life, he has been the focus of his parents’ attention. Philip, after twenty five years without love, meets Eliot and falls in love with him. Relationship with Eliot makes him strong enough to tell his parents about his sexual orientation. Even if he is alarmed by Eliot’s roommate Jerene, who is condemned by her parents after informing them that she is a lesbian. Philip admires Eliot and when being in his closeness, he feels “as if something was blooming in him.”<sup>120</sup> Before Philip met Eliot he had lived without physical love, so far “hiding had been so important, so essential a part of his life.”<sup>121</sup> Eliot, fulfilling all Philip’s dreams, becomes his object of admiration, but Eliot does not share his feelings.

Eliot is a man brought up by two writers because his parents died when he was three years old. One of the writers is Philip’s favorite author of children’s novels. Philip insists to meet them as well. After dinner with Derek and Geoffrey, Eliot is disgusted with Philip’s obsession and expresses doubts about their relationship. He feels tied up and needs more space but Philip is scared of their end.<sup>122</sup> Philip’s coming out is a disappointment to Rose, who reacts: “I am not a woman without prejudices.”<sup>123</sup> Rose would prefer she never

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<sup>117</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 19.

<sup>118</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 24.

<sup>119</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 89.

<sup>120</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 36.

<sup>121</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 73.

<sup>122</sup> See Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 162.

<sup>123</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 171.

knew this fact, which makes Philip surprised: “Imagine you had to keep your heterosexuality in secret.”<sup>124</sup> For Owen it is a shock as he thinks that he is a cause of Philip’s situation. He cries since then very often and decides to ask hotline for help. There he speaks to Jerene who has no idea that this man is Philip’s father. After that, Owen, Rose, and Philip have a period of mutual blaming. Rose is angry, feels disappointed and expects Owen’s sympathy and understanding. Philip is unhappy because his mother refuses to talk to him about it. “Pain gave her the privilege of anger.”<sup>125</sup> Philip and Eliot breaks up and in spite of Philip’s initial sadness, this experience makes him stronger and more self-assured.

Owen is attracted by a real sexual experience more and more and when he meets a man named Frank, he makes love with him. Satisfied with this adventure, he suddenly does not have need to change anything in his life. “I will continue as I am. Unchanged.”<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, the situation gets even more complicated when Owen invites for dinner his colleague Winston Penn. During dinner, Rose feels misused and lost because she discloses Owen’s secret. She sees three men around the table, eating spaghetti she cooked, and with the profitable role of objective observer, she can see “how Philip and Owen mooned over Wilson”<sup>127</sup> “She’d phrase it, the perverse freak accident of fake, the terrible coincidence: her husband and her son.”<sup>128</sup>

After this finding, Rose realizes that she has lived in a lie for more than twenty years. She believed in her family and this destroyed all her ideals – her position of mother and wife. Now, her life with Owen seems to be only a string of bad decisions. She finds out that she would have married him if she knew that.<sup>129</sup> For Rose, homosexuality is “a condition to be treated in hospitals.”<sup>130</sup> Rose wants to know what their life will look like in the future and Owen is not able to answer. The relief is replaced by solution of misty future. He does not want to get divorced, he loves his wife but the rip in their relationship is undisputable. Owen likes the feeling he does not have to pretend any more.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 173.

<sup>125</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 219.

<sup>126</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 241.

<sup>127</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 282.

<sup>128</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 283.

<sup>129</sup> See Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 285.

<sup>130</sup> Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 285.

<sup>131</sup> See Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 304-5.

These events changed lives of all of them. They had very positive influence on relationship between Owen and Philip. Fatherhood changed into a friendship. Owen meets Philip and talks to him honestly about his second life. He describes how he started to visit Bijou, a porn theatre, every Sunday and longed for a real sexual experience with man. He talks about the pity of being such a distant father and about that night when Philip admitted his homosexuality. That night he realized that he is: “too far gone”<sup>132</sup> to go back on this way.

The title of the book is symbolic. Jerene is writing a dissertation about lost languages, mostly those created by children and those which are later forbidden. When collecting materials for her dissertation, she finds a story about a baby whose mother often leaves him at home alone. His mother was a teenage mad girl with no clue how to take care of a baby. At the beginning, the baby cried a lot. Later, when he stopped crying, the neighbors alarmed police and what was their surprise when they found the child quietly lying and looking out of the window. Outside the window, there were cranes working at a construction site. He made exactly the same movements and noises as the cranes outside.<sup>133</sup> He was lost and lonely and the cranes were his only companions. The baby did not have any other possibility than to assimilate with them and adopt their world. People always adjust to the background they live in. They adopt the language, culture, the customs and the way of behavior of the society that surrounds them.

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<sup>132</sup> See Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 316-17.

<sup>133</sup> See Leavitt, *The Lost Language of Cranes*, 181-83.

#### 4 CONNECTION BETWEEN THE ANALYZED WRITINGS

The analysis of selected writings of the lost generations' authors proves the connection between them. *The Great Gatsby*, *The Sun Also Rises*, and *Bright Lights, Big City* deals with similar lifestyles of the main characters. The main theme of *The Lost Language of Cranes* is different but the theme of 'being lost' could be found there as well.

Jay Gatsby, in *The Great Gatsby*, is a war hero who tries to find happiness in the post war period in the United States surrounded by superficiality of other novel's protagonists. Despite the fact, he finds a friend in Nick Carraway, Daisy finally disappoints him. The woman of his heart refuses his love, cuts dead and even does not come to his funeral. She shuts her eyes to Jay's broadmindedness, generosity and honesty. She prefers to continue life with her unfaithful husband and denies the past moments with Jay. Daisy lives through aimless, but comfortable life without looking for a deep sense. As I have demonstrated in the analysis of *The Great Gatsby*, Daisy sometimes behaves as a little girl who wants to have everything what enters her mind. Jay is lost because he dies misunderstood. Daisy is lost because she lives with a lack of understanding. War, ended not long ago, has a great influence on the protagonists' lives. In wars, men are losing their ideals and see the basis of life. After such experiences, they may perceive everyday life too vacant.

In *The Sun Also Rises*, the group of friends lives their lives at the same time as Gatsby, but in Paris. They are also stigmatized by the recent war, in which, most of them, took place as soldiers. Their assimilation to 'normal life' is very difficult, so they only hopelessly screw around and fulfill their time with alcohol and entertainment. In the analysis of *The Sun Also Rises* could be seen that alcohol is indisputable companion of all characters and enjoyment is the main contents of their days. As well as in *The Sun Also Rises*, the protagonist of the *Bright Lights, Big City* also uses alcohol to make his mind dull.

During a few weeks of the characters' lives nothing change, beginning is very similar to the end of the novel. Especially Brett and her way of thinking about her life and her attitudes to people around seem to be unchangeable. This is proved in the analysis of *The Sun Also Rises* where I describe the last dialogue between Jake and Lady Ashley. Hemingway is realistic in describing their feelings, in comparison to *The Great Gatsby*, where Fitzgerald avoids personal judgments. In *The Sun Also Rises*, the protagonists are lost in their lives generally. At times, the reader may conceive an idea, that their lives are completely useless.

*Bright Lights, Big City* is set in New York City of the 1980s - some sixty years after *The Sun Also Rises* and *The Great Gatsby* were published. Even though the main character deals with different losses, his solution of difficult situation evokes *The Sun Also Rises'* characters. A lot of alcohol and cocaine is used to forget the problems, but in this way he only causes other ones and lives in a circle. This man works as a journalist and a writer, as well as the heroes of *The Sun Also Rises*. It may be also this freelance job what even intensifies their bohemian lifestyle. In *Bright Lights, Big City*, the main protagonist finally finds the way away from this circle – or, it is at least suggested. In comparison to *The Sun Also Rises*, the end is plain because the protagonists do not realize any problem or emptiness. The story of *The Sun Also Rises* does not lead to any conclusion at the end but in *Bright Lights, Big City*, the solving of the crisis is expected.

The main theme of *The Lost Language of Cranes* is homosexuality and its perception by different groups of people in the 1980s. The story is set in New York and dwelling situation of the city is touched as well. So far, a quiet family life of Owen, Rose, and Philip starts to get serious crashes. They deal with moving from their flat where they spent whole time during their marriage. Next thing they have to cope with is their son's homosexuality and finally with homosexuality of the father of the family. In comparison to *The Sun Also Rises* or *Bright Lights, Big City*, the protagonists do not help themselves with alcohol or drugs. They deal with their feelings in order to be stronger and look for a better way of living. They feel to be lost in their own lives because of lie and inner dissatisfaction. Philip and Owen finally come to solution as well as the main character of *Bright Lights, Big City* and the end of the novel seems to be a new beginning for them. On the other hand, Rose gets lost at the same time because of pretence she has lived in. The theme of being lost in *The Lost Language of Cranes* is more implicit and is described on the part about the baby who adjusted to the cranes. The baby was lost like Philip and Owen but assimilated as well as they did. Philip and Owen finally admitted their homosexuality but for a long time they lived in a lie, adjusted to their surround.

All four novels have some motifs in common. Whether it is superficiality, naivety, trust in people's well-being, the protagonists are always lost in some way. The period and the society they live in is mostly the main cause of this phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

In my bachelor thesis I described generations in the American society of the twentieth century. There were generations of people who strongly influenced American culture and literature. The First World War, Vietnam War, Cold War and other political events had a great impact of American inhabitants and became important turnings in creating new generations and changes in people's mind.

Secondly, I deal with American literature of the last century with focus on two Lost Generations. The First Lost Generation came in the twenties after the First World War. This war stole ideals to people and made them to live in 'emptiness' that usually comes after war. Together with war, there were other changes to cope with. Big cities were established, new technologies came and people were losing the old. So, the nostalgic mood took root in the American society. The First Lost Generation was named by Gertrude Stein, in comparison to members of the Second Lost Generation, who were named by Douglas Coupland. Generation X, as they are also called, came in the sixties – after the strong generation of Boomers. Boomers were brave, made a revolution and Generation X lived in their shadow, without ideals. For them, it was difficult to find goals and achieve them.

Thirdly, I tried to explore, how the situation of lost generations reflected in American literature. On the basis of literary theoreticians, mainly Richard Gray, Richard Ruland, and Malcolm Bradbury, I have chosen the most significant authors. In analysis of particular writings, I found the parallel between the characters' problems, lifestyle, psychic isolation and, the most important, the background of their lives. I believe that the comparison of the selected writings proves that the theme of 'being lost' occurs in writings of both lost generations, and, what is more, the motifs are similar.

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