THE LOST GENERATION

During the 1920’s a group of writers known as *The Lost Generation* gained popularity. The term was coined by Gertrude Stein who is rumored to have heard it in France (once her auto-mechanic man had said that his young workers were “une génération perdue”). This referred to the young workers’ poor auto-mechanic repair skills.

Gertrude Stein would take this phrase and use it to describe the people of the 1920’s who rejected American post World War I values. This group included authors such as Scott Fitzgerald, Hemingway, Dos Passos, Steinbeck or Faulkner...

Hemingway, perhaps the leading literary figure of the decade, would take Stein’s phrase and use it as an epigraph for his first novel, *The Sun Also Rises*. Because of this novel’s popularity, the term *The Lost Generation* is the enduring term that has stayed associated with the writers of the 1920’s.

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or mentally wounded (for most, both), and their faith in the moral guideposts that had earlier given them hope, were no longer valid...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

Apart from the loss of innocence caused by the First World War, the group shared the stylistic bond of modernism, which was a movement away from realism. Characters’ subjective experiences were portrayed through steam-of-consciousness techniques, symbolism or disjointed time frames. The narrator is just a mere witness.

*The Great Gatsby* is an early exemplar of the modernist techniques of *The Lost Generation*, illustrating a type of jumbled symbolism in the first image of Gatsby. The 1920s was the jazz era in the big cities of the United States. It was an era of high living and all-night parties through the rhythm of the saxophone and trumpet. It was an era of gangsters, of prohibition and of ostentatious new-found wealth.

Scott Fitzgerald was part of that world, and with his glamorous wife, Zelda, he became a pin-up personality of the time. The main character in his best-known novel, *The Great Gatsby*, is a man who, like his creator, climbs the ladder of social success. The foundations on which this success is built are fragile, and consequently his fall into obscurity is almost as rapid as his rise towards meteoric success.

1. ERNEST HEMINGWAY

He was the first writer in publishing short stories in Europe. In those, some of his way of writing such as short expressivity and shortening of feelings can be appreciated. He worked as journalist and, following American tradition of *muckraker*, he informed a cruel social system against the human being. Thus, He travelled sometimes from France to Spain due to his Republican idealism and Spanish culture as we can observe in his novel *Fiesta* (the plot is set up in Pamplona during Saint Fermin’s bullfighting /racing feasts). Its characters seem to be lost so that they decide to fight against their boredom of living by suffering and taking risks.
Other Hemingway’s literary features are dense descriptions, characters’ estrangement by dialogues, short syntactic periods and autobiography. All of them can be appreciated in novels such as A Farewell to Arms, From Whom the Bells Tolls, The Old Man and The Sea...

2. SCOTT FITZGERALD

His great literary talent gives him a quick success even among critics and readers. That makes him drive a luxury, wealthy and alcoholic life. He dies when he applies for a scriptwriter in Hollywood. He writes five novels and a lot of stories about the jazz, the 1920s, money, pleasure and art.

3. JOHN DOS PASSOS

It is the most experimental writer in technical innovations. Thus, in Manhattan Transfer the city is the real protagonist. Camilo José Cela emulates him in La colmena (The Hive): the fragmentation of the novel, the concatenation of actions using tricks of editing, description of several shots, the simultaneity of actions we can read in progression... In his trilogy USA, he used those techniques and the chaotic city of New York is the protagonist of the novel again.

4. JOHN STEINBECK

Younger than his colleges, his success comes at 30s, but there is a committed literature, far away from the purity and experiments of the former poetry. As a result, Literature is made of stories within emigrants, framers or strikers inside. Thus, The grapes of the Wrath (Las Uvas de la Ira -1939) becomes a landmark of American social novelty. He knows cinematographic scripts very well and masters comic and dramatic elements. The Pearl, Mice and Men, The East of Eden are other famous novels.

5. WILLIAM FAULKNER

Despite of being the most influential American writer, he has been at Paris for a short time. His relationship with literary world is also short and he lives confined in a southern house where he makes up the imaginary county of Yoknapatawpha, filling in with characters and references to set up a symbolic world, very popular in García Márquez’s Macondo, Juan Rulfo’s Comala, Juan Benet’s Región).

Faulkner represents the connection between Joyce and the second XX century novelists. His style is slow and careful, with subordinate sentences and a chronological narration broken in order to connect the present and the past. A variety of narrative voices and points of view are also included in his most important novels: The Sound and The Fury (four narrators), As I Lay Dying (inner monologues from more than ten characters), Absalom, Absalom! (The reader must rebuild the story)