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## HEMINGWAY AND 'LA GENERATION PERDUE'

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### Abstract

Hemingway was born, as the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the age inebriated with science and scientism, was coming to an end. He lived till the beginning of the sixties of the present century. Roughly it makes the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, really a turbulent period in human history. The world wars, the revolutionary rise of Socialism, the great Depression, the Spanish Civil War, the division of world into super power-blocs, the decline and fall of colonialism, and a great leap forward in science and technology, are the main features of the epoch. In the world of intellection, the age is dominated by Marxism, psychoanalysis, existentialism and the rise of structuralism. No thinker and writer in this time could escape the stormy impact of those ideas which shaped anew his awareness of his situation.

LA GENERATION PERDUE is also used more generally refer to the post-World War I generation.

**Key words:** Depression, Colonialism, Cognitive, Generation and Fascism.

### Concept Explanation

A perspicacious mind could fool the changing order of 'epistemes' in the world of cognition. Now conceptual structures of reality displaced the established models. Complacency was thoroughly shattered. The author suddenly found himself in turmoil. Many an author was caught in the whirlwind and thrown overboard into the bottomless abyss. Yet some of them did grapple with the situation and survived. An analysis of the times with all the currents and cross-currents in cognitive praxis of the epoch forms the subject-matter of several studies of this kind. However, an attempt is made to understand the spirit of the age vis-e-vis the contemporaries of Hemingway who actively interacted with him, during this time in the formation of a literary movement called 'Modernism'. This brings us round the concept of the 'lost generation' used by Gertrude Stein for all these people.

The birth of the epithet is thus narrated by Hemingway. Gertrude Stein has some ignition trouble with the old Model T Ford she then drove and the young man who worked in the garage and had served in the last year of the war had not been adopted, or perhaps had not broken the priority of other vehicles, in repairing Miss Stein's Ford. Anyway he had not been serious and had been corrected severely by the patron of the garage after Miss Stein's protest. The patron had said to him, 'you are all a generation perdue'. Gertrude Stein used the epithet for Hemingway and his like, saying, "That's what you are. That's what you all are, ... All of you young people who served in the war. You are a lost generation". Mankind had never known an event more devastating than the First World War because till its beginning only local wars were known to war. That millions of troops in dozens of countries would participate in the diabolical dance of death and destruction, was utterly unthinkable. The war gave a rude shock to the soul of man. A number of young men who participated in the war in diverse capacities come back to the world of letters in Paris, totally disillusioned and desperate. All norms and ethical questions become irrelevant to them. War-bested, they plunged into life with a vengeance, disregarding all the moral scruples. So drinking, carousing, whoring and merry-making, for them became a norm rather than an exception. Some of these people wrote good pieces of literature that gave them a name and also a lot of money to pursue their merry-making ideals in different capitals and tourist-resorts of Europe. More often than not, their works smacked of war-like barbarity and utter disrespect for the established values.

Combined with the bitterness, one could see a streak of human qualities in their writings which made some of them the heroes of the age. Ernest Hemingway had also participated in the war and was wounded. So had some others like E.E. Cummings and John Dos Passos. Still some of this generation had not directly participated in the war but were deeply moved by its brutalities that always lurked in their sub-conscious. They were present in the war by their absence. Such other writers Dred Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound, Thomas Wolfe, Wyndham Lewis, and to some extent T.S. Eliot. Certain other poets, painters and novelists intimately associated with this group were Ford Madox Ford, William Faulkner, Pablo Picasso and Gertrude Stein. The most productive decade of the 'lost generation' was the twenties of this century.

During this period they assimilated and digested the experience of the war through their writings. Hemingway's *Pleasant and A Farewell to Arms* are presented against this background. In the former Jake Barnes, the protagonist, has been rendered impotent by a mine explosion during the war, which lends an element of frustration and despair to the entire work. Superficially the lives of the characters indulging in parties, pleasure trips and merry-making seem to be a gay merry-go-round and yet the sense of desperation and frustration underlying their pursuit of pleasure is not difficult to see. Similarly, the last scene of *A Farewell* epitomises the bitterness and venom left behind by the war. T.S. Eliot's long poem *The Waste Land* aptly summarises this mood of frustration and alienation behind the façade of extravagant gaudiness. Some of the authors of this generation made daring experiments with form. Gertrude Stein borrowed Cubism from Picasso and Braque and used it in literature. She lived for a long time in Paris and during the twenties her house in Paris was the centre of creative activity. Hemingway, Picasso, Ezra Pound, Madox Ford and others would meet there to discuss the literary and other creative problems. Stein herself was a painter writer and very popular in the United States where she often went to lecture in the universities. Hemingway introduces her in the following

way, “Miss Stein was very big but not tall and was heavily built like a peasant woman. She had beautiful eyes and a strong German-Jewish face that also could have been friulano and she reminded me of a northern Italian peasant woman with her clothes, her mobile face and her lovely thick, alive, immigrant hair which she wore put up in the same way she had probably worn it in college. She talked all the time and at first it was about people and places”. E.E. Cummings also got interested in the textural experiments of the French Painters especially the Cubists, who tried to understand the composition of objects through geometrical perspective. Cummings made bold experiments in metrics that shake the reader out of complacency.

## Conclusion

Much has been written about his style and still more about the concept of ‘Modernism’ which Hemingway along with his friends, was trying to formulate during the twenties. But Hemingway’s unique contribution lies in the synthesis of the old and the new. He talked about the present in the language of the present interpolating it with the language of the past. Every writer has to speak his own language. Those who recycle what others say, are lost in the noise. In this study, an attempt has been made to understand the ‘Immanent language’ of Hemingway as manifest in his novel *For Whom The Bell Tolls*. To understand this microcosm, other relevant aspects of this entire literary discourse, particularly the novels, have also been briefly explored. The result is a discourse on a discourse, conceptualized and organised in a different way.

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