

The Lost Generation in Biofictional Writing

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyze the presentation of the concept of the Lost Generation as presented in the novelistic re-writings of the lives of the great American authors F. Scott Fitzgerald and Ernest Hemingway. Their life stories being repeatedly used as plot lines in postmodern biofictions, which underline the connection between fiction, biography, and autobiography by developing texts that are “both self-reflexive and yet paradoxically also lay claim to historical events and personages” (Hutcheon 2003: 5) These stories inherently carry the information about the time and places where they lived while the creative process involves a specific textuality to genre blending, makes use of different facts, fictional characters, literary works and practices, themes and subjects, which are re-ordered in a constantly changing world of doubling, mirror reflections and fluctuations constructing concepts of the time and culture in a literary form from a most recent perspective. The Lost Generation is one such concept that forms a constitutive part in these narratives allowing for the plausibility and uniqueness of the story. This paper unravels the notions of the Lost Generation in the biofiction genre and the techniques used for that portrayal. The biofictional rendition is especially relevant marking a hundred years since the establishment of the concept of the Lost Generation and the understanding of it in contemporary world.

Key words: Lost Generation, biofiction, F.Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway

Introduction

This paper examines the role of biofictional writing into delivering the content of the time and places when the historical and life events of the protagonists took place. By using descriptive methods and text analysis several biofictions about Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald the concept of the Lost Generation that marked the decades after the WWI will be examined. The main hypothesis is that the biofictional writing brings to attention past events and cultural concepts by shedding new light to them. In particular the paper delves into the textuality applied to deliver the spirit of the time considering that the biofictions in question are written almost a century since the concept of the Lost Generation emerged.

As a hybrid genre of life-writing biofictions use life stories as plot lines underlining different aspects of the time and period of the people turned characters. The past few decades saw a rise in the writing, publishing and translation of biofictions all over the world turning it into one of the most popular literary genres. Postmodern biofictions encompass a wide range of terms to denote the genre play such as “historiographic metafiction” (Huthceon 2003), “literary biography” (Benton 2009), “autobiographicalization” and “autofiction” (Saunders 2010:7) or “fictional biography”, “biofiction”, “fictional metabiography”, “the biographical novel” and “biographical fiction”. (In Viljoen 2013:155). The study of biofictions analyzes the narrative techniques used by the different writers to create new genre forms in life-writing. These forms are usually closely connected to the processes of hybridization, bending of boundaries and blending of characteristics. In other words, these narratives exhibit a unique the genre play that has become an inherent feature of postmodern writing, often associated with specific forms of textuality. Generally speaking, contemporary self-reflexive historiographic metafiction subverts the view of history as a coherent inscription of unified subjectivity. The questions of how the issues of narrative representation, textuality, subjectivity and ideology are dealt with in the postmodern combinations of fiction, non-fiction and history are the center of biofiction investigation. The complex creative process often involves intertextuality, intertextual parody, palimpsest, borrowing or plagiarisim.

The biofictions, therefore, can bring to the forefront of today, centuries old persons, events, places and even thematic and philosophical concepts such as the concept of the Lost Generation. The commonality with the past events can measure how divergent the present is from its antecedent. The term “The Lost Generation” is typically used to refer to the people who came of age during World War I, also used more generally to refer to the post-World War I generation. The term is also particularly used to refer to a group of American expatriate

writers living in Paris during the 1920s. Gertrude Stein is credited with coining the term which was further popularised by Ernest Hemingway with his novel *The Sun also Rises* (1926). The generation was “lost” in the sense that its inherited values were no longer relevant in the postwar world and because of its spiritual alienation. The biofictions, therefore, help the concept of the Lost Generation to be artistically revised in the new culturescapes understood as “the cultural expressions and identities that occur within a given space and a particular time” (Bredohl&Zimmerman 2008: *Introduction*) a century later, but also by examining the generations of all the past decades. The age of the Lost Generation can be analyzed on two levels here, the first is the degree of innovation it brought about in the 20s of the past century and its reflection on the biofictional writing techniques. The other level involves the disenchantment with the core values and the grace under pressure exhibited by that generation of young people and its reflection on the biofictional narrative, historiography and metafiction.

The Lost Generation in the biofictional writing

A particular case of presentation of the notions of time and place can be seen in the biofictions about the great American authors Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald, Paula McLain’s *The Paris Wife* and There Ann Fowler’s *Z: A Novel of Zelda Fitzgerald* respectively. Here at the back drop of the life stories of the two American expatriate in Paris, the postwar France and Europe are presented. Similarly to the authors’ own novels published in the 1920s, the biofictions published in the 21st century equally portray the era of the Jazz Age, artistic life and the lost generation. This exhibits unique perspectives in terms of cross-temporal themes and ideas represented as a narrative incorporating both fact and fiction. The biofictions presented here share some of the same places and events in telling their stories which allows for a comparative study of the various narratives dealing with the same subject.

The above narratives are examples of interculturality and their inherent biopreservational techniques. This type of textuality inherent to biofiction is a

process of biofictional preservation, or “biopreservation”. I use the term “biopreservation” to refer to the “literary” preservation of one’s Introduction 5 life, and “bio” to refer to the facts of one’s life. Biopreservation can be viewed as an experiment with different postmodern modes and techniques of writing, as a play with generic characteristics. Similar to the process of biopreservation in biochemical laboratories, in the process of literary creation, the authors decide which facts from the biography of their subjects and which traits of their

characters they want to preserve and then choose what “literary” “preservatives” to use to create the fictional stories. The end product is a biofiction that illustrates a new vision of the past times. Thus, the term metaphorically refers to the scientific process of biopreservation denoting the unique genre play in postmodern rewriting of the lives of historical figures. (Krsteva 2023:4-5)

The choices the authors made in telling the stories all follow the typical textual creation though biopreservation. As a result, unique accounts are made about the same historical figures all underlining and accentuating different meanings and ideas.

The two biofiction narratives presented here are both told in first person narrative of the fictional Hadley and Zelda. Simultaneously, by use of intertextuality, in the two narratives historical and literary texts are restored to reshape the life narratives. As a result, notions of reference is often questioned. One such example is Paris as a symbolic place for the members of the Lost Generation. Although Paris between the wars had a major influence on the authors’ lives at that time, McLain presents Paris in a different and more cheerful light than Zelda does. This not only suggests that Hadley is the more optimistic and cheerful of the two American wives in Paris but points to the fact that there is not one “factual” account of a time or a place. She considers herself old fashioned for cosmopolitan Paris, but she falls in love with all the interesting people there and is truly happy with her life in Paris while accepting Hemingway as he is.

Interesting people were everywhere just then. The cafés of Montparnasse breathed them in and out, French painters and Russian dancers and American writers. On any given night, you could see Picasso walking from Saint-Germain to his apartment in the rue des Grands Augustins, always exactly the same route and always looking quietly at everyone and everything. Nearly anyone might feel like a painter walking the streets of Paris then because the light brought it out in you, and the shadows alongside the buildings, and the bridges which seemed to want to break your heart, and the sculpturally beautiful women in Chanel's black sheath dresses, smoking and throwing back their heads to laugh. (McLain: 139)

Although Hadley’s Paris at the beginning is exciting, at the end, her attitude changes a bit:

We called Paris the great good place, then, and it was. We invented it after all. We made it with our longing and cigarettes and Rhum St. James; we made it with smoke and smart and savage conversation and we dared anyone to say it wasn't ours. Together we made everything and then we busted it apart again. (McLain: 308)

Similarly in Fowler's book, another biopreservation sequence is the visit to Gertrude Stein's salon; the whole atmosphere is depicted as one of a modern artists' den. More importantly, that particular atmosphere is used to depict Hadley and Zelda's place in the ex-patriate artistic life in Paris. Hadley is presented as a woman who recognizes that she is just the wife and does not have anything much to do with art: "I'm not a writer, or an artist either. I wouldn't have much to contribute" (Fowler: 220). In contrast, Zelda says: "I was both – which neither Scott nor I seemed capable of pointing out, here in the revered Miss Stein's apartment" (Fowler: 221).

Another biopreservation sequence building Zelda's narrative identity is her observation on the polygamy and betrayals of other great artistic figures from their surroundings as members of The Lost Generation:

Maybe I was alone in finding all these things distasteful. Maybe Hadley would be as acquiescent as Stella was, and Dorothy Pound. Maybe she'd be fine with sharing her extra-manly man. I sure couldn't predict the outcome; any woman who was willing to take Hemingway in the first place was a mystery to me. (Fowler: 245)

McLain dedicates a specific biopreservation sequence for the Gertrude Stein. Stein represents the cultural myth of the artistic life in Paris and the whole idea of the Lost Generation. Her role is multifaceted and often crucial for Hemingway's establishment in artistic Paris at the beginning of his writing career. Their relationship is not just profession they become close friends with Stein becoming the godmother of Hemingway's firstborn son John. Here is McLain's account of the role of Stein in their lives.

'Just as he'd done in Chicago, when I read his work for the first time, Ernest paced and twitched and seemed to be in pain. The poems are very good,' Stein said finally. 'Simple and quite clear. You're not posing at anything.' 'And the novel?' I thought he was very brave to ask or even show her the pages, because he was newly in love with it. So protective was he, he had

shown me next to nothing. 'It's not the kind of writing that interests me,' she said finally. 'Three sentences about the color of the sky. The sky is the sky and that's all. Strong declarative sentences, that's what you do best. Stick to that.' As Stein spoke Ernest's face fell for a moment, but then he recovered himself. (McLain:155)

These are narratives of crossing thresholds. By doing so, special color is added to the narrative. The presentation of the Lost Generation is one such example of cultural colorization. Reading these narratives concocted in the 21st century calls for the 21st lost generations, the big cities where the young people live and the relationships they have. The story of Hemingway as a "grandfather" who once embodied the Lost Generation is now among the new generations delivered in first person. In this sense, the depiction is even more effective and thought-provoking. This analysis confirms the way a cultural concept can be examined across texts both synchronically and diachronically.

Conclusion

This paper shows how a whole cultural concept marking decades of cultural, artistic and historical perspective is shaped in biofictional writing. As seen in the above analysis, the narrative structure and the biofictional textuality exhibits multiple functions. First, they pose a specific contribution to understanding of the cultural heritage from the time period they portray. The interchangeable narratives and plot lines opens up new understandings about the historical period and its importance. A reader can get a unique chance to take a look in the same fact and fiction stories told from different angles and perspectives by looking into the unique genre play of fact and fiction duality. Secondly, while embarking on uniquely creative life-writing journeys the biofictions about the two authors can show how the life-story is inextricably bound with the time and place of it and vice versa. As such, the narratives further draw attention and pose questions on the past, the present and the future by re-telling the life stories of the key figures that influenced the artistic world of today. In this way, biofictions can be seen as agents of transgression and shapeshifting. This is especially relevant a century later allowing us to revisit the concept of The Lost Generation in today's 21st century with wars ranging on different corners in the world and youth lost. As a result, multiple perspectives can be attributed to the concept and its application in the contemporary world and society. The biofiction and its historiographic metafictional nature examine contemporary events but questioning and

combining the past with the present. In this way, readers' understanding is given a fresh outlook on reality and its connection with the past.

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