DOI: https://doi.org/10.37547/mesmj-V7-I3-24 Pages: 187-194

MENTAL ENLIGHTENMENT SCIENTIFIC – METHODOLOGICAL JOURNAL

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http://mentaljournal-jspu.uz/index.php/mesmj/index

THE ARTISTIC PORTRAYAL OF FEMALE IMAGES IN AMERICAN "LOST GENERATION" LITERATURE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF F. S. FITZGERALD'S "THE GREAT GATSBY" AND E. HEMINGWAY'S "A FAREWELL TO ARMS"

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ABOUT ARTICLE

Key words: Lost Generation, female image, The Great Gatsby, A Farewell to Arms, gender transformation, interwar literature, artistic portrayal, psychoanalytic criticism, comparative literature, war and gender.

Received: 01.04.26
Accepted: 02.04.26
Published: 03.04.26

Abstract: This article investigates the artistic and psychological representation of female characters in two seminal works of the "Lost Generation": F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby" (1925) and Ernest Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms" (1929). Through a comparative framework integrating gender analysis and cultural-historical contextualization, the study examines how the aftermath of the First World War conditioned the construction of feminine identity, agency, and moral contradiction in American literary contexts. While both novels belong to the same national tradition, they reveal strikingly divergent models of femininity: Fitzgerald deploys his female characters as instruments of social critique, exposing the moral vacuity of post-war American prosperity, while Hemingway constructs Catherine Barkley as an idealized yet deeply problematic figure of devotion, sacrifice, and tragic beauty set against the chaos of the Italian front.

Introduction. The concept of the "Lost Generation" a phrase attributed to Gertrude Stein and later disseminated by Ernest Hemingway as the epigraph to The Sun Also Rises

(1926) [11] designates a cohort of writers and artists profoundly shaped by the catastrophic violence of the First World War and by the shattering of the pre-war moral and social order. The term itself carries an ambivalence that is central to understanding the literature it describes: these writers were "lost" not merely in the sense of being disoriented or disillusioned, but in the deeper sense of having been severed from the cultural inheritance the systems of meaning, value, and social belonging that had sustained their predecessors. The war had not simply wounded them; it had rendered the pre-war world permanently inaccessible, leaving them to navigate a present that offered no adequate frameworks for understanding what had been experienced or lost.

The literature they produced is distinguished by its psychological intensity, its formal innovation, and its unflinching engagement with the consequences of industrial warfare for individual selfhood, social relations, and cultural value. Whether in Hemingway's stripped prose, Fitzgerald's lyrical disenchantment, or the wider tradition they represent, the writing of this generation shares a refusal of false consolation and a determination to represent the texture of post-war existence with rigorous honesty.

Among the defining preoccupations of this literature is the representation of female identity in the aftermath of war a topic of particular urgency given the profound gender transformations that the conflict had precipitated. Women's unprecedented wartime participation in public life as nurses, factory workers, and social organizers had fundamentally disrupted the normative categories of femininity, domesticity, and social role that had governed the pre-war era. The literature of the Lost Generation registers these disruptions with varying degrees of sympathy, ambivalence, and critique, producing female characters who embody the contradictions of an era caught between old norms and new possibilities.

This tension between female visibility and female marginalization is, we would argue, one of the most revealing dimensions of Lost Generation fiction. The female characters of this literature are rarely simply decorative or subordinate; they carry symbolic and ideological weight that is central to each novel's meaning. Yet they are rarely granted the kind of autonomous interiority that would make them the subjects rather than the instruments of their narratives. It is precisely this paradox the female character as simultaneously symbolically essential and narratively subordinated that makes the comparative study of feminine representation in this body of literature so illuminating.

In this article we undertake a comparative analysis of the female images in two canonical American texts: F. Scott Fitzgerald's The Great Gatsby (1925) and Ernest Hemingway's A Farewell to Arms (1929). Though produced by authors of the same generation and national

tradition, and separated by only four years, both novels place the question of feminine identity at the center of their artistic vision while pursuing fundamentally different literary and ideological agendas. Fitzgerald anatomizes the moral vacuity of post-war American social elite through female characters who are both victims and agents of a corrupt social order; Hemingway, a veteran of the Italian front who was wounded at Fossalta di Piave [2; p. 88], constructs his primary female figure as a symbol of absolute devotion, transcendence, and sacrificial beauty set against the chaos and meaninglessness of modern warfare. The juxtaposition of these two novels is unusually productive: it allows us to examine how the same historical moment and, in Hemingway's case, the same directly experienced catastrophe generated divergent literary responses to the transformation of femininity depending on authorial experience, aesthetic philosophy, and ideological investment.

Methods and methodology. The methodology of this article integrates three complementary analytical frameworks, each chosen for its capacity to illuminate a distinct dimension of the female characters under examination. These frameworks are not applied in isolation but are treated as mutually reinforcing lenses whose combination produces a richer and more nuanced account of feminine representation than any single approach could yield. A methodological premise underlies the entire analysis: that literary characters are not simply fictional persons whose psychology can be assessed as if they were real individuals, but are constructed artistic objects whose meanings are produced by specific narrative choices, symbolic systems, and ideological investments.

The first and foundational framework is close textual reading. Careful, sustained attention to the language, structure, and formal properties of "The Great Gatsby" and "A Farewell to Arms" provides the analytical basis from which all interpretive claims in this article are drawn. Particular attention is paid to the narrative strategies through which female characters are first presented to the reader, to the imagery that accumulates around each figure, and to the characterization techniques focalization, dialogue, free indirect discourse that determine how much interiority each female figure is permitted to possess.

The second framework is gender-analytical theory. This article draws on three bodies of theory that are complementary in their concerns while distinct in their emphases. Simone de Beauvoir's analysis of femininity as cultural production rather than natural fact [6; p. 800] provides the foundational premise. The qualities attributed to women are socially constructed categories serving specific ideological functions. Judith Butler's model of gender performativity [3; p. 17] extends this insight by arguing that femininity is not something one is but something one does, continuously and under social compulsion a framework particularly illuminating for

reading Daisy's performed femininity and Catherine's near-total self-effacement in the service of her lover's emotional needs. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's framework for analyzing the suppression of female agency in patriarchal narratives [10; p. 719] provides tools for examining how female characters in both novels are simultaneously present and silenced, symbolically central and narratively marginalized.

The third framework is psychoanalytic criticism. Sigmund Freud's theory of the death drive [9; p. 64] provides a productive lens for reading the self-destructive patterns of desire that structure both novels Gatsby's compulsive repetition of an irrecoverable past, Lieutenant Henry's progressive detachment from all social bonds, and Catherine's total dissolution of self into love. Cathy Caruth's trauma theory [5; p. 154] offers complementary tools for analyzing the representation of wartime experience: the First World War is not simply a historical backdrop in either novel but a psychological presence that continues to shape character and desire in ways that cannot be fully spoken or consciously processed.

Results and analysis. Both novels are shaped by the aftermath of the First World War, though the nature and degree of that shaping differ significantly between them. In "The Great Gatsby", the war is a largely subterranean presence: it has produced the conditions of post-war prosperity and moral disorientation that define the novel's social world, but it is rarely addressed directly. Its most important trace is the psychological damage inflicted on the male characters Gatsby's wartime service as the source of both his social ambition and his permanent displacement from the world he seeks to enter and the broader cultural climate of hedonistic excess and ethical vacancy that the novel presents as the American response to the trauma of industrial warfare.

In "A Farewell to Arms", by contrast, the war is the explicit and immediate subject. Set on the Italian front during the First World War and in its immediate aftermath, the novel presents a landscape of meaningless violence, institutional failure, and existential despair in which Lieutenant Frederick Henry's progressive disengagement from duty, patriotism, and social obligation functions as the only available form of integrity. The gender dynamics produced by this landscape are inseparable from the novel's larger meditation on loss, meaninglessness, and the fragile human capacity for connection in the face of annihilation.

Fitzgerald presents two principal female figures whose contrasting qualities map the contradictions of 1920s American femininity. Daisy Buchanan is one of the most artistically complex female characters in American literature. From her first appearance reclining on a vast couch, her voice described as being "full of money", she is associated with an image of radiant femininity that is simultaneously genuine and fraudulent [8; p. 180]. She is constructed

throughout through a dense symbolic network centered on the color white a whiteness consistently revealed as a surface concealing corruption and moral indifference. The feminist reading of Daisy as a victim of patriarchal social structures is illuminating but insufficient [12; p. 406]. Daisy is not simply passive: she has made choices to marry Tom, to pursue the affair with Gatsby, to flee the scene of the accident and bears moral responsibility for those choices even as the social world has severely constrained her options. Fitzgerald's achievement is to hold simultaneously in view her victimization and her complicity, producing a figure whose failure is simultaneously personal and structural.

Jordan Baker offers an ostensibly different model: professional, independent, socially self-sufficient. As a tournament golfer a public career unprecedented for women of her class in the 1920s she represents the New Woman of the post-war decade. Yet Fitzgerald's critical vision extends to this figure with equal rigor: Jordan is revealed to be dishonest, careless, and emotionally evasive, suggesting that independence without ethical integrity does not constitute genuine emancipation. The contrast between Daisy and Jordan maps a range of feminine possibilities and reveals all of them as inadequate within the corrupt social world that the novel anatomizes.

Hemingway's Catherine Barkley is a fundamentally different kind of female construction, and one that has attracted sustained and often sharply critical feminist attention. A British nurse serving on the Italian front, Catherine is introduced as a figure already marked by loss her fiance has been killed in the war and her relationship with Frederick Henry develops with a speed and an intensity that is, from the outset, shadowed by the awareness of impermanence and potential annihilation. Where Fitzgerald's women are defined by their relationship to a social order they both inhabit and critique, Catherine is defined almost entirely by her relationship to her lover. Her famous declaration that she wants to be whatever Henry wants, that she has no self apart from the love she bears him has been read by feminist critics as one of the most troubling representations of femininity in the American literary canon [4; p. 215].

Yet the question of Catherine's agency is more complex than this reading suggests. It is possible to understand her self-abnegation not as passive surrender but as a deliberate philosophical choice a decision to invest absolute value in love and human connection in a world that the war has stripped of all other meaning. From this perspective, Catherine's devotion is not weakness but a form of existential courage: the choice to affirm life and love in the full knowledge of their vulnerability. This reading does not dissolve the feminist problem but it complicates it, suggesting that Catherine embodies a form of female heroism that the

novel simultaneously celebrates and through the brutal mechanism of her death in childbirth destroys.

From a psychoanalytic perspective, Catherine functions as a complex figure of Eros and the death drive: her absolute love and her dying body are inseparable, and the love story at the center of the novel is simultaneously a meditation on the relationship between desire and annihilation [1; p. 246]. Her death in childbirth the ultimate biological function reduced to a fatal wound can be read as the novel's most devastating statement about the relationship between femininity, vitality, and destruction in the Lost Generation's experience of a world in which the most alive things seem always already marked for annihilation.

A systematic comparison of the two novels' female images reveals both significant points of convergence and significant divergences. Among the shared strategies, the most important is the symbolic loading of female characters with meanings that exceed their individual psychological reality. In both novels, female figures function as embodiments of larger ideological forces: Daisy Buchanan embodies the seductive hollowness of the American Dream and the moral bankruptcy of the social elite; Catherine Barkley embodies the fragile possibility of love and beauty in a world at war with itself. Both figures are constructed through dense networks of symbolic associationcolor, atmosphere, physical presence that give them a resonance far beyond the limits of realistic characterization.

The most significant divergence lies in the moral and emotional valence of female agency. Fitzgerald's women are defined by evasion, complicity, and moral failure their agency is real but corrupted by the social world that produced them. Catherine's agency, such as it is, is defined by absolute devotion and sacrificial love a radically different, and in some ways radically more troubling, model of feminine virtue. Where Fitzgerald deploys female characters as instruments of social critique, Hemingway deploys his primary female character as an instrument of existential and emotional redemption or, more precisely, of its impossibility.

Conclusion. This comparative analysis of the female images in "The Great Gatsby" and "A Farewell to Arms" has demonstrated that both novels engage with the transformation of feminine identity in the Lost Generation context in artistically sophisticated and ideologically consequential ways, while pursuing fundamentally different literary agendas that reflect the divergent aesthetic philosophies and personal experiences of their authors.

Fitzgerald's female characters are primarily instruments of social critique. Daisy Buchanan and Jordan Baker embody the contradictions and moral failures of 1920s American society, and their characterization is governed by a structural critique of the patriarchal social order that both produces and constrains them. Fitzgerald holds simultaneously in view their

victimization by a world that has denied them the conditions for genuine autonomy and their complicity in the values of that world a dual vision that refuses easy sympathy or easy condemnation and insists instead on the irreducible moral complexity of lives lived under structural constraint.

Hemingway's Catherine Barkley is primarily an instrument of existential and emotional reflection. She embodies the fragile possibility of authentic human connection in a world at war, and her death enacts the novel's most devastating thesis: that the most vital and most precious things are precisely those most vulnerable to annihilation. Her characterization is, as feminist critics have rightly insisted, deeply problematic her self-abnegation, her total dissolution of identity into love, and her ultimate reduction to a dying body all reflect the ideological limitations of Hemingway's vision of femininity. Yet within those limitations she achieves a form of emotional and moral power that the novel cannot fully contain or control.

The comparative analysis has identified three principal shared artistic strategies: the symbolic loading of female characters with meanings that exceed their individual psychological reality; the use of contrast between female figures to map the ideological contradictions of the post-war social world; and the engagement with the transformation of feminine identity in the interwar period. It has also identified significant divergences in the moral valence of female agency evasion and complicity in Fitzgerald, devotion and sacrifice in Hemingway and in the relationship between female characters and their social context social critique in Fitzgerald, existential reflection in Hemingway.

The most important conclusion of this analysis, however, points beyond the differences between the two novels toward a shared limitation that is itself historically significant. In both "The Great Gatsby" and "A Farewell to Arms", the female characters however complex, however symbolically rich ultimately serve the novel's larger purposes rather than their own. Daisy and Jordan exist to illuminate the moral failures of American society; Catherine exists to authenticate and deepen male grief and to embody the ideal against which Henry's losses are measured. Their interiority, when granted at all, is granted selectively and instrumentally. This is not a failure of individual artistry alone but a reflection of the ideological horizons within which even the most gifted writers of the Lost Generation operated horizons that made it possible to recognize the transformation of feminine identity as historically significant while still treating female characters primarily as symbols of male experience rather than as subjects of their own.

Both Fitzgerald and Hemingway recognized that the transformation of feminine identity was not a peripheral but a central dimension of the social and spiritual crisis of their generation.

Both used the artistic representation of female characters to illuminate that transformation with a depth and emotional power that continues to resonate nearly a century after their novels were written. What they could not fully do and what the feminist criticism of subsequent decades has worked to supply is grant those characters the full weight of their own subjectivity. Reading these novels today, with the benefit of that critical tradition, we are in a position to appreciate both what they achieved and what they could not yet imagine which is, perhaps, the most honest and most productive form of literary historical understanding.

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