Lost at College

Cultural Change and Identity Crises of the Two Lost Generations in F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* and Bret Easton Ellis's *The Rules of Attraction*

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to provide an analysis of cultural changes and identity crises in American academic fiction of the Lost Generation and Generation X. Furthermore, the suitability of the academic novel for such analysis is examined. The research material for this study consists of works of two lost generation authors: F. Scott Fitzgerald's debut *This Side of Paradise* and Bret Easton Ellis's *The Rules of Attraction*. As the *oeuvres* of both authors include thoroughly examined novels, this thesis focuses on works that have not been exhaustively analyzed. On one hand, the thesis aims to illuminate the connection between wider cultural changes and more personal identity crises especially among college students. On the other hand, the thesis discusses how the personal experiences represent the generation crises of their time from the viewpoint of both the Lost Generation of the 1920s and Generation X of the 1980s.

The theory section of this thesis comprises sociology, study of literature and psychology. The concept of generation is approached sociologically from a particularly American viewpoint through the theories of Mannheim and Strauss & Howe. Central phenomena include the generational cycle and American lost generations. In terms of literary studies, the novels under study are read as academic fiction and *bildungsromane*. In developmental psychology, the thesis is based on Erik H. Erikson's theories of the stages of psychosocial development and identity. Furthermore, the cultural and historical context of both novels is presented.

After introduction, the thesis presents the authors and the novels under study. The theory section consists of four subsections, in which the concepts and phenomena central to the thesis are discussed. In the analysis, the novels are examined with the help of these concepts and phenomena. Finally, the findings and results of the study are presented in the conclusion.

In the analysis, numerous connections of varying degree were found between the cultural changes and identity crises. However, the representativeness of personal experience and the generational crises varies between the novels: whereas a single protagonist in *This Side of Paradise* represents his generation relatively comprehensively, *The Rules of Attraction*, despite its multiple protagonists, presents a postmodern and fragmentary viewpoint to the same matter. Moreover, the academic fiction was suitable as material for the approach of this study. The final chapter of the thesis provides conclusions and presents possible topics and means of further study, for example, in terms of contrasting two generations as done in the thesis. In addition, instead of the wider examination of identity formation and adolescence in this thesis, more specific subjects, such as the construction of masculinity, could be analyzed in further research. Lastly, the analysis of Ellis's *The Rules of Attraction* in particular forms a substantial basis for future studies, as the novel has not yet been examined in detail.

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract

Pro gradu -tutkielmani tarkoituksena on analysoida kulttuurisia muutoksia ja identiteettikriisejä amerikkalaisten kadotettujen sukupolvien yliopistoromaaneissa. Lisäksi pyrin tutkimaan yliopistoromaanin soveltuvuutta tämänkaltaiseen analyysiin. Tutkimusaineistoni muodostaa F. Scott Fitzgeraldin esikoisromaani *This Side of Paradise* (1920) sekä Bret Easton Ellisin *The Rules of Attraction* (1987). Koska molempien kirjailijoiden tuotanto sisältää läpitutkittuja suurteoksia, oma mielenkiintoni kohdistui nimenomaan vähemmän analysoituihin romaaneihin. Tutkielmani tavoitteena on yhtäältä valottaa laajempien kulttuuristen muutosten yhteyttä henkilökohtaisempiin nuoruuden identiteettikriiseihin varsinkin yliopisto-opiskelijoiden parissa. Toisaalta tutkin kuinka nämä yksilötason kokemukset edustavat aikansa sukupolvikriisejä niin 1920-luvun kadotetun sukupolven kuin 1980-luvun X-sukupolven näkokulmasta.

Tutkielmani teoriaosuus sisältää niin sosiologiaa, kirjallisuustiedettä kuin psykologiaa. Lähestyn sukupolven käsitettä sosiologisesti ja erityisesti amerikkalaisesta näkökulmasta Mannheimin sekä Straussin ja Howen teorioiden kautta. Keskiössä ovat sukupolvien syklisyys ja amerikkalaiset kadonneet sukupolvet. Kirjallisuustieteellisesti lähestyn tutkimustani lukemalla aineistoa yliopisto- ja kehitysromaaneina. Kehityspsykologiassa perustan tutkimukseni Erik H. Eriksonin teorioihin psykososiaalisen kasvun tasoista ja identiteetistä. Edellä mainittujen lisäksi esittelen kummankin teoksen kulttuurishistoriallista viitekehystä.

Pro gradu -tutkielmassani esittelen johdannossa kirjailijat ja teokset ennen siirtymistä teoriaosioon. Teoriaosio koostuu neljästä alaluvusta, joissa käyn läpi tutkielman kannalta keskeiset käsitteet ja ilmiöt. Analyysiosiossa tutkin näiden käsitteiden ja ilmiöiden esiintymistä Fitzgeraldin ja Ellisin romaaneissa. Lopulta kokoan löydökseni ja tulokseni loppupäätelmässä.

Analyysissä selvisi runsaasti eriasteisia yhteyksiä kulttuuristen muutosten ja identiteettikriisien välillä. Se, miten yksilökokemukset edustivat sukupolvikriisejä, vaihtelee teosten välillä: siinä missä yksittäisen päähenkilön kasvu Fitzgeraldin romaanissa *This Side of Paradise* edustaa suhteellisen kattavasti sukupolvikokemusta, *The Rules of Attraction,* huolimatta useista päähenkilöistä, tarjoaa postmodernistisesti sirpaleisen tulkinnan samasta asiasta. Kuten tutkielmani alkuvaiheessa oletin, yliopistoromaani soveltui hyvin tämänkaltaisen tutkimuksen aineistoksi. Tutkielman lopussa olevassa yhteenvedossa pohdin jatkotutkimuskohteita ja -tapoja, joista esimerkiksi tutkielmassani käytetty sukupolvien rinnastus on mahdollinen. Tässä mielessä tutkielmani voi toimia vertailupohjana tulevaisuuden tutkimukselle. Lisäksi identiteetin muodostamisen ja nuoruuden laajempi tutkiminen paljasti mahdollisuuksia yksityiskohtaisempiin tutkimuskohteisiin, kuten maskuliinisuuden rakentumiseen. Toivon myös, että erityisesti tutkimukseni Ellisin romaanista *The Rules of Attraction* tarjoaa perustaa tulevaa tutkimusta varten, sillä verrattuna hänen muiden teostensa analyysin määrään, kyseinen romaani on käytännössä tutkimaton.

Avainsanat – Keywords kulttuurinen muutos, identiteettikriisi, kadotettu sukupolvi, X-sukupolvi yliopistoromaani, kehitysromaani, Karl Mannheim, William Strauss & Neil Howe, Erik H. Erikson F. Scott Fitzgerald, Bret Easton Ellis, Maan päällä kuin taivaissa, Vetovoiman lait

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1. Introduction

1.1. Aims and Structure

This thesis aims to provide an analysis of the connection between cultural changes and identity crises in American lost generation academic fiction. Furthermore, the suitability of the academic novel as the template for discussing such subject matter is examined. The works chosen for analysis belong to different yet not dissimilar eras and generations: F. Scott Fitzgerald's *This Side of Paradise* (1920, *TSOP*) and Bret Easton Ellis's *The Rules of Attraction* (1985, *ROA*). Although written 65 years apart, the novels capture astutely the spirits of their times, and the ethos of generations equally lost. The thesis draws parallels both within and between the novels—between wider cultural changes and more personal identity crises: how is the cultural climate reflected in the lives and crises of college students, and how do the personal crises come to represent generational crises? Despite the historical distance, the novels parallel each other in a multitude of ways ranging from the representation of cultural and personal crises to their settings and pessimistic endings. Both works are essentially autobiographical coming-of-age stories, and can be read within the tradition of the *bildungsroman*, yet they also share the backdrop familiar from the academic fiction.

In terms of cultural change, this thesis argues that *This Side of Paradise* can be seen as addressing the modern condition through the simultaneous emergence of American artistic modernism and the Lost Generation of the 1920s, whereas *The Rules of Attraction* tackles in a similar manner the post-modern anxiety of the Generation X in the 1980s. Firstly, the analysis discusses these cultural conditions and their evident influence on identity formation, and secondly, the ways in which the identity formation developed under

such contexts come to embody the generational coming-of-age. Since the works under study are part of the tradition of the academic novel, a particular emphasis will be placed on identity crises of the adolescent academe. Furthermore, the thesis aims to draw further comparisons between the novels, connecting them to the idea of recurring generations.

First of all, the authors and novels at issue will be presented. Secondly, the theoretical framework, through which the texts will eventually be analyzed, will be delineated. This section will discuss the concept of generation, outline the concept of college fiction, introduce the socio-historical cultural changes and lastly, discuss the basics of identity crisis. After the theoretical framework has been presented, I will discuss *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* in the selected framework. Finally, a conclusion of the analysis will be drawn, and its application for further studies discussed.

1.2. Introduction to Texts and Criticism

Both novels are early works: *This Side of Paradise* is Fitzgerald's debut, and *The Rules of Attraction* is Ellis's sophomore effort. Both Fitzgerald and Ellis boast impressive oeuvres of significant and thoroughly analyzed works of American fiction, yet the novels I have chosen are often read as their lesser works. This explains but hardly justifies the scant—in comparison to authors' other works—academic research on the novels, which, coupled with the numerous ways these novels parallel each other is why I have chosen to focus on these particular works.

This Side of Paradise is F. Scott Fitzgerald's debut novel, published originally in 1920. Fitzgerald wrote most of the script—titled then *Romantic Egotist*—during his time in Princeton and finished it after his fiancée, Zelda Sayre, left him due to his lack of means or stable career. Fitzgerald was only 20 years old when *This Side of Paradise* was published, and overnight, the novel launched him into literary celebrity, and the consequent success

reunited Fitzgerald with Zelda Sayre (Tate 2007, 5). Regardless of the mainly positive initial response—both commercial and critical, "*Paradise* has", as Powell suggests, "endured a century of relative critical neglect, mostly stemming from one early review (Edmund Wilson's biting reflection on the novel in 1922)" (2011, 52). In comparison to a wide-ranging readings of Fitzgerald's later works, such as *The Great Gatsby* and *Tender Is the Night, This Side of Paradise* is, as Riccardo notes, mostly analyzed in terms of "historical value, relationship to the author's biography" (2012, 33) and the structure or lack thereof (Powell 2011, 93). Other common topics in readings include feminism and narcissism.

Together, the Fitzgeralds came to embody the flappers and playboys of the Roaring Twenties through the lavish lifestyle they led both around the US and in expatriate circles of Europe unlike any other celebrity couple. To a great extent posthumously, F. Scott Fitzgerald became known as the voice of the Lost Generation and the foremost illustrator of the Jazz Age. Already before his literary career begun properly, Fitzgerald was confident in his own adeptness in portraying the generational experience. For example, Fitzgerald wrote to his friend of an early version of *This Side of Paradise*, *The Romantic Egotist*: "I really believe that no one else could have written so searchingly the story of the youth of our generation" (qtd. in Tate 2005, 4).

This Side of Paradise is a two-act account of Amory Blaine's childhood and adolescence first in boarding school, then Princeton, and lastly in New York, after the First World War. Amory's *bildung* combined with the debilitating effects of the war render him aimless and disillusioned with the American institutions, such as education and capitalism. Through various romantic adventures and bouts of reckless abandon, Amory succeeds in gaining self-knowledge necessary in his quest for modern identity, and observes his generation and time astutely.

The Rules of Attraction is Bret Easton Ellis's second novel published in 1987, only two years after *Less Than Zero* turned him into the voice of his generation and a debut author of a best seller (Baelo-Allué 2011, 2). Paralleling Ellis's trajectory, a group of East Coast writers, primarily Jay McInerney, David Leavitt and Tama Janowitz (Finke 1987), emerged and were dubbed the Literary Brat Pack, equivalent to Hollywood's Brat Pack. The works of the Literary Brat Pack are viewed as blank fiction[1], a loosely defined literary movement negotiating the American adolescence with the themes such as consumerism and mass culture, extremes in violence and sex, and decadence and indifference (Annesley 1998, 2, 9) Although the 'blank' in blank fiction associates with emptiness and surface, Annesley argues: "The irony is that in dealing with supposedly lightweight and ephemeral elements these texts manage to engage with the kind of weighty material forces that are fundamental to the whole functioning of late twentieth century society" (1998, 10). As is the case with *This Side of Paradise, The Rules of Attraction* has been subject to little academic attention in comparison to respective author's major works. Whereas *American Psycho* is one of the most thoroughly analyzed novels of the 1990s, *The Rules of Attraction* is, as Fodor and Varga note, read simply as a sequel to Ellis's breakthrough *Less Than Zero,* or at best, the misunderstood missing link in Ellis's literary universe (2014). *The Rules of Attraction* recounts the fall semester in 1985 in the fictive Camden College, and is kaleidoscopically narrated in first person by numerous characters. The story is centered about an implied *ménage à trois* between Sean, Paul and Laura. The love story aside, the novel depicts its characters partaking in endless campus parties. By the end of the semester, the same cycle of nothing appears uninterrupted, with the protagonists showing little to no development in terms of identity formation or life in general.

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[1] The terms "downtown writing", "post-punk", "new narrative" and "fiction of insurgency" have also been applied (Annesley 1998, 2).

Chiefly, the theoretical framework of this thesis consists of the theories of generation, academic fiction, cultural change and identity. Firstly, the concept of generation is of great essence in this study. The thesis approaches generations from the sociological perspective, basing the general definition of the concept on Karl Mannheim's oft-cited theory of the problem of generations, and how it is viewed in contemporary context. It is paired with the particularly American view on generations as developed in Strauss and Howe's works on the subject. Secondly, the theory of 20th century American college fiction is presented and combined with its overlapping with modern *bildungsroman.* The section is based on the works of such key authors as Kramer, Millard, and Showalter, to name a few. Thirdly, cultural change during the two eras as chronicled in the novels is discussed from socio-historical and cultural viewpoints, basing the theoretical framework on one hand, on various historians, and on the other hand, on the basics of cultural change as addressed in the works of Steward. Fourthly and finally, the concepts of identity and identity crisis are introduced on the basis of the works of Erik H. Erikson, and in a more cultural sense, on the works of Stuart Hall. The thesis will close with a concluding chapter.

2. Theoretical Framework

The aim of this thesis is to analyze *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* as works of American academic fiction. Due to the settings of the novels, reading them in the context of the academic fiction is fairly obvious a choice—even if the works under study may not read as typical representatives of the genre at all times. However, both novels are included in John E. Kramer's *The American College Novel,* the most exhaustive cross-section of American academic fiction. Moreover, academic fiction is often seen as stories of development, thus connecting the genre to the tradition of the *bildungsroman* and the idea of the coming-of-age. However, due to modernist and postmodernist nature of *This Side of Paradise,* and *The Rules of Attraction,* respectively, the signs of development familiar from traditional coming-of-age stories are not always to be found, but manifest as disillusionment and disenchantment.

As the concept of generation is of paramount importance to this thesis's approach, the theoretical section begins with the definition of generation. Following this, an overview of the theory of campus novel, in connection to the tradition of modern *bildungsroman,* is presented. Next, the concepts of identity and identity crisis are discussed through the works of Erik H. Erikson and Stuart Hall. Lastly, the socio-historical background information concerning the cultural changes depicted in the novels under study is provided.

2.1.   The Concept of Generation

"*History shapes generations*; yet at the same time […] *generations shape history*" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 76; emphasis original).

This thesis is centered on two generations, which naturally demands a definition of the concept of the generation. Firstly, generation as a concept, as it is used in this thesis, differs significantly from the use of the term in everyday language. Thus, this ambiguous concept demands exhaustive examination in terms of its sociological and particularly American connotations. Indeed, 2.1. is divided into two subsections: first, the sociological generation is defined using the works and findings of various sociologists and historicists, including but not limited to, Mannheim, Redlich, and Pilcher. Secondly, the American take on generation is discussed through the theories of Strauss and Howe; and in particular, their notion of the cyclical nature of American generations, which is of particular importance to this thesis.

2.1.1. The Social Generation

Even in the 21st century, the concept of generation remains somewhat ambiguous despite its frequent usage in both written and spoken language. Fundamentally, the concept of generation can be viewed both biologically and sociologically. The biological, or genealogical, generations are in a sense specific to each family: the parents represent the step before their children whose children in turn represent the following step in said family's lineage. Thus, a genealogical generation comprises the time between an individual's birth and reproduction, usually averaging in between 20–30 years. However, for this paper's intents and purposes, it is more necessary to concentrate on the sociological aspects of generation.

This section aims to provide a clear outline of how the concept of generation is viewed in the thesis. This view, due to the nature of research subjects at issue is largely sociological. Hereafter, 'generation' will denote social generation unless otherwise specified. According to Jane Pilcher, "the social significance" (1994, 482) of both the generation and age in general has long been neglected among sociologists: "Despite the notion of genera-

tion being in such common currency, contemporary sociologists have paid scant attention to the significance of generation" (481). Strauss and Howe connect this with the Second World War, and call the sociology of generation "one of the many intellectual casualties of the global war" (1991, 439). Julian Marías suggests that August Comte and James Stuart Mill were the first to recognize generation as a social phenomenon in the latter half of late 18th century (Redlich 1973, 245). The term 'social generation', however, was not coined until the 1920s by Francois Mentré as "a state of collective mind embodied in a human group than endures certain time" (Strauss and Howe 1991, 439). In general, a certain pulse in subsequent generations was postulated by a number of sociologists, such as Ortega y Gasset and Mannheim in the early 20th century.

Ultimately, this thesis's definition of generation is to a great degree based on Karl Mannheim's findings in his pivotal essay "Problem of Generations". Originally published in 1923, it is still often regarded "as the most systematic and fully developed treatment of generation from a sociological perspective" (Bengtson, *et al.* qtd. in Pilcher, 482). Moreover, I will substantiate this paper's view on social generation with the works of assorted sociologists and historicists, for example, José Ortega y Gasset, Julian Marías, and Strauss and Howe, which if not contradictive to Mannheim's theory, can still offer valuable viewpoints from the outside.

In his essay, Mannheim approaches the concept of generation from various points of view in order to formulate a comprehensive definition of the phenomenon. He acknowledges that the sociological definition of generation is ultimately founded on biology (1952, 290) but that generations have to be viewed as a social phenomenon as well. The problems in conceptualizing generation arise more than partly from this dichotomy, and are reflected, for example, in the juxtaposition of quantitative and qualitative attempts to define generation. Unsurprisingly, and as is the case with most successful theorizations of social

generations, the quantitative dimension of time appears often shrugged off and substituted with a more qualitative view, as is the case with Mannheim: "The time-interval separating generations becomes subjectively experienceable time" (1952, 282). Furthermore, Mannheim never posits a certain exact length to his concept of generation.

Mannheim begins his conceptualization with generation location. Location-wise, Mannheim distinguishes three dimensions in which a generation exists: physical, temporal, and social. Through these dimensions, generation can be viewed as a "location phenomenon" (1952, 303), which, albeit not the final and comprehensive definition, is an excellent starting point in understanding the complex concept of social generation. Interpreting Mannheim, a generation "[…] is defined as people within a delineated population who experience the same significant event within a given period of time" (Pilcher 1994, 483). In a physical and temporal sense these delineations are clear: a generation has to be a coetaneous group living in a relative proximity to other members of the cohort in order to share a similar worldview. As mentioned above, Mannheim himself does not postulate any specific length to a social generation. He, however, reminds that "the duration of a generation [has] been very variously estimated" (1952, 278), usually from 15 to 30 years[2]. It is worth noting that the physical and temporal locations of generation have been affected by the technological advancement and globalization: due to Internet, the geographical limitations have become of diminishing importance, whereas the life expectancies and the age of reproduction have changed significantly from Mannheim's day and age.

In terms of the societal dimension of generations, Mannheim's approach can be seen as mainly focused on the class society. For example, Mannheim views both class and generation as social locations, which share certain qualities:

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[2] 15 years, said Ortega y Gasset, Jefferson concluded at 18.2 years, Littré suggested 25 years, Comte proposed 30 years, whereas Cournot preferred 33 years (see Strauss & Howe 1991, Redlich 1976).

[…] both endow the individuals sharing in them a common location is social and historical process, and thereby limit them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action. (1952, 291)

This is what Mannheim calls "the tendency 'inherent in' a social location" (1952, 291). In practice, the differences between various social locations manifest in the fact that "[…] experiential, intellectual, and emotional data which are available to the members of a certain society are not uniformly 'given' to all of them […]" (Mannheim 1952, 291).

Nevertheless, these three dimensions of generation location are merely the basis on which Mannheim's further definitions are constructed: "However, a generation in the sense of a location phenomenon falls short of encompassing the generation phenomenon in its full actuality" (1952, 303). According to Mannheim's account, the members of any given generation are interconnected through a shared generational consciousness. Auguste Comte called the same phenomenon a "unanimous adherence to certain fundamental notions" (1838, qtd. in Strauss & Howe 1991, 66). At any rate, this collective consciousness remains somewhat similar over the course of its life, or as Strauss and Howe suggest, "[a]s generation ages, its inner beliefs retain a certain consistency over its lifecycle" (1991, 66). Mannheim posits a prerequisite of a shared generational consciousness be the "*natural view* of the world", or a similar set of values and beliefs (1952, 298, emphasis original)—the childhood experiences and early impressions, that is. Therefore, the childhood and youth during which individuals emerge as new participants in cultural process (1952, 292) are decisive in the development of generation and its collective consciousness.

However, this consciousness does not simply develop due to contemporaneity in a chronological or spatial sense, but through various kinds of uniting generational moments,

which then are experienced through the abovementioned Mannheimian natural view of the world. For Mannheim, these uniting generational moments, or "further concrete nexus" (1952, 303) are, for example, key historical events, through which a generation becomes what he calls a "generation as an actuality". Mannheim describes these moments as "*participation in the common destiny*" (1952, 303; emphasis original). Thus, "[i]ndividuals of the same age […] are, however, only united as an actual generation in so far as they participate in the characteristic social and intellectual currents of their society and period" (1952, 304).

2.1.2. American Generations

As *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* are both characteristically American in their nature, it is only logical to view the concept of generation also from the specifically American perspective. In their 1991 work *Generations,* demographers William Strauss and Neil Howe outline the American generations and their recurrence. The theory was well received in public, yet the academic response was largely mixed. In any case, the Strauss-Howe generational theory, as it has been dubbed, is applicable to my thesis—firstly, due to its inherent focus on American generations, and secondly, due to the recurrence of generations, including those lost, a qualifier that will be elaborated later.

In the same manner as Mannheim centered the realization of his actual generations about the major historical events, Strauss and Howe connect their view of common generational experiences to similar points in history called "social moments" (1991, 71). These moments are not actually mere moments in the blink of an eye sense of the word, but rather social moments and the following eras "lasting about a decade" during which a generation recognizes the influence of that moment in their social environment (Strauss & Howe 1991, 71). Moreover, Strauss and Howe distinguish two kinds of social moments, secular

crises and spiritual awakenings, with basis on whether the society at issue changes externally or internally. In secular crises "the society focuses on reordering the outer world of institutions and public behavior", whereas in spiritual awakenings "society focuses on changing the inner world of values and private behavior" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 91). Secular crises occur "roughly every ninety years" (1991, 92), and in between two such crises, a spiritual awakening takes place. Two social moments of the same kind never arise in succession due to the concomitant relationship of the different kinds. In other words, a secular crisis, for example, the Second World War crisis, is always followed by a spiritual awakening, in this case, the Boom Awakening of the counterculture of the 1960s (Strauss & Howe 1991, 88, 94).

As mentioned above, a generation's length in Strauss-Howe theory is 22 years—a period, which unsurprisingly coincides with the length of each of the four life stages: youth spans from 0 to 21, rising adulthood from 22 to 43, midlife 44 to 65, with the remainder dedicated to elderhood (1991, 60). The two types of social moments presented above, secular crises and spiritual awakenings, and an individual's age location in regard to them, dictate the main type of the generation to which the individual belongs Strauss and Howe conflate various categories of generation under two main classes, dominant and recessive: "During social moments, DOMINANT generations are entering rising adulthood and elderhood", whereas "RECESSIVE generations are entering youth and midlife" (1991, 73; emphases original).

The dominant and recessive generations are both split into two subcategories: idealist and civic, and, reactive and adaptive, respectively (1991, 74). To exemplify this with the novels under study, both the Lost Generation and Generation X are recessive and reactive generations, which were in their youth during an awakening—Missionary and Boom,

respectively—and had reached midlife when faced with a proper secular crisis—Second World War and, 9/11[3], respectively. According to Strauss and Howe:

> "[…] REACTIVE GENERATION grows up as underprotected and criticized youths during a spiritual awakening; matures into risk-taking, alienated rising adults; mellows into pragmatic midlife leaders during a secular crisis; and maintains respect (but less influence) as reclusive elders" (1991, 74; emphasis original).

With regard to other three types of generation, it is unnecessary to delve into their characteristics in such detail, as the focus will primarily be on the reactive generations. In general, it can be said, however, that all the different types

Furthermore, the Strauss-Howe generational theory divides the passage of time into four recurring stages, or "eras": Awakening, Inner-Driven, Crisis, and Outer-Driven (1991, 76). Of the eras, Awakenings and Crises are more central, whereas the Inner-Driven and Outer-Driven eras can rather be seen as reactions to the preceding stages. The central eras, as suggested by their names, are fast connected with the social moments introduced above. Each of these stages lasts roughly 20 to 22 years, and combined together, they form what Strauss and Howe call *saeculum*, Latin for "natural century". As *saeculum* bears resemblance to the course of year, the four turnings can be seen as seasons of history. The beliefs and behaviors shared by the members of a generation are dictated according to the era in which they are born, which again can be seen as a link to Mannheimian natural view of the world.

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[3] Strauss and Howe posit certain awakenings and crises as defining to each generation. However, the Generation X had not entered their midlife proper around the time of the publication of *Generations*. Although the timing is my own, 9/11 is certainly a generation defining experience.

All in all, *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* both address, more or less overtly, a generational experience through their protagonists. Although roughly 70 years apart, those generational experiences fall in the same category of generations posited by Strauss and Howe. This offers a previously overlooked yet definitely useful and worthwhile viewpoint on the novels and their cycle of nothing through the recurrence of the lost American generations, of which the most famous was named thus by Gertrude Stein in the 1920s.

2.2. Academic Fiction and *Bildungsroman*

Simply put, the academic fiction is a literary genre characterized by and named after its main setting—the world of academe. Academic fiction, too, has been called by many names over the years: the academic novel, campus novel, the college novel, and the university novel have all been widely used. In this thesis, academic fiction is used as an umbrella term covering these to refer to fiction situated in academic context. This section outlines the different types of academic fiction. Historically, academic fiction has been fundamentally bipartite in its two main foci. On one hand, what has been called the campus novel tends to focus on the students, whereas the academic novel refers most often to fiction about staff members of the academe. John E. Kramer, the compiler of an annotated bibliography titled *The American College Novel,* defines the [American] college novel as a: "full-length work of fiction that incorporates an [American] institution of higher education as a crucial part of its total setting and includes among its principal characters graduate or undergraduate students, faculty members, administrators, and/or other college or university personnel" (2004, v). Another widely cited definition of academic novel is that of John O. Lyons: "I consider a novel of academic life one in which higher education is treated with seriousness and the main characters are students or professors" (1962, xvii).

Although universities and colleges have acted as backdrops in literature for centuries now, the genre is primarily attributed to the 20th century, and more specifically, its latter half (Showalter 2005, 1; Williams 2012, 567). In the United Kingdom, academic fiction has been present for a longer time, whereas in the USA, the rise of academic novel coincides with the post-WWII expansion of higher education, although the first American work of academic fiction is considered to be Nathaniel Hawthorne's *Fanshawe* from 1828 (Williams 2005, 566–7, 576). Statistically, between 1920 and 1980, or the milieus of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction,* the ratio of graduates per population has surged from 1 to 177 all the way to 1 to 18 (Williams 2012, 576). Indeed, Williams argues that during the latter half of the 20th century,

> Contrary to the image of its being an elite experience, college has become mass culture, and the proliferation of both campus and academic novels, as well as films and television shows, obviously responds to the greater centrality of higher education in American life. (2012, 577)

At this point, it is necessary to delve further into the historical background and evolution of academic fiction, while, for this thesis focuses on the early-20th century, and the 1980s. Firstly, Williams characterizes the academic fiction of the early 1900s as "either boys' book" or "almost prurient look at the life of they young" (2012, 562). Secondly, Williams points out that although the academic fiction of the 1970s "center[s] on political strife on campus […] the major trend of the 1970s and 1980s was the affair novel" (2012, 564). In other words, the sexualization of the society was reflected in the genre of academic fiction as well, of which *The Rules of Attraction* stands a prime example. By the end of the 20th century, the academic fiction hit the mainstream, yet the scholarly and critical response to the genre has been largely lukewarm and indifferent (Williams 2012, 561; Powell 2011, 1),

which in part can be explained by the fact that only few works of the genre can be considered as major works: "[…] the bulk of [academic fiction works] have suffered one edition and then been consigned to the remainder piles" (Lyons 1962, xii). In addition to its characterizing setting, other key features of the genre include the divide into faculty members and students, and in the latter case, the genre's innate connection with the *bildungsroman*. Furthermore, the works of the genre are often characterized by the qualities of satire and intertextuality (Showalter 2005, 3; Moseley 2007, 7; Anténe 2015, 8, 10), which is significantly manifested in both novels under study.

First and foremost, the academic novel is defined by its milieu—as established, to the extent that the whole genre is named after it. Even though the American academic novel started gaining momentum only after the Second World War and subsequent democratization of higher education, the works in the genre most often take place in small and exclusive colleges with pastoral campuses rather than in the larger, more inclusive "redbrick" or "white tile" conglomerates of the more recent history (Moseley 2007, xi). This can be, at least in part, associated with the prestige and the intrigue associated with the closed chambers of cloistral and rural elite colleges in the US. Furthermore, all this pertains to Williams's view of what academic fiction is "usually thought to be" (2012, 561): "quaint and eccentric" (2012, 561) or "quirky" (2012, 573) accounts of academe as "separate sphere […] with its own protocols, peculiar customs, and insular politics" (2012, 563). All in all, the most important aspect of various institutions of higher education as a setting is the microcosmic nature of the insular and exclusive campuses, which come to represent the society and in particular its future (Anténe 2015, 8–9). The spatial limitations of colleges and campuses aside, the academic year with its fixed ascents, peaks and descents, as Moseley notes, offers a prime temporal framework for story arcs (2007, 17). Although Moseley sees the trajectory of an individual student as linear, intertwined with the cyclical

academic years, the annual and thus undisrupted change of students can also be seen as cyclical in a wider perspective.

Secondly, in much the same way as the populace of academic world is split into faculty members and students, the genre depicting their lives and deeds is often seen as bi-partite as well: staff-centered and student-centered, as Kramer calls them (2004, ix). This division is present in practically all prominent studies and analyses of academic fiction. Both *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* are student-centered academic novels with only rare glimpses onto the faculty members. So, on one hand there is the staff-centered academic novel, which focuses on the lives of the faculty personnel—most often teachers and professors, but also other university employees. Since the 1950s, the staff-centered academic novel has continually outperformed the student-centered in every decade except for the 1990s in terms of popularity and publishing numbers (Williams 2005; 562, 567). Williams suggests that the democratization of higher education has turned professors "from being a rare figure to a common profession, one whom most Americans would encounter" (2005, 576). The rise of the academic fiction can be attributed to this downward social change: toward the end of the 20th century, professors have descended among the white collar middle class, and accounts of their lives have become a prime medium for mid-life crisis literature (Williams 2005, 577).

On the other hand—and more importantly to this thesis—there is the student-centered academic novel—also often called the campus novel—which in turn concentrates on the lives of students, especially undergraduates. According to Williams, the campus novel peaked during the first decades of the 20th century, blending with *bildungsroman*, and hitting the mainstream in the mid-1900s when the genre was taken from the pages of best-sellers onto the silver screens of Hollywood (2005, 562). Indeed, one reason for the decline in the student-centered academic fiction's popularity can be attributed to this change in

medium: whereas staff-centered counterparts remained in the pages of the novels, the student-centered academic novels transmuted into films. Characteristically, as Foster notes, the campus novel depicting students' lives often revolves predominantly around the "extracurricular, undergraduate merriment", which in his view is the starkest contrasting factor to the academic novel with its "depressive professors" (2014, 464–5).

To Foster, the student-centered academic fiction typically "trace a young person's emergence from the family into the social world" (2014, 465), and to Williams they "present young adult comedies or dramas, most frequently coming-of-age narratives" (2012, 561–2), which effectively makes the student-centered works, far more so than their staff-centered counterparts, essentially a part of the tradition of education narratives, *bildungsromane*. Firstly, of course, this is due to the very function of the school system: to provide a formal education and through that the necessary capabilities for professional life. Secondly, this is also, to a great extent, due to the age in which the academe is usually entered. The usual four-year career in academe can be viewed as the culmination and final frontier of the adolescence, after which an individual has supposedly reached the precipices of adulthood. From the Generation X onwards, this notion, however, can be seriously questioned, as the line between youth and adulthood has become increasingly blurred (Waters *et al.* 2011, 8). At any rate, in the core of student-centered academic fiction there lies a stark sense of transition: "between childhood and adulthood, parental and societal authority, home and corporation, and play and work" (Bronner 2012, xiii). This transition is a multifaceted one—in addition to Bronner's juxtapositions, the student-centered academic fiction can characteristically be seen negotiating the dilemma based on the juxtaposition of internal and external. For example, to Moretti the *bildung* aspect of the academic novel typically discusses "[t]he conflict between the ideal of self-determination and the equally imperious demands of socialization" (2000, 15). In practice, this juxtaposi-

tion manifests, on one hand, in undergraduates' personal development, for example, in terms of identity, and, on the other hand, in their social development as members of society.

At this point, it is necessary to examine the historical background of *bildungsroman.* As a genre, *bildungsroman* is significantly older than the academic novel, as its origins can be traced back to Germany in 1819 (Millard 2007, 2). Moretti posits that the watershed in the trajectory of the *bildungsroman* is the year 1914 and the First World War, which to him represents the beginnings of a "collective, immense initiation ritual" (2000, 229) that the war would turn out to be. The first decades of the 20th century at latest, however, denote the emergence of modernism as well, paralleling the cultural change brought on by the atrocities of the First World War. Moretti suggests that the most significant change within the *bildungsroman* from the 19th century to the post-war 20th century is the shift in the focus from personal relations between individuals toward relations between individuals and social institutions (2000, 230), of which both *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* stand as examples. Especially in the 20th century, the *bildungsroman* has somewhat problematically become nearly synonymous with coming of age, although the latter points to a fixed point in individual's life—legal age, which then again varies from country to country (Millard 2007, 4–5). Although significant moments in individual's development may occur at any point of their life, Millard suggests the contemporary *bildungsromane* can be delineated between ages 12 and 19, which can be explained with the certain aspects of life taking place earlier from the 1980s onwards (2007, 4–5). Furthermore, *bildungsromane* read and written in the American context in particular gain further meaning due to the origin story of the United States. Indeed, the colonization of the New World can be seen as *bildung*—coming of age from the authority and dated morals of the Old World. Ultimately, New World's relationship with the Old World bears resemblance

to a teenager rebelling and leaving their parents to pursue social and economical independence (Millard 2007, 4–5).

In sum, academe is doubtlessly of a forming importance in regard to the societal context in which it operates. Thus, academic fiction is essentially a window onto the cultural and social change to come. As the student-centered academic fiction takes place at a decisive moment in adolescents' transition from childhood home to the adulthood's social responsibilities, works within the genre offer a simultaneous look at the values from which the individuals stem and against which they build their own beliefs, and about the prospects toward which they are headed. Although present globally, this is particularly strongly manifested in the American college context, where the university experience is "pivotal" in "shaping the American culture", as suggested by Bronner (2012, xvi).

2.3.   Identity and Its Crises

For indeed, in the social jungle of human existence there is no feeling of being alive without a sense of identity. (Erikson 1968, 130)

The term identity crisis constitutes one half of the title of this thesis. Whereas the cultural changes of the former half are more associated with the broader and more general generational experience, as will be discussed in the next section, the identity crises are inarguably of far more personal quality, and essential in the process of coming-of-age. Although identity crises remain similar in terms of quality and location, it is worth exploring how, first, the hastened pace of the modernization, and second, the postmodern fragmentation have affected something as crucial as identity. As Erikson suggests: "As technological advances put more and more distance between early school life and the young person's final access to specialized work, the stage of adolescing becomes an even more marked and conscious

period" (1968, 128). In this section, this thesis aims to illuminate the concept of identity crisis with a particular focus on the crises situated in the late adolescence and around the transition from youth to adulthood. Mainly, the identity crises will be defined and examined in psychological sense through the work of the groundbreaking psychologist Erik H. Erikson, employing, among others, his theory of stages of psychological development. In addition to Erikson's observations on identity, the concept, and particularly its applications in the age of postmodernism, will be expanded through selected more recent works. Due to the nature of this thesis, its particular focus is on late adolescence and early adulthood, the fifth and sixth of Erikson's stages. The former of these stages is characterized by establishing one's identity, and indeed, the end of the stage can be placed around the time an individual has succeeded in determining their identity.

Originally, Erik H. Erikson coined the very term 'identity crisis'. Before defining the term any further, however, it is necessary to start by delineating the concept of identity —a pursuit in which Erikson again can be of great aid. Identity, as Erikson himself considers, is a concept simultaneously "so large and so seemingly self-evident", yet "something made so narrow for purposes of measurement" (1968, 15), that it eludes total and exhaustive definition. However, a valid starting point for the conceptualization of identity could be the "[…] sense of personal sameness and historical continuity", loss of which sparked the first usage of the term identity crisis during the Second World War (Erikson 1968, 16–7). Secondly, and more importantly, the identity is fundamentally something of psychosocial quality and reflective of the connection between an individual and their social surroundings:

[…] in psychological terms, identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, a process taking place on all levels of mental function-

ing, by which the individual judges himself in the light of what he perceives to be

the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology

significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in the light of how he

perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to

him. (Erikson 1968, 22–3)

The process described here is that of identity formation, "a lifelong development largely

unconscious to the individual and his society" (Erikson 1980, 122), a process through the

eight psychological development stages.

Each of the abovementioned eight Eriksonian stages of development precipitates a

new crisis, and when an individual ultimately emerges from one crisis, they are ready to

advance toward the new stage and new crisis. However, in the nucleus of these identity

crises lies adolescence, the crisis of which Erikson calls "Identity versus Role Confusion"

(1968, 94). During the fifth stage of psychosocial development, an individual undergoes

through physical changes, which are reflected in their identity. In the midst of these

changes, the individual seeks for loyalty and trust, although paradoxically they "express

[their] need for faith in loud and cynical mistrust" (Erikson 1968, 129) directed toward au-

thorities and prior beliefs. In part, the process of identity formation occurs through explo-

ration, or "role experimentation", in terms of, for example, lifestyle, subculture, and sexu-

ality (Erikson 1968, 128; 1980, 126–7). Should the identity confusion not ameliorate to-

ward the end of adolescence, a "negative identity" may supersede the ego identity in the

making (Erikson 1980, 141–3). By negative identity Erikson denotes "an identity per-

versely based on all those identifications and roles which, at critical stages of development,

had been presented to the individual as most undesirable or dangerous, and yet also most

real" (Erikson 1980, 141–3). This often results from external pressure from, for example,

parents or society. However when the identity formation succeeds, the new identity becomes superimposed over the remnants of childhood identifications, which in the new identity are reconfigured to match the new views of the individual (1980, 121). According to Erikson, the adolescence in itself is the very "normative crisis" (1980, 125), which "[…] is in many ways determined by what went before and determines much that follows" (1968, 23) and that that crisis indeed is "the psychosocial aspect of adolescing" (1968, 91). By the end of the adolescent crisis, one hand, a sense of fidelity is achieved, and on the other hand, a more or less whole ego identity is formed. Although adolescence ends with an ego identity, the process of identity formation is by no means over, but continues throughout the lifespan.

However, such permanence of identity, as in the Eriksonian version of the concept seems more questionable the deeper we enter the postmodern fragmentation and splintering. Bauman compares the modern identity (as might be the case with *This Side of Paradise*) to the postmodern identity (as in *The Rules of Attraction*): "Indeed, if the modern 'problem of identity' was how to construct an identity and keep it solid and stable, the postmodern 'problem of identity' is primarily how to avoid fixation and keep the options open" (1996, 18). Moreover, Hall writes of postmodern identity as follows:

> It accepts that identities are never unified and, in late modern times, increasingly fragmented and fractured; never singular but multiply constructed across different, often intersecting and antagonistic, discourses, practices and positions. They are subject to a radical historicization, and are constantly in the process of change and transformation. (1996, 4)

Although, the postmodern notions, as presented here, too, certainly question and problematize Erikson's modern identity, his works are of use as a basis and an outline of various stages where a postmodern analysis of identity starts.

In essence, the Eriksonian identity is bifurcated into personal or ego identity, and social or group identity. Moreover, these are also paralleled in Erikson's notion of sexual and occupational identities. Ultimately, identity is fundamentally tied to the interplay between an individual and the surrounding society. This is reflected in in Erikson's observation that it is impossible to "[…] separate the identity crisis in individual life and contemporary crises in historical development because the two help to define each other and are truly relative to each other (1968, 23). On the same note, Erikson argues that identity is connected to the wider generational experience as well (1968, 29; 38). These notions are of paramount importance in regard to this thesis.

2.4. Lost Generations and Their Cultural Movements

In this section, the socio-political, historical and theoretical backgrounds of the cultural changes and generations under study in this thesis will be presented. As mentioned above, the lost generations of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* are situated in the same turn of the Strauss-Howe generational cycle—they both are reactive generations, which were born amongst a nationwide spiritual awakening, and then faced an Inner-Driven Era in their youth. The following subsections provide an introduction to, firstly, the intergenerational relationships between the generations at hand and their elders, secondly, the respective spiritual awakenings, and finally, the socio-political climates. In this thesis, both these generations are considered as "lost generations", but for the sake of clarity, the generations under study here will be addressed as the Lost Generation (of the 1920s), and Generation X, respectively.

On one hand, *This Side of Paradise* takes place in the years and the immediate aftermath of the First World War, a cataclysmic turning point for the modern condition. The American cultural landscape of the 1910s was changing rapidly with the emergence of artistic modernism, and towards the end of the decade, nationwide negotiation of the world before and after the war. Simultaneously, the armistice precipitated unprecedented economic boom gilding the 1920s, but also it brought along the disillusion and decadence. On the other hand, *The Rules of Attraction* is situated in the mid-1980s: the consumerist flurry of Reaganomics, the postmodern condition; the nation simultaneously at its most optimistic and divided, in the brink of the financial boom and in the final years of the Cold War. Although the cultural changes are fast connected to the generational experience as discussed earlier, they, too, are recurring phenomena, which occur in cycles.

This means that both novels under study in this thesis take place in a time period, which in the Strauss-Howe generational theory is referred to as an Inner-Driven Era. However, it is necessary to begin from the roots: the generations of *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* were both brought up during characteristically spiritual Awakening Eras. These Awakenings can be seen as reactions to preceding secular crises. Indeed, the Awakening Eras are characterized by the emergence of new ideals and cross-societal change in institutions, but in which the rising generations—in this case, Lost, X—are too young to participate. Initially, this change is triggered by the preceding generation, or the parents of the reactive lost generations, in their youth and rising adulthood. This, in turn, results in that, a "REACTIVE GENERATION grows up as underprotected and criticized youths […], matures into risk-taking alienated rising adults" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 74). Disillusion, aimlessness and indirection are common denominators to reactive generations at any point of generational chronology, and their members come of age under constant criticism and chastisement.

2.4.1. The Lost Generation of the 1920s

The two generations portrayed in the novels under study in this thesis, commonly dubbed as the Lost Generation and the Generation X, respectively, are situated rather similarly in relation to major wars. In *Generations,* Strauss and Howe delineate the Lost Generation's[4] birth between years 1883 and 1900 (1991, 248). Although F. Scott Fitzgerald—and for that matter, Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise*, too—, born in 1896, represent the last quarter of his generation, they present him as one of the key members and interpreters of the generation that came to bloom during the 1920s, frequently employing his words in describing the overall generational experience (1991, 247–50). The Lost Generation, famously baptized so by Gertrude Stein and popularized by Ernest Hemingway's epigraph in *Sun Also Rises,* was raised by the Missionary Generation, who had been directly affected by the Civil War, and who in their children's early years were actively engaged in societal and spiritual change instead of parenting. Indeed, the first misstep on the Lost Generation's way to stray can be attributed to the generation-wide parental neglect from which the generation had to fight its way up. In address to parental neglect, Strauss and Howe present a number of the preceding Missionary Generation's reactions to the "'soft' and incompetent" Lost Generation with its "*culte de moi"* and godless socialism (Comer 1911, 148–50). On the other hand, the Lost Generation was largely the "only 'logical' reaction to parental neglect" as Randoph Bourne (qtd. in Strauss & Howe 1991, 250) responded to Comer's critique. The Lost Generation entered the labor market "at a higher rate than any generation of American children before or since" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 251), and in result, used its self-earned money to a greater degree than any other generation (Strauss & Howe 1991, 252). In general, the Lost Generation represents stagnation in terms of educational im-

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[4] In Europe, the Lost Generation was called, among others, The Generation of 1914 and *Génération au Feu*; the Generation in Flames

provement: on the contrary, the participation in education dropped significantly during the Lost Generation's childhood. As Strauss and Howe note, the conscripts to be sent to war had a "'mental age' of under 12" (1991, 252).

During the Lost Generation's emergence into adulthood, The First World War simultaneously robbed them of illusion but shoved them toward the "fear of poverty and the worship of success" (*TSOP* 268) balancing in "[…] a world of pomposity and danger" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 247). Even though the two most significant crises encountered by the Lost Generation are definitely the Great Depression and The Second World War, the First World War and its "[…] horrors of mustard gas and trenchfoot catalyzed their generational identity" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 250), and was the first *de facto* social moment bringing the Lost Generation into actuality. During the 1910s, the home front showed little betterment: homicide rates and narcotics use soared, and the Lost Generation took the blame (Strauss & Howe 1991, 252). Returning from the First World War, the Lost Generation was also rendered more suicidal than any other 20th century American generation expect for Generation X. In any case, the Lost Generation grew up to become arguably the most influential and successful artistic generation of US history, with such sample members pioneering modernism as F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ernest Hemingway, William Faulkner, and so on.

According to Strauss and Howe, the Lost Generation grew up during the Awakening phase of the *saeculum*. The spiritual awakening at issue here is considered the third of the American awakenings, started by the Missionary Generation, the parents of the Lost Generation. In terms of actual religion, the awakening, according to McLoughlin, emerged as a response to Darwinism and naturalism in the late 19th century: "[e]volution and the naturalistic, pragmatic philosophy of the "new social science"—particularly the behaviorist and Freudian psychological theories—seemed to undermine the whole basis of the Chris-

tian faith […]" (1980, 146). In addition to the advancement in science, new kinds of social protest had started to emerge in the *fin de siècle* US. Since the 1890s the American mood was branded with a new sort of nervousness, as James notes (2005, 2–4). This nervousness was perceived as something fundamentally feminine, and thus as something foreign and precarious to the masculine America in the brink of modernism and the First World War. Indeed, the change of the century was characterized by emerging women's movements, such as suffrage movement, which culminated in the nationwide women's right to vote in 1920. Ultimately, the Missionary Revolution movement was sparked by "agrarian protests and urban labor violence" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 232) during the tumult of the 1890s. Furthermore, Strauss and Howe view the Missionary Awakening as an idealist reaction to an increasingly commercialized, industrialized and science-based lifestyle of the Progressive Generation that preceded the Missionary Generation (1991, 233–5). The turbulent turn of the century begun to climax in 1912, when Wilson was elected among political and artistic radicalism, ultimately derailing into the First World War (Ruland & Bradbury 1991, 227–8).

Although the Missionary Awakening is the first social moment during which the Lost Generation lived, the first social moment, in which they were old enough to participate, and to turn the Lost Generation into a Mannheimian actual generation, is the USA's entry into the First World War in April 1917. Indeed, the 1910s in the entire Western world were characterized by the First World War. In the United States, Democrat president Woodrow Wilson led the country toward a more active foreign policy with USA's entry to war in 1917. "The world must be made safe for democracy" (1917, 2), told Wilson the Congress. In the final stages of war, Wilson partook in the championing of the peace agreement. Curiously, the same Lost Generation, which embraced the abroad-born Modernism to the fullest, grew up to be the most Republican generation is American history,

but despite the end of the Democratic reign "[…] in the elections of 1920", as Ambrosius notes: "[Republicans] did not overturn all the progressive reforms […] at home, nor did they succeed in killing [Wilson's] vision of America's new mission in international relations (2013, 619). The 1920s glowed golden, with the economical boom facilitated by the aftermath of the First World War and newfound American focus on reconstructing Europe's market. However, on one Tuesday in October, roughly 12 and half years after USA's entry to WW1, the Wall Street crashed and painted the Golden Twenties black, redefining the Lost Generation yet again. In sum, the First World War, the subsequent decade of unprecedented prosperity, and the eventual financial collapse tied the rootless Lost Generation together into an actual generation.

2.4.2. Generation X: The Middle Children Generation

If the Lost Generation of the 1920s received its fair share of criticism and chastisement uncalled for, the Generation X[5], the lost generation of the 1980s, was certainly lambasted by its predecessors as well. Generation X, born between 1961 and 1981, grew up in the midst of the Boom Awakening, 1960s counterculture and Cold War, raised up by parents of the Boomer Generation affected—at least in second hand—by the Second World War. The Boomers, like the Missionary Generation before the Lost Generation, were engaged in reacting to horrors of war through spiritual Boom Awakening, characterized by the Counterculture of the 1960s (Strauss & Howe 1991, 94) and "unprecedented social upheaval" (Millard 2007, 46). In comparison to the Lost Generation of the 1920s, in the case of Generation X the effect of rapid postmodernization in its numerous forms can be seen to heavy-handedly increase the degree in which the Xers became a new lost generation. So, whereas the factors behind yet another lost generation remained largely the same, the mag-

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[5] In the equation to solve the X in Generation X, numerous results in the form of nicknames are found: to name but a few, Thirteenth, MTV, Middle Children, and Yuppie spring readily to mind.

nitude of the factors grew apace with consumer culture and postmodernism. Similarly, the generational gap between the preceding Boomer Generation and Generation X grew to unprecedented and irreconcilable lengths.

According to Strauss and Howe, the members of Generation X were born between the years of 1961 and 1981—critically too young to remember the assassination of John F. Kennedy yet old enough to be brought up by MTV. In the United States, the Generation X was brought together through such definitive social moments as 1970s energy crisis, Three Mile Island, the fall of Berlin Wall to name but a few. As was is case with the Lost Generation, Generation X's first national upheaval came in the form of Spiritual Awakening, the psychedelic Consciousness Revolution of the love-and-peace 1960s, in which the Boomer parents were occupied in lieu of actually providing a childhood for their offspring. Eventually, the 1960s came to an end, and the love ran out. The childhood of Generation X differed crucially from preceding generations, even the Lost Generation, in two major ways: firstly, Generation X were children of divorce to an unprecedented degree, and secondly, they were subjected to a mixed parent-child relationship of record parental neglect on one hand, and Generation X's distrust to its elders on the other. "No other generation in living memory has come of age with such a sense of social distance—of adults doing so little for them and expecting so little from them" (Strauss & Howe 1991, 323–5). As Strauss and Howe note, from the early 1970s, the new generation realized that their predecessors were not in control: the Boomer parents, still recovering from the 1960s, turned out to be incompetent, which in turn manifested in their lashing out their own frustration on their children (1991, 317): "an adultlike fatalism about the weakness and uncertainty of elders" (1991, 322). When the "parents" of the society then declared their children as "a lost generation, an army of aging Bart Simpsons, possibly armed and dangerous" (Barringer 1990, qtd. in Strauss & Howe 1991, 317), it did everything but narrow the generational gap between

Generation X and their parents. Moreover, further sharing the statistics with Lost Generation, Generation X performed poorly in school; unfortunately well in suicide numbers and crime (Strauss & Howe 1991, 317). The increasingly mediocre results in the stratum of education combined with Robert Kuttner's "depression of the young", the reality of soaring housing costs and college tuitions with deflating wages of young works, led, as hinted by Strauss and Howe, to have-to-be mentality (1991, 320) and an unquenchable strive for opulence and financial success.

As established, the parental neglect through which Generation X had to come of age can be attributed to the spiritual awakening of the 1960s—the Fourth Great Awakening, as McLoughlin calls it. McLoughlin posits the awakening stem from Americans' disappointment on liberalism and the 20th century's union of religion and technology (1978, 179). The end of the Second World War, and the continuation of the Cold War, McLoughlin suggests, gave birth to a decade of neoconservatism, "an attempt to reaffirm the beliefs and values of an older era"—movement toward religiosity and *laissez-faire* capitalism (1978, 185). However, this kind of a more traditional spiritual awakening was soon juxtaposed with a new kind: indeed, the 1960s and the counterculture of the Beat Generation emerged—this is the Boom awakening, as Strauss and Howe call it. The counterculture was innately anti-establishment way of life, which developed largely due to the unprecedentedly populous Boomer Generation's reaction to the post-war American life of their parents. Curiously, the same post-war prosperity, which first manifested in the *bourgeois* materialism of their elders, then enabled the Boomers to abandon the same prospects. Moreover, the counterculture was politically engaged participating in such movements as the Civil Rights Movement and the Anti-Vietnam rallies.

In terms of religion, the 1960s became to be known as the decade of new transcendentalism, with the emergence of numerous, often originally Oriental, spiritual concepts

and religions, such as yoga, Zen, Buddhism, Taoism, and Hinduism (McLoughlin 1978, 197–202). The 1960s counterculture's spirituality stood in stark contrast to the traditional Protestant ethic and the Western worldview in general, and was thus, "un-American in […] profound ways" (1978, 199) to McLoughlin. Furthermore, the countercultural transcendence was famously achieved, alongside with the "rejection of bourgeois values" (McLoughlin 1978, 196), through drug experimentation with cannabis and LSD. However, come the end of the 1960s, the love and drugs had run out.

The 1970s was the first time when Western economies did not grow since the Great Depression, and was, in the scale of the larger global economical conflicts, marked by the Oil Crises of 1973 and 1979. The American mood was affected by the Watergate, the soaring divorce and abortion numbers and the failures in Vietnam War: the superpower was for the first time since the First World War questioned and challenged by, on one hand, oversea losses in South-Eastern Asia, and on the other hand, by the Cold War. Then, the Reagan administration moved into the White House to maneuver the country out of the collision course, but the implementation of Reaganomics and general inclination to war with unprecedented defense spending and upped ante of the War on Drugs did little to ease the ailing generation attempting to negotiate the adulthood with the ethos of 'whatever'.

2.4.3. The Cultural Change and Condition

Cultural change is a multifaceted and constant phenomenon. In this section, the background and the 20th century applications of the cultural change will be introduced. In 1950s, Julian Steward, in his *Theory of Culture Change,* to which sociologists and anthropologists refer still in the 21st century, defined culture change from a historical and anthropological viewpoint. His concept of cultural evolution bears distant yet noteworthy resemblance to its biological counterpart in sharing certain attributes: "first, a tendency toward

increasing complexity of forms, and second, the development of superior forms, that is, improvement or progress" (Steward 1972, 12). For example, this evolutional movement toward a higher level of complexity is visible in the cultural change over the course of the 20th century, on one hand, with the emergence of modernism, and on the other hand, its splintering into postmodernism and beyond. Basing his view on early 20th century research, the change of culture is fundamentally divergent, continuous, and multilinear: "particular cultures diverge significantly from one another and do not pass through unilinear stages", Steward concludes (1972, 28), which in the context of this thesis is visible, for example, in the emergence of modernism, initiated in Europe, but effectively repossessed and branded fundamentally American by the New World.

Over the course of the 20th century, at least two major shifts from one cultural and artistic movement to another occurred: first, from Victorianism to modernism, and second, from modernism to postmodernism. Such changes are virtually impossible to place on a specific date, due to cultural change's continuous nature. Hence, following years and numbers are at best common views and consensuses on movements at issue. Firstly, although modernism "emerged in Europe in the 1880s" (Boyne & Ruttansi 1990, 6), the American shift from 19th century realism to modernism is frequently located in the first decades of the 20th century, prophesized and precipitated by the likes of Gertrude Stein and Ezra Pound (Wagner-Martin 2016, 6–8), and "flourished amongst the generation of the 1920s" (Ruland & Bradbury 1991, 222, 211–215). Ruland and Bradbury delineate the exact pivot point in "the short span of years between 1912 and 1914" (1991, 227).

The shift to Modernism is by no means limited to arts, but encompasses a wide range of societal and cultural institutions through a multitude of forms—as Linda Wagner-Martin argues, "'Modernism' was *an attitude more than a single style*" (2016, 4; emphasis added). However multifaceted and multimedia, originally the American Modernism can

be, on one hand, seen as stemming from the need to detach from the English tradition[6] and to address something truly American and to "Make It New": "American modernists were thematically linked by their focus on the intrinsic Americanness of twentieth century life: the common. The real" (Wagner-Martin 2016, 4). However, as Ruland & Bradbury note, "[…] [g]reat (sic) artistic evolutions, large innovative periods in the arts, normally arise in a climate of cosmopolitanism" (1991, 225). On the other hand, with the Americanness and cosmopolitanism aside, modernism was built on and came to strengthen the societal changes of the *fin de siècle*, such as weakening of the class divisions and replacing the Protestantism (or religion, and large institutions, in general) with subjectivity and personal choice (Ruland & Bradbury 1991, 225). Fitzgerald and *This Side of Paradise*, in particular, address all of the abovementioned issues.

Furthermore, it is necessary to distinguish between the concepts of modernism and modernity. Modernism, as depicted earlier, is characteristically artistic and philosophical manifesting as a mindset and cultural movement, whereas modernity, according to Marshall Berman, denotes an experience "shared by men and women all over the world today" (1983, 15)—an all-encompassing era and condition, which started in the 16th century following the Middle Age. Fundamentally, Berman describes modernity as "pregnant with its contrary", citing Karl Marx's speech: "a maelstrom of perpetual disintegration and renewal" (Berman 1983, 15). At his clearest, Berman differentiates between modern and modernist as follows: "To be modern […] is to experience personal and social life as a maelstrom", "[t]o be a modern*ist* is to make oneself somehow at home in the maelstrom (1983, 345–6; emphasis original). Ultimately, the modern condition stems from a multitude of phenomena ranging from "great discoveries in the physical sciences" to "systems of mass communication", and from "industrialization of production" to "immense demo-

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[6] Interestingly enough, as Ruland & Bradbury note, "America, with its special gift for progress, *was* the twentieth century, though it would have to go somewhere else to make it happen" (1991, 203; emphasis original).

graphic upheavals" (Berman 1983, 16). Spanning nearly a half millennium, Berman's concept of modernity is divided into three phases, of which the final, the one taking place during the 20th century is pertinent to this thesis. Although the third phase is decorated for its global reach and "spectacular triumphs in art and thought" (Berman 1983, 17), it is also characteristically splintered and lacks luster: "As a result of this, we find ourselves today in the midst of a modern age that has lost touch with the roots of its own modernity" (1983, 17).

Dating the subsequent change from modernism to postmodernism is of even greater difficulty and ambiguousness due to the overlapping qualities and inherent vagueness between and within said movements: "Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant", as Lyotard outlined the ambiguous term's relation to its predecessor (1984, 79). Bearing Lyotard's words in mind, the actual shift from modernism to postmodernism is particularly blurred and vague. However, the Second World War is often proposed to be the watershed between the two movements. The bloodier reiteration of the Great War and its aftermath rendered modernism and other grand Western narratives essentially defunct (Lyotard 1984, xxii). Moreover, while modernism since the 1930s had begun to move toward mainstream and a one of Lyotard's grand narratives, the movement subsequently was canonized and simultaneously stripped of its mantle as *avant-garde*, something new had to fill the cultural void (Connor 2004, 5). The failures of modernism, the shattered *post-bellum* cultural landscape, and the swift emergence of consumer culture at an unprecedented level is whence postmodernism emerged.

Coinciding with the shift between artistic-philosophical movements of modernism and postmodernism, the modernity as an era and human condition has been argued to come to an end in the 20th century as well. As discussed earlier, the third phase of Berman's

modernity lost its luster and splintered during the 1900s, and although Berman himself appears hesitant to address postmodernity as the successor to modernity—at least in any other sense than the artistic-philosophical movement. However, as Berman argues, the 1970s represented stagnation in modernity: "The modernism of the 1970s was a modernism with ghosts" (1983, 333), which can be seen as a nod toward a shift in the cultural mode. It is worth pointing out that Berman's *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air* was written 1982. Thus, it is arguable that at latest the extensive changes in mass media and consumerism in the 1980s ushered the human condition in a radically different direction—whether it is a mere extension to modernity, or a separate phenomenon is largely besides the point—which in a lack of better word might as well be called postmodernity.

To sum up the section, these cultural changes can very well be seen connected to the World Wars, but as is the case with generations discussed earlier on in this thesis, the origins of both Modernism and Postmodernism are in truth linked to a far greater cultural, historical and social framework, a mere, albeit indubitably significant, part of which these wars are. However, the fact that the generations addressed—and during whose time these cultural movements emerged—share a wide spectrum of common denominators and characteristics is not coincidental. Similar generational mindsets and locations in regard to preceding generations can be seen almost as a prerequisite of sorts in order to create such significant changes in the strata of culture, art and beyond. Therefore, it is only logical to assume there is a connection between the changes in an individual's—especially one's whose actions have come to embody a whole generation—identity and the changes in cultural field, in which said individual operates. This is the case with *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction*: these connections will be examined and discussed in the analysis section of this thesis.

3. Analysis

In this section, divided into two subsections dedicated to *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction,* respectively, a thorough analysis and comparison of various identity crises and cultural changes and their interrelationship in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* is provided. Firstly, the generational issues, and their relation to cultural change and identity crises depicted in the novels will be addressed. Secondly, the novels' approaches to education and college, once again in relation to cultural change and identity crises, are discussed. After the analysis section, a conclusion of findings in this dissertation and their further applications is presented.

3.1. All the Sad Young Modern Men: The Crisis of Modernism

In essence, *This Side of Paradise* recounts the first 20 years of the education of a brilliant yet lost Amory Blaine. One person's—in part eager, in part reluctant—*bildung* comes to reflect a far wider experience of the American youth coming of age during an era defined by the uncertainty of the modern world—the same generation that was notoriously lost in the following decade. Over the course of this section, Amory's *bildung* in general will be discussed from, on one hand a coming-of-age perspective, and on the other hand, the perspective of academic fiction. Furthermore and more specifically, the two primary characteristics of the Lost Generation, as it is portrayed in *This Side of Paradise*, will be considered. Firstly, Amory Blaine and the Lost Generation's adolescent crises are traced back to the unprecedented relationship—or lack thereof—between the Lost Generation and their parents. This will be discussed in the subsections 3.1.1. through 3.1.2. Secondly, the effect of modernity on American identity, and particularly that of the Lost Generation during the

first decades of the 20th century, will be examined. The second point, then, can be divided into to subcategories: on one hand, modernism's effect on identity in a more general sense, and on the other hand, the modern masculine identity in crisis. These are analyzed in the subsections 3.1.3. and 3.1.4. Indeed, the Lost Generation's coming-of-age parallels the emergence of modernism, both reaching the post-adolescent state in the wake of the First World War. From the beginning of his career, Fitzgerald succeeds, quite unlike any other author, in depicting the very reasons and causes that put lost in the Lost Generation before it ever was called thus. Lastly, Amory and Lost Generation's education as depicted in *This Side of Paradise* will be discussed in the subsections 3.1.5. and 3.1.6.

3.1.1. Detachment and Youth

F. Scott Fitzgerald, and of his *oeuvre, This Side of Paradise* in particular, was first to capture and depict the emerging and characteristically modern idea of adolescence[7] successfully in the first decades of the 20th century United States. In *This Side of Paradise*, Fitzgerald is unprecedentedly sympathetic to the confusion and nervousness of the American coming-of-age in the liminalities between the waning Victorian values and incipient modernism. Naturally, this is partly due to Fitzgerald himself still being post-adolescent when *This Side of Paradise* was published, and a young adult for the great deal of his career. However, the way Fitzgerald viewed what Curnutt dubbed "postlapsarian" (2002, 35) youth was keen and unique and foreshadowed his later achievements in chronicling the Lost Generation.

Throughout the novel, and in particular in the first half of *This Side of Paradise* Amory is portrayed as an outsider. He is repeatedly depicted observing his peers and generation, a member of which he grows to epitomize more or less inadvertently. This can be

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[7] The word 'adolescent' was first coined in 1905 by G. Stanley Hall (Strauss & Howe 1991, 255).

seen resulting from the way Amory spent his childhood: "From his fourth to his tenth year he did the country with his mother in her father's private car […]" (*TSOP* 10). Indeed, until Amory is sent to Minnesota at the age of thirteen, he has practically no experience of his coevals whatsoever, and concomitantly has difficulties in adapting to the regular life of a pre-adolescent. With the exception of his implied many romantic interests and occasional male friends, Amory's low popularity continues at St. Regis' and until his time in college, although from early on "[h]e granted himself personality, charm, magnetism, poise the power of dominating all contemporary males, the gift of fascinating all women" (*TSOP* 23). In addition to his mother, Amory seeks a father figure of sorts, and adult companionship in general, in Thayer Darcy, and it is only during his Princeton days when Amory finally begins to identify with his coevals for the first time. Ultimately, it is quite arguable that by positioning Amory—at least in character's own mind—outside of the generational context at issue, Fitzgerald succeeds in creating a more exhaustive cross-sectional examination of the Lost Generation during its youth and formative years in academe.

The foremost factor behind Amory's detachment from his teenage coevals and his role as an outsider is his childhood and upbringing, "precocious adolescence" (1995, 62) as Monk calls it. He is exclusively homeschooled until the age of 13 by his mother with little to no exposure to his contemporaries. Beatrice Blaine, Amory's mother, herself had "[…] absorbed the sort of education that will be quite impossible ever again" (*TSOP* 10) all around Europe and its cultural elite. In an attempt to provide Amory with something similar, the two of them spent most of Amory's childhood traveling around the United States: "The Blaines were attached to no city" (*TSOP* 11). In part, Beatrice's parental approach can be traced back to Victorian values and visions of childhood and youth: "Victorians had defined youth as a moral apprenticeship in which children learned the prevailing ideals of *politesse* essential to bourgeois respectability" (Curnutt 2002, 32). However, the preceding

Victorian age does not fully explain the curious, to say the least, and although certainly well meaning, somewhat neglectful upbringing Beatrice passes on to his son. Essentially, Amory is robbed off of his childhood, as Beatrice mostly treats him as an adult and a little travel companion:

> So, while more or less fortunate little rich boys were defying governesses on the beach at Newport, or being spanked or tutored or read to from *Do and Dare,* or *Frank on Lower Mississippi,* Amory was biting acquiescent bell-boys in Waldorf, outgrowing a natural repugnance to chamber music and symphonies, and deriving a highly specialized education from his mother. (*TSOP* 10)

One of the prerequisites Mannheim posited for the formation of an actual generation and its shared generational consciousness is a common "*natural view* of the world" (1952, 298, emphasis original) based on the childhood experiences and early impressions. On one hand, it can be argued that in regard to this prerequisite, Amory is positioned outside of the general context, and that his natural view of the world is at least somewhat different from his peers. On the other hand, however, Amory is portrayed as spending his extraordinary childhood in the same cultural and national context, and does well share the same historical background as his contemporaries. Thus, it, too, is arguable that despite his unusual years before the age of thirteen, in a more general sense, Amory has been brought up in a rather similar environment as his peers. Furthermore, Amory being treated as an adult in his childhood can perhaps be seen as the enabling factor for his keen generational observations later on in his adolescence. However, Beatrice's attitude toward Amory, combined with the absence of Amory's father, can well be seen as an example of parental neglect that came to characterize the Lost Generation's childhood and youth. Indeed, among other supporting

statistics, the Lost Generation, according to Strauss and Howe, "entered the cash labor market at a higher rate than any generation of American children before or since" (1991, 251). Furthermore, the along with the Lost children and youth, rates of illiteracy and college entry actually dropped from the previous generation (Strauss and Howe 1991, 252).

Suddenly, at the age of thirteen, Amory's life is turned upside down, as he is brought to Minneapolis to live with his aunt and uncle in the aftermath of Beatrice's breakdown. Amory has to face an abrupt burst of the bubble in which his mother chose to live, and is placed among the regular people. The shift from maternal Victorian childhood to the orphan-like youth among peers parallels the actual emergence of adolescence as both an age location and subculture in the American context: "[…] while Victorian moralists insisted on a strict regime of moral policing to ensure proper entry into adulthood, modern thinkers promoted an indulgent attitude that encouraged teens to formulate their identities through peer affiliations" (Curnutt 2002, 30). Indeed, at the beginning of his time in Minneapolis and entering the regular school system, Amory is surrounded by his peers for the first time in his life. This proves to be somewhat demanding for a child brought up as an adult, and Amory has to readjust his innately superior attitude toward other students and his new teachers (*TSOP* 13–4). Perhaps resulting from his attitude, he remains somewhat unpopular until his entry to Princeton. In essence, Amory's years in Minnesota function as a transition from not only the childhood toward the adolescence, but also from Victorian values to modernity. At the end of his Minnesota years, he still feels himself superior, "a boy marked for glory" (*TSOP* 22), and is described as "drift[ing] into adolescence" with "[v]anity, tempered with self-suspicion if not self-knowledge, a sense of people as automatons to his will, a desire to 'pass' as many boys as possible and get to a vague top of the world" (*TSOP* 24).

Although Amory's delayed entry among his peers signifies mediation of his detachment from his coevals, to some degree, he remains an outsider throughout *This Side of Paradise*. In general, Amory's detachment is linked to a far wider, generational state of disconnection to not only previous generation's values, but also to the internal disengagement and confusion innate among the contemporaries of the Lost Generation in the making. As Strauss and Howe mark, the childhood and coming-of-age of the Lost Generation were "chaotic" (1991, 250), reflected in the then-current art movements, such as "surrealism, Dadaism, expressionism, futurism" and "overshadowed by pessimistic theories of social entropy and decline" (*ibid.*). To conclude, the Lost Generation was forced to grow up fast among unprecedented parental neglect and divisive generational gap with their parents. All this, combined with the nervous air of modernity and the ubiquitous cultural change, rendered the generation lost amid the confusion, *ennui,* and unprecedented disillusion in the development and the fate of mankind.

3.1.2. Becoming Amory

In this section, Amory's development and identity formation are discussed. The topics are first approached from a general point of view considering Amory's goals and maturing, after which a modernist point of view is presented. *This Side of Paradise* features two important dichotomies: first, becoming and being, second, personality and personage. Both polarizations are pertinent to Amory's development, to such an extent that they come to characterize him. Furthermore, the first dichotomy is a prime example of how *This Side of Paradise* mediates coming-of-age and identity formation with the modern condition.

Firstly, the dichotomy of becoming and being is addressed early on in the novel and is particularly pertinent to Amory's early adolescence.

> […] before he fell asleep he would dream one of his favorite waking dreams, the one about becoming a great half-back, or the one about the Japanese invasion, when he was rewarded by being made the youngest general in the world (*TSOP* 22)

At the time of this quote, Amory is 14 years old, described as young egotist. He is certain of his future success, "a boy marked for glory" (*ibid.*) reimagining the "ambiguous eyes" on the "faces of the throng" with the "most romantic of expressions" (*ibid.*). In early adolescence, his goal is to become a hero, regardless of the field, a hero nonetheless. This is connected to the second dichotomy of personality and personage.

Initially, Amory is informed of the idea of people representing either personalities or personages by Monsignor Darcy, who sees Amory and himself representing the latter category:

> Personality is a physical matter almost entirely; it lowers the people it acts on—I've seen it vanish in a long sickness. But while a personality is active, it overrides 'the next thing.' Now a personage, on the other hand, gathers. He is never thought of apart from what he's done. He's a bar on which a thousand things have been hung —glittering things sometimes, as ours are; but he uses those things with a cold mentality back of them. (*TSOP* 102–3)

This Side of Paradise is frequently categorized as a quest novel, and the personage, as described here, is the goal of Amory's quest. The heroes of Amory's early adolescence, great halfbacks or young generals, are certainly not personalities. Thus, on one hand, Darcy's personages are decorated celebrities and heroes—members of elite. For a daydreaming egotist that Amory is in his youth such goals are obvious. However, *This Side of Paradise*

reveals to Amory that the path to the elite is vastly more difficult and unclear—preparatory schools and prestigious colleges do not suffice alone. On the other hand, Amory himself defines personage as follows: "'It always means brainy and well-educated,'" interrupted Amory. "'It means having an active knowledge of the race's experience'" (*TSOP* 257). Bearing this in mind, it is significantly easier to understand the title of the final chapter, "The Egotist Becomes a Personage". Amory, rendered disillusioned with the world, stripped of his achievements, gives a generation-defining monologue demonstrating keen insight onto his generation.

Secondly, the first dichotomy of becoming and being can be associated with the modernity's effect on identity. The turn of the 20th century signaled a new, rapidly escalating level of modernity. Along with the modern condition, the identity, much in the same way as most of the phenomena and institutions held permanent and certain before, becomes uncertain, malleable and fallible. As James writes: "In response to an accelerating pace of change, the American character seemed to be losing its firmness. Worse, the new, more *fluid identity* engendered by modern conditions seemed effeminate" (James 2005, 2; emphasis added). The effeminacy of the modern identity aside, this half of the section discusses the newfound fluidity of identity: abandoning the past ideals in order to accept the change of what once seemed permanent.

Although on the surface Amory's view on becoming and being could be shrugged off as naïve daydreaming of future success, that same daydreaming can in fact be connected to a larger significance—that of modernity. Whereas becoming denotes change—upward, in the case of *This Side of Paradise*—being denotes something fundamentally static. A parallel between this notion and the fluidity of the 20th century American identity can well be drawn: although identity might have been viewed as a fixed concept previously, the new century brought along unprecedented nationwide cultural change, ultimately

manifesting in modernism, all of which naturally affected how identity was seen and developed. However, although Amory is depicted dreaming of becoming from his early adolescence, it takes several years, a few institutions of education, a World War, and some major identity crises for him to understand the significance of his adolescent daydreaming to how modern identity works.

Importantly, the recognition of change as the only constant is one of the milestones in Amory's modernist *bildung*: it takes place after yet another setback in his life, Monsignor Darcy's death: "After the death of Darcy, then, Amory arrives at the conclusion that he must resolve to embrace and accept change, and most importantly, to try to fashion something positive from the resulting chaos" (Monk 1995, 64). Thus, by abandoning any hope of stability stemming from the past ideals with which he was brought up, Amory succeeds in moving toward modern identity and condition.

3.1.3. Masculine in Modern Crisis

As established, Amory Blaine's coming-of-age takes place in a mutating cultural landscape. Ultimately, this nationwide change in the US results partly, but not solely, from the First World War. Mainly, however, it can be seen connected to the escalating pace of the modern condition, whose effects are particularly perceivable in the portrayal of masculinity as a part of identity formation in *This Side of Paradise*. In this section, the influence of modernity on masculinity and American manhood as it is portrayed through the character of Amory is discussed.

In general, the beginning of the new century marked an era of nervousness in the US: "[…] our whole continent has been growing nervous" (Pierce 1919, 81). This nervousness and hysteria were traditionally associated with femininity, and it was largely presented as a threat to established male-centric Americanism and American values. Since the

fin de siècle, various women's movements had surfaced and become a stable part of American political milieu climaxing in women's right to vote in 1920. Such newfound prominence of modern ideas, however, unbalanced the predominant discourse of gender roles, masculinity and femininity.

This Side of Paradise has been studied from the feminist point of view because of its strong female characters. Throughout the novel the women are, on one hand, mainly depicted as objects onto which Amory's fluctuating sense of self and masculinity is projected. On the other hand, the female characters are depicted maintaining their own direction in terms of their future, religion and such. Although somewhat contradictory, this depiction can be seen not only as encapsulating the change in the gender roles, but also as a sort of commentary to the changing masculinity and Amory's youthful notions. Next, a brief discussion of how women are portrayed in the novel is necessary since it, for instance, oozes the *zeitgeist* of the Lost Generation: "None of the Victorian mothers—and most of the mothers were Victorian—had any idea how casually their daughters were accustomed to be kissed" (*TSOP* 61). Indeed, *This Side of Paradise* introduces a new kind of young woman: "the Popular Daughter" (*ibid.*), stubborn, self-directing flapper who is having precisely as much fun as her male counterpart, in whose shadow women have too long awaited:

> Amory saw girls doing things that even in his memory would have been impossible: eating three-o'clock, afterdance suppers in impossible cafés, talking of every side of life with an air half of earnestness, half of mockery yet with a furtive excitement that Amory considered stood for a real moral let-down. (*TSOP* 61)

Furthermore, in *This Side of Paradise,* Amory's *bildung* is fundamentally characterized by

his negotiating of the feminine and masculine in his identity formation. Indeed, Pearl James, who in her article discussing the history and masculinity in *This Side of Paradise*, suggests "we read the novel's flaws as a reflection of a larger cultural anxiety about the coherence of masculinity in the early twentieth century, an anxiety exacerbated by World War I" (2005, 2). This way, Amory's antics throughout the novel come to reflect the construction of his masculinity. It can be argued, based on *This Side of Paradise,* that the significance of gender roles in the Lost Generation identity formation is one of the major results of the cultural change.

For the most part, Amory spends his childhood traveling around with his mother Beatrice, meanwhile his father Stephen merely "hovered in the background" (*TSOP* 9) with no real connection to his son, which made Amory essentially fatherless. However, although mainly raised up by his mother during his childhood, the education Beatrice passes on to Amory is only a part of the origin of Amory's effeminate characteristics. On the contrary, the social status inherited from his father—who also inherited it through sheer luck—can be seen as predisposing Amory's masculinity to crisis from the beginning: Amory comes from a wealthy background, but then toward the end of *This Side of Paradise,* when Beatrice dies and testaments most of Blaine fortune to the Catholic Church, Amory is left effectively disinherited and has to reconfigure his view on money and class entirely. In addition, the only two traits that Amory inherited from his father are "his height of just under six feet and his tendency to waver at the crucial moments", however those two constitute the "stray inexpressible few that made him worth while" (*TSOP* 9). The inherited wealth and class, the both of which disintegrate along the course of Amory's youth, combined with the passed-on irresolution come to form a formidable obstacle in Amory's *bildung* and becoming a personage. Thus, the feminine in Amory, to which the hereditary indecision in the cultural climate of the early 20th century US associates, is actually emphasized

already in the first sentence of the novel. Furthermore, masculinity naturally functions as a goal in Amory's youth, manifested in his dreams of becoming a hero of sports or war—rather masculine professions. However, these youthful aspirations fade and are replaced by literal ambitions, which in comparison stand as significantly less masculine. This development is paralleled by Amory's advanced negotiation of masculine and feminine. Moreover, masculinity as an obvious goal has been compromised and questioned in the flux of modernism and the First World War; masculinity is in crisis. As James posits: "[*TSOP*] figures masculinity as an unachievable ideal, complicated from without by contradictory cultural imperatives and from within by homoerotic desires, experiences of loss, and feelings of inadequacy" (2005, 5).

Indeed, masculinity comprises a fair deal of male adolescent identity formation, and in the early 20th century American mood, it functions as a prerequisite of a completed identity. In a changing cultural situation, this notion becomes contradictory and controversial. Over the course of *This Side of Paradise,* Amory employs various means in his pursuit of masculinity. Firstly, he seeks a father figure in Thayer Darcy, whose instructions Amory takes rather seriously, especially in his early adolescence. Darcy, however, is far from the traditional male role model: he is celibate and intellectual. Consequently, the model of masculinity passed on by Darcy to Amory can be seen connected to Amory's formation of modern masculine identity in *This Side of Paradise*: apart from tradition, aware of the questions and challenges of the time.

Secondly, Amory attempts to construct his unstable masculinity through his love affairs, which, however, one after another, fail. As Turner, who herself relies largely on Kimmel, suggests, "women are used as a symbol or a prize that is bestowed upon the individual" (2015, 24) in traditional American manhood which pursues power and control. From the beginning of his Minnesota years, Amory is depicted—not necessarily unlike his

peers—as viewing women as trophies and collectibles: "He collected locks of hair from many girls. He wore the rings of several" (*TSOP* 22). Over the course of *This Side of Paradise*, Amory has four true love interests, who all have their effect on his masculinity. The most significant of these affairs is the one with Rosalind Connage, a debutante and a flapper. Their break-up, which is presented as a play script with lines and stage directions, illuminates Amory's relation to women and masculinity. In the scene, Rosalind informs Amory of her intentions to marry another man, Dawson Ryder, "a good man and a strong man" (*TSOP* 186), and breaks their engagement. Amory's lines are spoken "a little *hysterically*" (*TSOP* 188; emphasis added), a qualifier which in its effeminate sense makes the protagonist stand in stark juxtaposition to Dawson Ryder's strong manhood.

Thirdly, and perhaps most importantly pertaining the generational aspect, Amory partakes in the First World War—ostensibly his masculine crusade *par excellence.* Coinciding with the USA's entry to the WW1, *This Side of Paradise* reaches interlude in May 1917, when the then Princeton senior Amory Blaine is suddenly drafted to war. Unlike many of his friends and classmates, Amory survives his stint in the trenches of the war-ridden Europe. As James points out, the First World War and the interlude it comes to represent in "the triptych structure" (2005, 7) of Amory's *bildung,* does not initially interest the protagonist: "The war began in the summer following his freshman year. Beyond a sporting interest in the German dash for Paris the whole affair failed either to thrill or interest him" (*TSOP* 58). However, by the time Amory is dispatched, his life, university career, and identity formation have been complicated by the death of his role model Dick Humbird, the dissolution of his relationship with Isabelle Borges, and the general failures in his studies at Princeton. As a result Amory spends the following year in existential stupor: "What Amory did that year from early September to late in the spring was so purposeless and inconsecutive that it seems scarcely worth recording" (*TSOP* 97). Thus, when fi-

nally the "war rolled swiftly up the beach and washed the sands where Princeton played" (*TSOP* 142), Amory views the whole ordeal more positively. Finally, the account of Amory's wartime experiences is distinctively brief: mere seven pages of correspondence with Monsignor Darcy and Tom D'Invilliers to convey the two years of horror.

As for the generational experience, the First World War marks the first proper social moment in the actualization of the Lost Generation. However, the way the war and its effect on Amory are portrayed hints toward insignificance, toward something that occurs *interim.* As Helen Turner suggests: "The defining experience of a generation therefore for Amory is a pause between two acts of real and significant experience" (2015, 48). Indeed, the discrepancy between the portrayals of Amory's life in the US in comparison to his time on the front reflects Turner's observation: the wartime, as it is depicted in *This Side of Paradise,* comes to resemble merely a bad daydream in its protagonist's life. Echoing this notion, in the final chapter of the novel, Amory, reminded by frostbitten autumn nature near Princeton, reminisces on a football game during his time in St. Regis' and a wartime battle in France. The juxtaposition of these two events, obviously quite different in nature and gravity, points to Amory's attitude toward war as a game or sport. However, the wartime Interlude between the two books in *This Side of Paradise* can also be seen as representing a sort of threshold to Amory, and his coevals for that matter: the war becomes the line separating egotist from 'personage'; a generation in the makings from the formidable Lost Generation: "This is the end of one thing: for better or worse you will never again be quite the Amory Blaine that I knew, never again will we meet as we have met, because your generation is growing hard, much harder than mine ever grew" (*TSOP* 153), writes Thayer Darcy to Amory during the war.

Still, the war itself does not offer an unambiguous resolution to Amory's negotiation of masculinity and modernity. As James points out, however, the war offers Amory an

excuse, "an alibi: after the war Amory attributes his lack of agency to the war, and explains his impotence as part of disillusioned postwar zeitgeist" (2005, 23–4). The third and final part of *This Side of Paradise* begins with Amory in love with Rosalind Connage—a relationship doomed to fall apart in culmination of Amory's masculinity's failure in confrontation with Rosalind, as was discussed earlier. Therefore, the war and the break-up together can be seen as enabling Amory a fresh start and a clean slate. Indeed, in the last chapter, Amory declares himself "free from all the hysteria" (*TSOP* 268)—hysteria, which on one hand associates with all things anti-masculine, but on the other hand, has been present in Amory's actions and lack thereof throughout his life.

3.1.4. The New Generation

In this subsection, the generational gap between the Lost Generation and the preceding Missionary Generation will be examined with a particular focus on modernity's effect on the intergenerational discussion. In the final chapters of *This Side of Paradise*, Amory returns to Princeton. Originally, Amory was to walk his way from Manhattan to Princeton on a foreshadowing "gray day, that least fleshly of all weathers; a day of dreams and far hopes and visions" (*TSOP* 254). *En route*, he is given a lift by an older man and his driver traveling in a car toward Princeton, with whom he engages in a heated argumentation pertaining many topical subjects, such as generational differences, but first and foremost, socialism. Perhaps the paramount of these subjects in transit is that of change: "'There are certain things which are human nature,'" […] "'which always have been and always will be, which can't be changed'" (*TSOP* 262), declares Garvin, the driver, assumedly a member of the preceding Missionary Generation. Outraged, Amory replies:

That's what makes me discouraged with progress. *Listen* to that! I can name off-hand over one hundred natural phenomena that have been changed by the will of man—a hundred instincts in man that have been wiped out or are now held in check by civilization. What this man here just said has been for thousands of years the last refuge of the associated mutton-heads of the world. It negates the efforts of every scientist, statesman, physician, inventor, doctor and philosopher that ever gave is life to humanity's service. It's a flat impeachment of all that's worth while in human nature. (*ibid.,* italics original)

These two excerpts condense astutely the generational gap in between the Missionary Generation and the Lost Generation, or any two subsequent generations for that matter. Naturally, the differing viewpoints are also concomitant to the age locations of the speakers: Garvin the driver appears to be in his middle age, Amory is nearing the end of adolescence. Indeed, when reminded of his young age, Amory retorts: "'Which may only mean that I have neither been corrupted nor made timid by contemporary experience'" (*TSOP* 263). Furthermore, Amory views socialism and the drastic societal change, which it entails, as "the only panacea" (*ibid.*), although toward the end of discussion he admits that he "wasn't sure of half of what I said". Indeed, Amory's experimentation with Socialism is depicted as brief, even whimsical—an adolescent gravitating from one idea to another in order to find a center to orbit. Moreover, the whole of Amory's socialist pilgrimage scene to Princeton is permeated with a stark sense of irony, as noted by Dan Seiters:

Luxuriating in a limousine, Amory explains—with much supercilious weariness—why he has jumped from the economic treadmill to become a radical socialist. Ironically, this socialist riding in a luxury car consents to discuss issues with Ferrenby,

the capitalist who picked him up as he hitchhiked, but tells the little man, the prole-

tarian chauffeur, to shut up. (qtd. in Powell 2011, 74)

Bearing all this in mind, it is quite arguable that Amory's sudden—yet intense—turn to so-

cialism is an act of a disenchanted adolescent compensating past disappointments by slip-

ping into overcompensation. The only certainty, to which he subscribes, is that of change:

"'I'm restless. My whole generation is restless'" (*ibid.*), "'I and my sort would struggle

against tradition; try, at least, to displace old cants with new ones'" (*TSOP* 264).

Upon finally arriving at Princeton late in the following night, the bells of the uni-

versity prompt an oft-cited analysis of Amory's generation. In particular, the difference in

introducing a generation from a detached point of view, as Amory here does, in compari-

son to Amory's fiery defense of the same generation when questioned by members of an-

other generation, is worth noting:

> Here was a new generation, shouting the old cries, learning the old creeds, through
>
> a revery of long days and nights; destined finally to go out into that dirty gray tur-
>
> moil to follow love and pride; a new generation dedicated more than the last to the
>
> fear of poverty and the worship of success; grown up to find all Gods dead, all wars
>
> fought, all faiths in man shaken…. (*TSOP* 268)

Although Amory is depicted as observing his generation from the outside, his young life,

or the course of *This Side of Paradise,* reads as a parallel to that of the Lost Generation.

However, the ubiquitous disillusion and disengagement, which result from the Victorian

world crumbling all around him, have rendered Amory paralysingly solitary, yet critically

on the verge of the "knowledge of the race's experience" (*TSOP* 257).

Prior to the First World War, Amory is depicted as an outsider in regard to his own generation. In the second half of *This Side of Paradise,* however, he is portrayed as gaining some true sense of belonging to his peers—for example, by distancing himself from the current Princetonians as an older Princetonian himself. Of course, this is likely to be due to Amory attaining some self-knowledge as well. As mentioned earlier, Amory himself noted how the First World War "killed individualism" (*TSOP* 203). Given the state of the world in which it emerged, the Lost Generation was born to get lost: in a world in which all traditional institutions have lost their significance and role as beacons by which one is to make their way through the "subjects of labyrinths, which were, after all, the business of life" (*TSOP* 266). Conclusively, West writes of the ending monologue:

> Perhaps the major problem for both young men [Amory, and Anthony of *The Beautiful and Damned*] is their sense of the ultimate futility of effort. In *This Side of Paradise* this feeling is lightly and cynically expressed, but it is there all the same – in Amory's frustration with religion, with education, and with romance. Amory fails at all that he attempts and concludes, in the end, that no system or arrangement of beliefs will give order and purpose to his life. (2002, 54)

This notion of the futility of effort echoes the generational disillusion and lost sense of purpose unlike any other. Indeed, the ending portrays Amory as departing from his past attempts: Catholicism, adolescent relationships, Princeton caste system, the First World War, even his brief diverge to Socialism—none of which offered him any lasting and definitive solutions.

Curnutt sees the ending of *This Side of Paradise* as an address to the generational gap between the Lost Generation and the preceding generation: "Fitzgerald defined adolescence as a process of emotional *and* historical accommodation. Ultimately, Amory does

not know how to grow up because the lessons imbibed from role models prove ineffectual in the modern age" (2002, 33; emphasis original). However, a prerequisite for such an astute analysis of one's own generation as Amory's is a combination of certain level of self-knowledge and a keen ability to observe one's own surroundings from the outside, through which a larger conceptualization is possible.

Indeed, the famous last words of *This Side of Paradise* point toward the significance of self-knowledge: "'I know myself,' he cried, 'but that is all'" (*TSOP* 268). Amory's journey from Manhattan to Princeton functions as a metaphorical conclusion to the whole course of *This Side of Paradise*—it parallels his *bildung* and identity formation and presents him with clear visions of who he truly is. As Turner points out: "Despite its qualification "'that is all'", [the ending] is highly positive: this self-knowledge is the basis of an identity that is authentic and not tied to social expectation, wealth and inherited privilege" (2015, 55). Here Amory can be seen as having reached a significant milestone in his quest for identity formation. Echoing the American mood in which the masculine is in danger, Amory's sense of knowing himself, at least in part, stems from being "free from all hysteria" (*TSOP* 268), as James notes (2005, 3)—free from effeminacy that has haunted Amory's becoming throughout the novel. Combining the notion of self-knowledge with the disillusion and change, Craig Monk writes: "The necessity of self-knowledge, coupled with the suggested impossibility of being certain about anything else, ultimately makes up the central idea in *This Side of Paradise*" (1995, 64). In a same manner as certain level of self-knowledge is a required in order to analyze one's peers, Monk sees Amory as "perceptive enough to recognize that the resuscitation of the self is the first step in redeeming the world around him" (1995, 65)—redeeming the world by abandoning his past and starting anew. After all, in a world newly characterized by impermanence and constant change, the

members of Lost Generation have fundamentally nothing but themselves—selves subject to the same ubiquitous ephemerality.

3.1.5. Education of Amory

The following two sections will focus on the various forms of Amory's education and his personal crises during his time in various schools, and discuss *This Side of Paradise* within the context of academic fiction. Over the course of *This Side of Paradise,* three different phases of education can be distinguished: firstly, Beatrice's homeschooling of Amory, secondly, Amory's years in Minnesota and St. Regis' during which Beatrice's influence is removed, and thirdly and most importantly, Amory's academic career in Princeton, which again can be seen as bifurcated between the first half's success, and the second half's idle drifting. The three stages of Amory's *bildung* presented here outline the various identity crises Amory undergoes as he ages through his adolescence. The first proper identity crisis comes with the move away from Beatrice's influence, the second during his time in St. Regis', and a multitude of late-teenage crises during his formative time at Princeton. In addition to the numerous identity crises in Amory's adolescence, this section is concerned to how the modernity can be seen reflected in the American education.

This section begins with a general outline of Amory's education throughout *This Side of Paradise* and Amory's childhood homeschooling, and education prior to Princeton. Appositely, *This Side of Paradise* features a table of Amory's *bildung* in which his fundamental self is juxtaposed to the four different stages of his varied education: Beatrice, Minnesota, St. Regis', and Princeton:

1. The fundamental Amory.
2. Amory plus Beatrice.

3. Amory plus Beatrice plus Minneapolis.

Then St. Regis' had pulled him to pieces and started him over again:

4. Amory plus St. Regis'.

5. Amory plus St. Regis' plus Princeton.

That had been his nearest approach to success through conformity. The fundamental Amory, idle, imaginative, rebellious, had been nearly snowed under. He had conformed, he had succeeded, but as his imagination was neither satisfied nor grasped by his own success, he had listlessly, half-accidentally chucked the whole thing and become again:

6. The fundamental Amory. (*TSOP* 98; emphases added).

This table, presented with the side notes emphasized here, gives an apt overview of Amory's educational progress over the course of the novel, although it reads somewhat pessimistic in its cyclical form—from the bare fundamentals back to bare fundamentals through an formal education that cost tens of thousands of dollars. However pessimistic the table, it echoes accurately how preparatory schools and college education is portrayed in *This Side of Paradise.*

Moreover, the table interlocks easily with the Eriksonian stages of development: the first two parts in Amory's table denote Erikson's first four stages, whereas the items 3 through 5 in Amory's table can all be placed under the fifth of Erikson's stages, the adolescent stage with the crisis of Identity vs. Role Confusion. At the end of *This Side of Paradise,* Amory has cycled back to his fundamental self, and can be seen in the brink of the 6th Eriksonian stage: adulthood and the crisis of Intimacy vs. Isolation.

In the first book of *This Side of Paradise*, "The Romantic Egotist", Amory Blaine is brought up a self-absorbed young boy by Beatrice—a colorful personality that is his

mother. Amory's childhood education is varied, and consists mostly of family's geographical rootlessness, and whatever Beatrice personally holds in value: among other things, the innate, *faux* aristocratic superiority to everything and everyone. As discussed in the earlier section, Beatrice herself had received an elitist education traveling around the cultural hotspots of the old continent, Lake Geneva, Rome, Vienna, England (*TSOP* 9–10), and naturally wanted to pass the same type of experience to his only son. Instead of Europe, however, Amory spent his childhood domestically: "From his fourth to his tenth year he did the country with his mother in her father's private car, from Coronado, where his mother became so bored that she had a nervous breakdown in a fashionable hotel, down to Mexico City, where she took a mild, almost epidemic consumption" (*TSOP* 10).

The curriculum of Beatrice's homeschool is, to say the least, "highly specialized" (*TSOP* 10). Besides the constant travels across the continent, Amory's childhood education consists of a curious range of subjects: from general life advice of American women and their accents, or not getting out of bed early—"'Dear, don't think of getting out of bed yet. I've always suspected that early rising in early life makes one nervous'" (*ibid.*)—to more traditional works such as "*Fetes Galantes"*, and "Brahms, Mozart and Beethoven" (*TSOP* 11). Until the age of 13, in addition to the special education passed on by Beatrice, Amory was exclusively taught by various tutors, regardless of whose best attempts Amory's "mind was still in a very good shape" (*TSOP* 13).

However, the most preeminent aspect of Beatrice's homeschool for "entirely sophisticated and quite charming" (*TSOP* 11) boys, that is passed on to Amory consists of egotism and superiority, which will prove problematic in all Amory's future pursuits, especially among his coevals. In addition to Beatrice's egotism, Amory's egotism can be connected to the complete lack of proper upbringing and parental neglect on Beatrice's behalf. Albeit ostensibly present in Amory's childhood, the way Beatrice treats and views Amory

as a little adult and travel companion—in a rather Victorian way—does not constitute much of a real upbringing and child-parent relationship; on the contrary, it comes much closer to parental neglect present in the childhood of the Lost Generation. Despite the relative brevity of the account of Amory's childhood with Beatrice, the impact of how Amory is brought up is naturally enormous—something with which Amory has to reconcile all the things to come in his life.

The process of abandoning Beatrice's teachings begins abruptly: at the age of 13, Amory is left to his own devices and in the care of his aunt and uncle after Beatrice is institutionalized following an apparently alcohol-related physical and mental breakdown. Concomitantly, Amory enters the ordinary world of education in Minneapolis where most of his prior home schooling is of little or no use. The paramount lesson Amory receives in Minneapolis is that of socializing with his peers—something he has been bereft of until Beatrice's breakdown. Indeed, throughout his adolescence and education, Amory has to reconcile his childhood and ego with the new surroundings: first, Minneapolis, then St. Regis', and later Princeton. This results in clashes and a highly complex relationship with authority. Due to his upbringing, Amory is frequently depicted in trouble with authority: "He was resentful against all those in authority over him […]" (*TSOP* 31). Furthermore, "School ruined his French and gave him a distaste for standard authors. His masters considered him idle, unreliable and superficially clever" (*TSOP* 22), all of which is by no means of aid in revivifying the student-teacher relationship. However, Amory is seldom depicted to be resentful to his mother, or Monsignor Darcy, both of whom he trusts on, and from both of whom he is eager to learn. During Amory's first stay with Monsignor Darcy, shortly after his mother's breakdown, Monsignor and his esteemed friend Thornton Hancock suggest that despite and, at least in part, due to Amory's brilliancy "[…] his education ought not to be intrusted to a school or college" (*TSOP* 30). Indeed, these moments of in-

formal education shared with various people separate from the campus context are contrasted against Amory's modest academic success.

All in all, although "the Minneapolis years were not a thick enough overlay to conceal the 'Amory plus Beatrice'", they come to represent the first stage of what the narrator calls "drilling the Beatrice out of him [Amory]" (*TSOP* 35). Post-Minnesota, the next stage is the preparatory school: After two years in Minnesota, Amory heads to preparatory school of St. Regis' in Connecticut. In whole and in the same manner as other levels of education, the period's American preparatory school system with its "vague purpose" and questionable "mental stimulus" of "To impart a Thorough Mental, Moral, and Physical Training as a Christian Gentleman, to fit the boy for meeting the problems of his day and generation, and to give a solid foundation in the Arts and Sciences" (*TSOP* 27), receives its fair share of criticism in *This Side of Paradise.* Nevertheless, Amory's choice of school pleases at least Monsignor Darcy: "'Of course. You'll hate school for a while, too, but I'm glad you're going to St. Regis's.' 'Why?' 'Because it's a gentleman's school, and democracy won't hit you so early. You'll find plenty of that in college'" (*TSOP* 29). With its lack of excessive premature democracy, as viewed by Darcy, St. Regis' is portrayed as somewhat old-fashioned, even backwards, yet simultaneously prestigious in Amory and Darcy's eyes. Despite that after his time there Amory reflects on St. Regis' with much detest, by the end of his two years in the New England boarding school, something worthwhile is actually achieved: Amory finally feels as if his mother's influence and teachings "had very painfully drilled […] out of him" (*TSOP* 35).

The narrator regards Amory's time in St. Regis' with even less enthusiasm while criticizing the preparatory school system: "Amory's two years at St. Regis's, though in turn painful and triumphant, had as little real significance in his own life as the American 'prep' school, crushed as it is under the heel of the universities, has to American life in

general" (*TSOP* 31). Indeed, the narrator goes as far as harkening back to England and its version of preparatory schools: "We have no Eton to create the self-consciousness of a governing class; we have, instead clean, flaccid and innocuous preparatory schools" (*TSOP* 31). All in all, the preparatory phase of Amory's education at St. Regis is depicted first and foremost as a temporary and transitional period between the liminalities of the childhood naïveté and Princeton prestige. The preparatory phase effectively signifies the cut-cord shift from a matron's little homeschooled egotist to an adolescent ready to formulate his own thoughts and to enter his youthful years of academe proper and to embark on his quest for personage and identity.

Eventually, with his mother's doting drilled out of him in Minnesotan winters and football fields of Connecticut, Amory continues onwards to Princeton. During Amory's final semester at St. Regis, Amory and Monsignor Darcy explore a cavalcade of possible Ivy League choices: "'I want to go to Princeton,' said Amory. 'I don't know why, but I think of all Harvard men as sissies, like I used to be, and all Yale men as wearing big blue sweaters and smoking pipes'" (*TSOP* 29). In addition, Amory views Princeton as "lazy", "good-looking" and "aristocratic"; "like a spring day" (*ibid.*)—attributes, which could surely be seen as Amory's characteristics as well. With little consideration of, or loyalty to, his former schoolmates, Amory follows his instincts to Princeton: "[he] had decided definitely on Princeton, even though he would be the only boy entering that year from St. Regis's. […] but Princeton drew him most, with its atmosphere of bright colors and its alluring reputation as the pleasantest country club in America" (TSOP 39). All in all, Amory's decision here is based solely on superficial things; there appears to be no deeper meaning or reason behind his choice.

3.1.6. Princeton – Evaporating Ideals in the Lost Paradise

> As he put in his studs he realized that he was enjoying life as he would probably
>
> never enjoy it again. Everything was hallowed by the haze of his own youth. He
>
> had arrived, abreast of the best in his generation at Princeton. (*TSOP* 89)

Amory's studies at Princeton comprise three years and amounts to the most part of *This Side of Paradise.* Amory's attitude toward his years in academe is one of necessity—and in that, not necessarily of a necessity to learn, but rather of necessity to go to a right university to meet the right people, and to receive the credentials of a prestigious college. However, this notion is to evaporate come the war and the first tidings of adulthood. The depictions of the collegiate lives of Amory and his friends are interspersed with the protagonist's trips to visit his various love interests, occasional festive excursions of his coterie, and inconsequential—to Amory, mostly—news from the Western Front. Indeed, Princeton is depicted as a haven amidst the tempests of modernity and the Great War: "The war seemed scarcely to touch them and it might have been one of the senior springs of the past, except for the drilling every other afternoon […]" (*TSOP* 147–8). All in all, Princeton's significance in *This Side of Paradise* is enormous. In her essay, Nancy P. van Arsdale goes as far as incitingly suggesting that "Princeton, not Amory Blaine, is the center of *This Side of Paradise*" (2000, 39). The novel certainly is located around the college, and in that, perhaps more than just in terms of a setting. However, in protagonist's stead, Princeton can be seen as the antagonist as well—and what a cunning antagonist it is. Princeton's role in *This Side of Paradise* is further discussed later.

For the most part, Amory's start at Princeton is pleasant: "From the first [Amory] loved Princeton—its lazy beauty, its half-grasped significance, the wild moonlight revel of

the rushes, the handsome, prosperous big-game crowds, and under it all the air of struggle that pervaded his class" (TSOP 46). Indeed, as Powell remarks, "the normative undergraduate type" of Princeton of *This Side of Paradise* consists of "lay-about social climbers" (2012, 59) such as Amory and his friends. It is worth noting that the reasons behind Amory's initial happiness have little to do with his actual studies—on the contrary, it is the extracurricular activities, and the novelty of collegiate life in general, that appeal to him. Indeed, of his educational undertakings, Amory demonstrates true interest only in football and writing, in former of which he focuses on his unpopular times in St. Regis, in latter of which he thrives toward in his attempt of upward mobility at Princeton. Besides eventually partaking in the editorial work of the *Daily Princetonian*, Amory produces an occasional poem to proclaim his love or to criticize his Victorian lecturers, and dabbles in playwriting within the frames of the Triangle Club, "a great seething ant-hill" (*TSOP* 58) of a musical comedy organization at Princeton. However, Amory is a harsh judge of his own literary endeavors:

> "I'll never be a poet,' said Amory as he finished. 'I'm not enough of a sensualist really; there are only a few obvious things that I notice as primarily beautiful: women, spring evenings, music at night, the sea; I don't catch the subtle things like 'silver-snarling trumpets.' I may turn out an intellectual, but I'll never write anything but mediocre poetry". (*TSOP* 85)

Such pieces of self-analysis are frequent over the course of *This Side of Paradise,* and in a sense function as checkpoints of sorts, assessing Amory's development and understanding of his own strengths and weaknesses—moments of self-evaluation and measurements of self-knowledge foreshadowing the ending.

However, the social reality of an Ivy League college catches up rather quickly: Amory's college years can be read as highly formative in shaping his views on the class and social life in general. As Craig Monk points out, at Princeton, "the best of Amory's intellect" is "concentrated on the matters of popularity, the intricacies of university social system and American society as represented by Biltmore Teas and Hot Springs golf-links" (1995, 62). From the beginning, Amory resolves to become "one of the gods of the class" (*TSOP* 47), in order to find contentment through re-seizing the position he once had won in St. Regis'—that of "being known and admired" (*TSOP* 48).

Amory's first attempt in this is to enlist in the football team, where he immediately receives recognition and praise, but after a few weeks' practice is injured to the extent that he is forced to skip the season (*TSOP* 47). Missing the direct path to the leading class of the college, Amory becomes frustrated with his self-proclaimed middle-class position: "Oh, it isn't that I mind the glittering caste system," admitted Amory. "I like having a bunch of hot cats on top, but gosh, Kerry, I've got to be one of them" (*TSOP* 49). This notion, however, is questioned and complicated with Amory's view on class presented early on in his time in Princeton: "Amory resented social barriers as artificial distinctions made by the strong to bolster up their weak retainers and keep out the almost strong" (*TSOP* 47). From the beginning of his academic career, Amory is depicted as class-conscious. Amory's first two years at Princeton constitute a study of the society and mobility within it, as reflected in the upper-class microcosm that is Princeton. Amory's sophomore year represents the crest of his academic career: first, he is admitted to the editorial staff of the *Daily Princetonian*, and then to the Cottage Club: "Long afterward Amory thought of sophomore spring as the happiest time of his life. His ideas were in tune with life as he found it; he wanted no more than to drift and dream and enjoy a dozen new-found friendships through the April afternoons" (*TSOP* 74). The celebration of club entries continues well into June,

when Amory and his coterie is met with an adversity: one of them, Dick Humbird, whom Amory admired to an extent that approached romantic love, is killed in a drunken car crash on the group's return from a party in New York City.

Dick Humbird's death signifies a turning point in relation to Amory's time at Princeton. Amory has just won some social prestige for which he has been striving for nearly two years, and he has arguably peaked in the Princeton's social microcosm. He had always viewed Dick as "a perfect type of aristocrat" (*TSOP* 78), but after Dick dies, the revelations of his origin—"'If you want to know the shocking truth, his father was a grocery clerk" (*TSOP* 79)—and his unspectacular death, driving under influence, send shockwaves through Amory's perception of aristocratism:

> All that remained of the charm and personality of the Dick Humbird he had known —oh, it was all so horrible and unaristocratic and close to the earth. All tragedy has that strain of the grotesque and squalid—so useless, futile... the way animals die.... Amory was reminded of a cat that had lain horribly mangled in some alley of his childhood. (*TSOP* 87)

Perhaps it is indeed his challenged notion of upper class and aristocracy, which shoves Amory downhill. In the fall term of his junior year, Amory opts to compete for the hallowed chair of *the Daily Princetonian*. This is where Amory's poor study record catches up with: yet another failed examination—a result of which Amory announces pompously in the presence of his coterie—thwarts Amory's hopes for the chair. Until this point, the aura of freshman has allowed him to skip lectures, flunk examinations, and in overall, perform academically poorly. Furthermore, Isabelle Borgés, Amory's love interest of the time,

has broken up with him some time ago. All these hardships push Amory into a downward spiral of inconsequence and alcohol abuse:

> What Amory did that year from early September to late in the spring was so purposeless and inconsecutive that it seems scarcely worth recording. He was, of course, immediately sorry for what he had lost. His philosophy of success had tumbled down upon him, and he looked for the reasons. "Your own laziness," said Alec later. "No—something deeper than that. I've begun to feel that I was meant to lose this chance. (*TSOP* 97)

These drastic failures, however, force Amory to re-evaluate his philosophy and approach to life in general—he faces a proper identity crisis that stems from his own disposition, and through the losses in his personal life, he has to reconfigure what he truly is made of. Despite the difficulties, Amory has, at least at this point, a somewhat clear vision that he has some type of destiny on way to which such disappointments are of essence. Amory soon realizes his destiny is not tied to his career at Princeton—that the college is not necessarily his friend but as a matter of fact, his antagonist.

As discussed earlier, *This Side of Paradise* features surprisingly few depictions of classroom activities. Furthermore, as Powell writes: "*Paradise* is virtually free of college administrators/'wardens'" (2011, 52), and much in the same manner, the actual accounts of lectures and lessons at Princeton are few and far between. On the other hand, Amory's Princeton is by no means a source of formal knowledge, but "the pleasantest country club in America" (*TSOP* 39) to which adolescents go for the Ivy League prestige. The "half-grasped significance" (*ibid.*) which the narrator connects to Amory's first impression of Princeton surfaces here. In a way, from the very beginning of his college career, Amory

has been aware of the incompleteness of his own perception of Princeton and its significance—he certainly did not enter Princeton in hopes of studying, but in pursuit of a fixed path and solution. Such a fixed path, however, does not exist, at least to ones like Amory, whose ambitions are only hindered in a collegiate context. This can be read as foreshadowing the further and deeper questioning of such institutions' importance, to which Amory drifts along his way to disillusion.

In terms of education, perhaps the paramount contrast put forth in *This Side of Paradise* is the juxtaposition of formal learning versus informal learning—Princeton versus life and mistakes. Already the departure point set by the novel's name and its epigraphs by Rupert Brooke and Oscar Wilde reflect this: "…Well this side of Paradise!... There's little comfort in the wise" and "Experience is the name so many people give to their mistakes" (*TSOP* iii). Indeed, over the course of the novel, Amory is only seldom portrayed attaining knowledge within the framework of formal education, or even employing the knowledge he has received in classrooms. On the contrary, he is forced to learn by himself and through his mistakes—the latter especially in case of his relationships with other people. Besides Beatrice, the two most important teachers in Amory's life are Thayer Darcy, whose contribution to Amory's spiritual and cultural education was discussed earlier, and his fellow Princeton student, "that awful highbrow, Thomas Parke D'Invilliers" (*TSOP* 53). D'Invilliers is of literary talent: "My gosh, Kerry, what in hell is it all about? I swear I don't get him at all, and I'm a literary bird myself" (*TSOP* 50), is how Amory reacts to D'Invilliers's poem early on. Although D'Invilliers is never described as Amory's closest friend, his influence on knowledge-thirsty Amory is significant in terms of literature and writing. Amory, as a self-proclaimed "literary bird", devours a vast and varying bulk of texts over the course of *This Side of Paradise:* a grand total of 64 texts and 98 authors are mentioned, as Broccoli points out (*TSOP* viii).

Amory's actual participation in lectures and formal study is characteristically de-scribed as inconsequential and inane—Amory and his disposition at least as much as any other aspect to be blamed—"The room was a study in stupidity" (*TSOP* 95), an attempt on geometry is introduced, or "[m]ost of them were so stupid or careless that they wouldn't admit when they didn't understand, and Amory was of the latter" (*TSOP* 95). Monk sum-marizes the collegiate life accurately: "In all, the portrait of university life in *This Side of Paradise* is, for the most part, one of intellectual stagnation." (1995, 62)

As a academic fiction, *This Side of Paradise* reads as a criticism of Princeton and the American concept of higher education in general, albeit, as Powell suggests "perhaps less weighty or explicit" (2011, 52). On the other hand, Powell suggests that "the attitude its protagonist would have toward faculty and classroom study carries its own rather force-ful critique of lockstep curricular standardization in the university" (2011, 52–3). Although Amory's frustration toward education at Princeton may not manifest explicitly, it is as a matter of fact something far more pervading: his disappointment with Princeton literature studies transmutes into disappointment with the whole institution, and is further reflected in a sense of anxiety toward "all flawed human 'systems'" (Powell 2011, 46) surrounding him. Furthermore, in his essay on the question of vocation in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Beautiful and Damned,* West suggests that, "the American educational system bears much of the blame for the predicaments of these protagonists. Neither Princeton (for Amory) nor Harvard (for Anthony) teaches its students usable skills" (2002, 53). While West attributes the usable skills here to the grooming process for aristocrats and future leaders, they are attributable to the incipient cultural change to modernism as well. Indeed, the education provided in an institution such as Princeton is bound to a traditional set of values due to sheer necessity: the prestige of the Ivy League colleges is connected to the very tradition, to resistance to change, even. Thus, as mentioned earlier, too, Princeton

comes to represent the haven in the midst of the cultural change toward modernism that is reshaping the entire American lifestyle. Therefore, it is far from necessary to Princeton to provide any useful skills to deal with the changing world—on the contrary. This is quite accurately reflected in Craig Monk's observation that "Amory's personal development is hindered throughout *This Side of Paradise* by the reality behind his observation that American society is changing all around him" (1995, 63). Indeed, Fitzgerald's Princeton appears inundated with a stark sense of contradiction, "half-grasped significance" (*TSOP* 46): if college is a necessary and prestigious, even, step toward adulthood, career and life in general, why is it seemingly immovably fixed with tradition and backwardness in the face of the change?

Nevertheless, Princeton becomes simultaneously the very paradise of the novel's title. 'This' side of Princeton begins after Amory's failures: "Your stock will go down like an elevator at the club and on the campus" (*TSOP* 96), Alec Connage warns Amory of what will happen if he fails the examination. From the blue slip he presents to his coterie begins Amory's postlapsarian life. Although Amory learns to criticize Princeton, its significance remains with him throughout *This Side of Paradise.* Until the end, Amory wishes to re-enter the spires and gargoyles of the college, to the extent that he pilgrimages back to his *alma mater* in the final chapters. During his postlapsarian time in Princeton, Amory sees and idly observes the attempts of change in the campus: a member of Amory's coterie, Burne Holiday, the revolutionist *par excellence* in *This Side of Paradise,* stages a movement to abolish the club system at Princeton—a system that reinforces social inequality. The coup succeeds, and Burne turns slowly into a pacifist-socialist hermit, whom Amory admires: "'he's the first contemporary I've ever met whom I'll admit is my superior in mental capacity'" (*TSOP* 129). Before the men are drafted to war, Burne quits Princeton, sells his possessions and rides away on a bicycle in order to follow his literary mentors,

Tolstoi, Whitman and Carpenter into a peaceful life. As Arsdale remarks: "as Amory watches Burne depart, he doubts his own ability to make personal decision that goes against the grain of the establishment" (2000, 48). Arsdale's sentiment echoes the very words in which Amory is introduced in the beginning, to be precise, the traits Amory inherited from his father: "tendency to waver at crucial moments" (*TSOP* 9). In this way, Amory is depicted—if not plain jealous—at least somewhat bitter in regard to his friends turned into rivals achieve a some type of illusion in their own lives: on one hand, Tom's notion of Princeton's toxic influence on creativity and intentions to leave prematurely, and on the other hand, Burne's personal rebellion.

Ultimately, Amory (over-)compensates his identity formation's lateness with his radical yet ultimately naive post-war turn to socialism, for which he rants on his ride to meet the ghosts of his lost paradise in the final chapters of *This Side of Paradise*. However, if *This Side of Paradise* recounts the construction of Amory, in the ending monologue Amory is presented as tearing apart, deconstructing himself through deconstructing the very makings of his generation. Furthermore, Amory is depicted as a survivor of the First World War, adolescence, and yet another personal crisis. As foreshadowed in the tabulation of Amory's education presented in this thesis earlier, "after Amory + St. Regis' + Princeton"[8] there remains only "fundamental Amory" (*TSOP* 98). Finally, Amory has reached the end of the adolescent stage of the Eriksonian development—he has formulated some type of identity—albeit one, which never is introduced in *This Side of Paradise*. Looking at Amory's own deliberation of himself as a romantic, the ending, however, can be read as positive: "No, I'm romantic—a sentimental person thinks things will last—a romantic person hopes against hope that they won't. Sentiment is emotional" (*TSOP* 172).

Education, and Princeton in particular, is more than a mere theme or milieu in *This Side of Paradise*. Amory's time in Princeton can be read as a summary of not only

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[8] Here, the First World War could easily be added.

Amory's, but also the youth of the Lost Generation: a pleasant beginning with success turned into disenchantment and disillusion toward an institution that comes to represent all other such staples of American life. *This Side of Paradise* suggests that the Lost Generation was the first in a larger scale to be let down by the promise of certain success after jumping through hoops of preparatory schools and prestigious universities—Amory Blaine being a prime example.

3.2. Maladjusted, Nihilistic, Malcontent, Self-serving Miscarriages: The Crisis of Postmodernity

"and it's a story that might bore you but you don't have to listen" (*ROA* 3)

Bret Easton Ellis's sophomore effort, *The Rules of Attraction* (ROA)*,* chronicles the fall semester of 1985 in a private liberal arts college in Camden, New Jersey[9]. The novel reads as a kaleidoscopic and frantic account of Generation X's collegiate debauchery and it is narrated in the first person by a grand total of 13 seemingly disparate yet ultimately quite homogenous and mostly overlapping voices. Although each narrator's style differs from others, and the narratives vary from blank to several pages of chaotic, diary-like rambling, the subject matter remains same, to the extent in which characters and their actions blend and blur into one. Of these 13 voices, three emerge as distinctive protagonists of *The Rules of Attraction*: Sean Bateman, Paul Denton and Lauren Hynde, each more delusional and narcissistic than the next one. The three are bound together in an insinuated *ménage a trois*: insinuated in the sense that the love triangle misses one confirmed edge. However, the entire course of the novel is suffused with unreliability in terms of both narration and signification (Mandel 2015, 83). Not only do the narrators appear undependable and unwilling to disclose what really happened, but also their accounts are continuously compromised by heavy substance abuse, self-editing, and contradiction. In essence, *The Rules of Attraction* portrays the Generation X's ailing postmodern coming-of-age in college during the Reagan 80s amidst the swirl of mass culture and consumerism.

This section provides an analysis of the 1980s characteristically postmodern cultural change and its connection to the identity crises of the members of Generation X navi-

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[9] Based on Ellis's own *alma mater,* Vermont-located Bennington, a student of which he still was when authoring his debut novel *Less Than Zero.*

gating through college life, as portrayed in *The Rules of Attraction*. Furthermore, this section is compared to the previous analysis of *This Side of Paradise* where applicable. Although Fodor & Varga (2014) exhaustively argue that the narrative voices in *The Rules of Attraction,* and in Ellisian textual universe in general, are homogenous and mostly indistinguishable, at least each of the protagonists in the novel has their own versions of the adolescent crises, which will be analyzed in the first three following sections. However, with this in mind, regardless of the character at issue, the experience of identity formation and adolescence becomes shared to Generation X. Furthermore, the identity formation of Generation X differs vastly from that of the first decades of the 20th century: "The 1980s ushered in a new phase of American capitalism that involved the cultural domination of an 'individual', whose'identity' became largely determined by consumer/popular/postmodern culture" (Grassian 2003, 12). Unlike the previous section pertaining *This Side of Paradise* with a single protagonist, the depictions of various adolescent identity crises are distributed among the whole cast of *The Rules of Attraction,* and primarily, the three protagonists.

Owing to the traditions of the *bildungsroman* and academic fiction, the question of identity is self-evidently central and multifaceted in *The Rules of Attraction*. The novel's depiction of identity is postmodern: "The novel revolves around a case of mistaken identity," Mandel (2015, 84) argues and continues: "in the novel's opening pages each of its main characters is introduced by a vignette that feature mistakes of affect and value" (*ibid.*). Although the cast of *The Rules of Attraction* strives for identity and are depicted in the process of identity formation throughout the novel, the meaningfulness of identity in the postmodern condition coupled with the depart from overall signification ultimately leads to the question of identity's significance and reliability, and the effect this has on the generation grasping for significance.

In the subsections 3.2.1. through 3.2.3., the identity crises of Sean, Paul, and Lauren, respectively, will be discussed and paralleled to the wider generational context of Generation X. Next, Generation X's college experience as depicted in *The Rules of Attraction* will be analyzed in the subsection 3.2.4, whereas the subsection 3.2.5. addresses the generational gap between Generation X and the preceding Boomer Generation. Lastly, the subsection 3.2.6. examines cyclicality in terms of generations with a particular focus on Generation X.

3.2.1. Neglect and Expectations

Although *The Rules of Attraction* begins with a chapter narrated by an unnamed narrator, Sean Bateman is the first protagonist to narrate a chapter—and also, the last. Thus, compositionally, Sean's accounts form the clearest arch over the course of the novel. Compared to the two other protagonists in the novel, his character appears the most historically rootless and most unreliable as a narrator. Simultaneously, his characteristically disenchanted and outright bored disposition and credos such as, "'Rock'n'roll. Deal with it'" (*ROA* 108) come to underline the Generation X's ethos unlike any other single textual item in the novel. "He didn't tell me a lot about himself but I wasn't particularly interested in his background anyway" (*ROA* 98), his alleged lover, Paul Denton, recounts. What is known of Sean, however, is that he is a directionless 21-year old drug-dealing senior with a motorbike and slight tendency to racism. This section chronicles the three major identity crises through which Sean goes during the fall semester of 1985.

In general, Sean's background is portrayed only through scraps of information, mostly found in other people's accounts. This can be seen as one representation of Generation X's childhood: fragmented and disjointed amalgam changing from one recount to another. Not unlike other aspects of his life, Sean's family history is only briefly chronicled.

The Bateman family is obviously of significant wealth: Sean and his brother Patrick are depicted riding limousines to and fro while meeting their father in luxurious restaurants and bars, and their father, on his deathbed, is surrounded by aides, whom Patrick intends to fire "as soon as [his] father dies" (*ROA* 273). The previous year, Sean's mother has been institutionalized—"'It was about time'" (*ROA* 267), as Patrick tells Sean. Over the semester portrayed in *The Rules of Attraction*, Sean's father's health deteriorates and he is depicted to enter intensive hospital care. During the hospital scene, Sean and Patrick have a discussion about Sean's future: "you're not going to last another term at that place" (*ROA* 276), the latter tells bluntly the former in regard to Camden. In general, Sean's attendance at Camden appears to be something like a rebellion against his family: "'[Father] would be pleased to know that you're taking, let's call it, a 'leave of absence' from that place'" (*ibid.*), Patrick continues.

Despite his family's wealth, Sean is self-allegedly on Financial Aid at Camden College, which can be associated to the rebellious nature of his choice of college. Although only briefly discussed, the key identity crisis Sean is portrayed to undergo during the span of *The Rules of Attraction* is the contradiction between his family background and his own —or Generation X's—pursuits and choices. All other major crises are ultimately connected to this conflict. Indeed, succeeding the optimistic Boomer Generation, Generation X was "expected to make their way easily through life because of the swath Boomers had carved" (New Strategists 1, 2014). Based on Sean's dialogue with his Brother, it is safe to assume that throughout his life Sean has been subjected to such expectations by his family and father. The sheer act of attending Camden can be read as a deliberate divergence from a career in finance and/or in the family company. However, Sean's revolution and identity crisis here is a convoluted one: despite opting for something wildly different, Sean is repeatedly portrayed as aimless, disenchanted and indifferent in terms of his studies or future. On

one hand, this can be seen as true divarication from his family values, but on the other hand, this can also be viewed as Sean trusting on having a safety net of his family's wealth underneath him when he becomes sufficiently bored of Camden, or realizes that his lackluster study attempts lead to nowhere.

In relation to the Eriksonian stages of development, most of *The Rules of Attraction* takes place on the fifth stage, the adolescence. This stage is characterized by questioning all prior knowledge and authorities in order to achieve fidelity—a process through which Sean is depicted going here (Erikson 1968, 128–9). Furthermore, a part of Erikson's theorizations of the identity formation on the adolescent stage is concerned with the external pressures, for example, by parents (Erikson 1980, 141–3). Although Sean's parents lack voices, Sean himself feels pushed toward conformity through his brother's voice, which can be seen to result in, on one hand, further identity confusion, but on the other hand, the formation of a negative identity, which manifests in Sean dealing drugs and treating other people poorly.

Of the three protagonists, Sean is depicted perhaps as the most superficial one with his constant sexual evaluation and objectification of women on his sight. This superficiality, however, can be associated with Sean's sexual confusion, which is the second one of Sean's identity crises. Indeed, the abovementioned missing edge of the love triangle, around which *The Rules of Attraction* revolves, is Sean and Paul's relationship. Whereas Paul recounts their erotic escapes yearningly and in much detail, Sean never admits to them. Their relationship remains unresolved: on one hand, it could be Sean's insecurity and denial in accepting his bisexual affairs, or on the other hand, Paul's vivid imagination and drunken hallucinations. Indeed, Sean and Paul's relationship is characterized by the latter's unrequited infatuation with the former, and their systematically differing accounts of times spent together. Sean's denial can be seen as stemming from his conservative fam-

ily background and values inherited thence. Indeed, Sean is implied to be more conservative in his political views than the rest of the cast of *The Rules of Attraction*[10]. As Lauren notes after their relationship begins: "He also seems suspicious. I have the feeling that he's the mastermind of the Young Conservatives Party" (*ROA* 213). So, whereas the rest of the characters take an occasional Reagan calendar as a joke or a prime target to vandalize, Sean maintains political neutrality.

In a sense, Sean's superficial commentary on the looks of the women surrounding him can be read as a masquerade and overcompensation of his sexual confusion. To apply this crisis to the Eriksonian theory of development, Sean's sexual confusion can be read as a part of adolescent explorations typical to the fifth stage of psychosocial development (1968, 128). However, since there is no apparent negative outside feedback to Sean's bisexual relationship, it follows that Sean himself—yet by no means free from his background—deems bisexuality as a failed attempt in identity formation.

The third major identity crisis comes in the shape of Lauren Hynde, "the completely beautiful girl" (*ROA* 119). As Sean and Paul's relationship unravels to coldness, Sean quickly becomes infatuated with, and possessive of, Lauren: "It can't be *my* Lauren?" (*ROA* 121; emphasis original). All of a sudden, Sean who has been continuously depicted as disaffected and emotionally numb, is lovesick and drowning his sorrow in meaningless acts of sex and whatever drugs he can access. Not before long, the two end up sleeping together for an undetermined period of time before the relationship dissolves in infidelity and indifference. In the aftermath, Sean attempts suicide thrice. However unaffected and unmoved by the dissolution of their relationship Sean has appeared, the suicide attempt and various other signs point toward Sean's apparent feelings toward Lauren: "'Why don't you love me, Lauren?'" (*ROA* 243), Sean bursts out after the couple's discussion concerning

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[10] In fact, Sean's moderate to conservative view on politics represents Generation X's future political leanings the best with a 69 per cent majority identifying themselves moderate or conservative (New Strategist Editors 2014, 3).

Sean's unfaithfulness. It is worth noting that most of these signs of Sean actually feeling something come from other people's accounts, whereas his own narration is disaffected and cold, probably due to self-editing. After various incidents, Lauren attempts to finish their relationship, "'No one ever *knows* anyone'" (*ROA* 260; emphasis original), Lauren tells Sean after admitting to being involved with someone else. However, despite their troubles, Sean and Lauren return back together—partly because of old habit, partly because of alcohol. After a drug-fueled day in a Winter Carnival, Lauren confides that she is pregnant for Sean, yet Lauren herself is not completely certain of the fatherhood, since it could be anyone of the four other people she has had recent sexual encounters—a fact that she does not disclose to Sean (*ROA* 292–3). The news makes Sean to immediately propose to Lauren, to which she agrees. Ultimately, Sean and Lauren's relationship concludes as a dream-like sequence in which the two never marry, but instead end up driving around the state for an extended period of time without speaking to each other, staying in motels and taking cocaine. Eventually, Lauren has an abortion.

Amidst the all-permeating sense of indifference and indirection, moments with Lauren offer a rare glimpse where we see into Sean taking action, and being sensitive and caring. In particular, the moment Lauren tells him she is pregnant, Sean is immediately ready to accept matrimony and a life of stability with her and the baby, who might not even be his. After a tumultuous semester of identity crises, Sean is partly involuntarily placed in a complex situation where several of his crises collide. Lauren, through whom Sean could perform at least some of the expectations to which he has been subjected by his background and himself, provides him with an escape from the confusion of youth.

Ultimately, Sean and Lauren's relationship dissolves into irremediable silence, culminating in Lauren's abortion, the cost of which Sean does not cover. *The Rules of Attraction* ends with Sean driving aimlessly away: "I didn't know where I was going. Someplace

unoccupied I hoped. Home was gone" (*ROA* 325). The ending is all but uplifting: Sean's identity formation remains unresolved, complicated from the beginning by the expectations he stubbornly carries with him, and his *bildung* during the semester questionable. The semester chronicled in the novel appears to have gone to waste, and the cyclical arch finds Sean as directionless and disenchanted. However, the ending with Sean on his journey to the unknown, as long as it is away from what once was home, is the outcome of his *bildung* here—it also comes to echo the generational gap between Generation X and their neglectful, uncomprehending parents. Of the three protagonists, Sean's identity crises are most clearly connected to the generational differences between him and his parents. Indeed, Sean is depicted negotiating the parental neglect of his fragmented childhood with the current expectations to which he appears to be subject. The contradictory expectations of conformity have rendered Generation X lost in a chaotic world where finding one's own direction appears to be nearly impossible.

3.2.2. Intimacy After Identity

Paul Denton is the second protagonist to narrate a chapter. In comparison to Sean, Paul appears relatively composed: he seems to be in no hurry to anywhere and in rebellion against no one. He, too, is of an affluent yet "boring" (*ROA* 32) background: his parents are not divorced, which stands out in the Camden demographic, especially among his classmates. Although Paul's identity crises may appear vague and subtler than his counterparts', they can also be seen as more attributable to, and identifiable for a wider demographic of Generation X. During the fall semester depicted in *The Rules of Attraction,* Paul is in his senior year, majoring in Drama, which he hates (*ROA* 31). As discussed above, Paul and Sean's relationship, or lack thereof, plays a crucial role in *The Rules of Attraction.* On one hand, Paul, unlike Sean and Lauren, is not depicted as going through a clear-cut identity crises,

but can instead be seen as trying to navigate the beginning of his lovelorn post-adolescent life by drifting from one relationship to another similarly disappointing and hurting: "And I sit there feeling like the hapless lover. But then I remembered, of course that now I'm only hapless" (*ROA* 35). On the other hand, Paul's acts of repeating his relationships and mistakes can be read as lack of self-knowledge and concomitant disconnection to the surrounding people and world. In a sense, his identity crisis is embodied in Sean and their relationship. In the end, Paul emerges, if not victorious, at least on the better side of the novel's cast in terms of *bildung* and identity formation.

If Sean is the foremost manifestation of Paul's identity crisis, the root of that crisis is Paul's past relationship with Mitchell. The relationship extends to the time prior to the fall term depicted in *The Rules of Attraction,* and they are implied to share a long common history, as their fathers are business partners back in Chicago, from where the two come originally (*ROA* 98). The relationship appears to be of paramount significance to Paul, who afterwards keeps on comparing Mitchell to, and repeating the relationship with, other people. Before the fall term of *The Rules of Attraction,* the relationship has dissolved: Paul recounts intensive 24 hours in New York City, bearing a multitude of signs of impending break-up (*ROA* 21–3). Later, when Paul encounters Mitchell in Camden, the latter tells him that he was warned (*ROA* 50). Despite overt depictions of "wild bouts of sex" (*ROA* 21) and their happier times together, Paul portrays their relationship as a secret: "We could never meet at his place because of 'roommate trouble,' he would gravely tell me about. We would meet usually at night, usually after a movie or some bad off-off-off Broadway play" (*ibid.*). Furthermore, it is implied that to be with Paul, Mitchell needs to be "[…] drunk or high, which seemed [his] constant state those last months" (*ibid.*). Essentially, Mitchell acts as a precursor to Paul's love interests to come: a sexually explorative male, who has

no interest in risking his implied inheritance, career or even reputation by engaging in an overtly homosexual relationship.

Soon after the definitive encounter with Mitchell, Paul meets Sean for the first time proper. As established, Paul and Sean's relationship is a complicated one due to the sheer credibility of the accounts in regard to it: Whereas Paul's depictions are vivid and rich in detail, Sean does not ever mention the relationship in sexual way. However, in bearing with the pattern of Paul's love interests, as discussed earlier, Sean's denial can be seen merely as a result of failed exploration, or at best, a way to maintain his identity and reputation—a coping mechanism amidst sexual confusion and contradicting values and desires. Furthermore, the only outside account of their relationship comes from Lauren, who compares Paul—with whom she too was involved—and Sean to Paul and Mitchell (*ROA* 261). At any rate, for Paul, Sean sparks comparisons to and memories of Mitchell: "[Sean's] body wasn't as nice as Mitchell's…" (*ROA* 98), or how the air in the room after they have had sex "…remind[s] [Paul] of Mitchell strangely enough, but he was already fading away, and it was hard to remember, what he even looked like" (*ROA* 108). Eventually, the relationship unravels: while Paul embarks to New York City to meet with his mother, Sean turns to Lauren: "I was standing there wet, my life ruined. It was over with Sean. Another one bites the dust" (*ROA* 144), Paul recognizes the pattern in his life.

After recovering from the disappointing break-up with Sean, Paul shows signs of growth and advancement. In a self-critical inner monologue he acknowledges his role in his social circles and his shortcomings in his love endeavors and is ultimately depicted as reaching insight and self-knowledge:

And this depresses you, makes you think, will you always be the quintessential faggot? Will you only pant after the blond-tan-good-body-stupid-goons? And will you

always ignore the smart, caring, sensitive type, who might be four-foot-three and have acne on his back but who is still, essentially, *bright*? Will you always pant after the blue-eyed palooka who's majoring in Trombone Theory and ignore the loving Drama queer who's doing his thesis on Joe Orton? You want it to stop, but…

…then the tall blue-eyed Freshman, who doesn't even have a hint of interest in you, will ask for a cigarette and you'll be blown away. (*ROA* 269; emphasis original)

Thus, Paul, whose narration is cut off significantly earlier than other protagonists', can be actually viewed as having grown and developed amidst what perhaps are not the best conditions to do so.

To conclude, Paul's relationship with Sean can be read as resulting from the former's prior relationship to Mitchell, around whom Paul, in a way, has adolescently constructed his own identity. Because of the numerous comparisons, it is clear that Sean functions as an object to Paul still in rebound. When their liaison ends, Paul is depicted as having gotten over Mitchell, which manifests as his actual *bildung* and increased readiness for the nearing adulthood. In Eriksonian terms, Paul is at least partly situated at the sixth stage known as Intimacy vs. Isolation, where the worst adolescent identity crises are behind, and some sense of identity has been gained. There is no sexual or occupational confusion in his doings. In relation to the other characters, Paul's *bildung* and identity crises stand out as a somewhat successful foil to the two counterparts, Sean and Lauren. Whereas Sean and Lauren represent the different aspects of Generation X's fumbling identity formation, Paul's character stands a contrary example. As is the case with Paul, the main conflict during the sixth stage revolves around negotiating intimacy and relationships. In this pursuit, Paul's achievements may remain questionable, yet his getting over past relationships, around which he has constructed his identity, is certainly a sign of development.

3.2.3. Unreal Identity

Although Lauren Hynde is the last of the three protagonists to narrate a chapter, her voice amounts to most of the non-male narration in *The Rules of Attraction.* However, Lauren's narration is just as delirious and unreliable as that of her male counterparts, which is high-lighted in his mostly unrequited relationship to Victor. Indeed, despite the love triangle in the center of the novel is fixed on her character, she is never truly interested in Paul or Sean, but in Victor, who for the most part of the novel is in Europe chasing another girl. Her situation bears some resemblance to Paul's relationship to Mitchell, around which he has constructed his identity in the past. Over the course of *The Rules of Attraction,* Lauren is depicted as changing majors rather whimsically, which can be associated with her iden-tity formation that is in a similar shape of exploration. The only destination in her life seems to be Victor—a deep infatuation, which upon Victor's return turns out to be unfortu-nately unrequited. Furthermore, Lauren's family background appears to be largely dys-functional with her father dating a woman of Lauren's age (*ROA* 55), and mother, whose contact Lauren attempts to avoid as much as she can (*ROA* 128). Lauren's background can be seen as resulting in her seeking safety, certainty and approval, which she over the course of *The Rules of Attraction* gains by flirting with her 70-year-old professor and fi-nally, by almost eloping with Sean. Ultimately, the ending, despite being ostensibly happy for Lauren, leaves her character's identity formation unresolved. Although Lauren's iden-tity crises are similar to Paul's and especially Sean's, her identity formation is complicated by the blending of real and unreal, which affects heavily her relationships and worldview.

From the beginning of Lauren's accounts, it is quite clear that her life is fundamen-tally defined by her long distance relationship with Victor, who appears in virtually all of Lauren's chapters, usually as a subject of Lauren's missing or desire: "I lie there, thinking about Victor. A very common morning" (*ROA* 145), after a night spent with someone else,

although Lauren has already told the reader that "[…] I had promised myself that I would be faithful to Victor and Victor had promised me that he, too, would be faithful" (*ROA* 15). However, while there is no contact whatsoever with Victor for weeks on end, Lauren ends up filling his void with other people, all the while maintaining her feelings to Victor: "It feels good but I'm not turned on. I just think about Victor and lay there. Victor" (*ROA* 16). Eventually, Lauren becomes involved with Sean, with whom she breaks up within a few weeks, projecting her feelings of abandonment precipitated by Victor's continuing absence, just to get back together and to declare that she is pregnant for him, although the father could quite as well be any of Lauren's sexual partners that term. After telling Sean, Lauren agrees to his sudden proposal, and the two head to New York City where they stay with Lauren's older friends living what the guests view as normal life. Later, Lauren dreams of life with Sean and Evian water and kiwi fruit: "It was unpleasant but not unbearable and in some indefinable way I felt safe" (*ROA* 297–8). However, the visit unravels unexpectedly quickly after Lauren and Sean's brief discussion about Victor: "This was our last real conversation. […] We left the next morning" (*ROA* 299).

The trip the two embark on Sean's car continues just as dream-like:

> The next week (or maybe it was a couple of days) seemed like a blur. Motel rooms, driving all night, getting stoned as his friend's MG raced through the snowy roads. Everything seemed speeded up, time moved faster. There was no conversation, we didn't speak to each other those days on the road. (*ROA* 302)

The unreal, cocaine and alcohol-fueled 2,000 miles act as a hospice of sorts for both Lauren and Sean who have hoped to escape the meaninglessness and uncertainty of their lives. The scene oozes with death, foreshadowing the eventual decision to abort the baby—and

the glimpse of meaningfulness and safety inherited from the previous generations: "All of the trees were dead. There were dead skunks and dogs and even an occasional deer by the sides of the roads, their blood staining the snow" (*ROA* 304). The trip ends with bellicose definitiveness, with the two driving back to Camden from the abortion clinic with Lauren promptly refusing Sean's truce. At the end of the novel, after the reunion with Victor, Lauren is depicted as "feeling not that much different than I did in September, or October, or for that matter, November, for Victor with some certainty" (*ROA* 323). On one hand, she ostensibly reaches her destination finding peace and happiness for a moment, but on the other hand, in truth, she is blissfully unaware that Victor did not even remember her name correct, and that his intentions with Lauren are limited to "a place to stay" since it will be "a long, cold Christmas" (*ROA* 320). Here, drawing parallel from Lauren (in her relationship to Victor) to previously discussed Sean (ready to entirely change his life for a child, whose father he may not even be), and in a wider sense, to Generation X, a pattern of yearning for something, if not traditional, at least stable can be discerned. In a way, this pattern manifests in a mentality of ignorance is bliss: neither Lauren nor Sean is aware or even actively interested in how their respective scenarios appear for anyone else expect them subjectively. This could well be seen as a mere continuation of the superficiality and surface orientation of Generation X. However, such reading would be incomplete. Indeed, the whole blissful ignorance is a telling example of how Generation X, despite, and perhaps because of the aimlessness and indirection, seeks for stability and meaning—come it through knowledge or intentional ignorance.

Essentially, the problematic nature of Lauren's convoluted relationship to Victor, and if viewed as a substitute, to Sean, as well, can be seen to stem from the blending of the real and the unreal in Lauren's life. Based on the contradictions of her and Victor's accounts of their relationship—compare Lauren's at times ignorant devotion to Victor, to

Victor's misremembering of Lauren's name and first reaction upon the two reuniting of "[…] this girl I sort of saw a little bit last summer" (*ROA* 320). Furthermore, at one point, Lauren herself acknowledges: "He starts to fade. I get scared. I get scared because while I'm laying here it suddenly seems as if he doesn't exist anymore. It seems as if only the song that's playing does, not Victor. It's almost as if I had made him up last summer" (*ROA* 40), which eventually turns into: "But can you remember what Victor looked like? No you can't, can you?" (*ROA* 128). In bearing with the warping liminalities of reality and dreaming, while staying with Lauren's older friends, Ann and Scott, Lauren dreams of a married life with Sean, who turns to Victor, who turns to Scott, while Lauren turns to Ann (*ROA* 297–8). To conclude, Lauren's character can be seen as constructed through dream-like and willfully ignorant relationships to Victor and other men around her, effectively depriving her of feminine individuality and power of decision.

Of the protagonists, it is Lauren who appears to be the most lost in terms of identity formation, and her *bildung* in *The Rules of Attraction* most insignificant. Although she, too, is situated somewhere between the fifth and sixth stage of Erikson's psychosocial development, her identity is riddled with lacking self-knowledge and realism—without forgetting Generation X's adolescent conditions such as aimlessness and disenchantment. Like Sean, Lauren, too, negotiates her incomplete identity with performance, of which the sequence following Lauren revealing her pregnancy stands out as a prime example. Yet again, not unlike Sean, in the end of *The Rules of Attraction,* Lauren herself feels that she has somehow returned to the starting point—before Camden, before the fall term depicted in the novel. Her wavering identity formation resembles that of Amory Blaine more than Sean or Paul's.

With her dysfunctional family background and ever-changing majors, Lauren comes to embody her generation. In a way, Lauren's fixation on her non-existing relation-

ship to Victor can be seen as a desperate and delusional means to navigate the all-encompassing meaninglessness of her time. Although she never acts as if she were in a monogamous relationship, the imaginary boyfriend abroad comes to function as a life raft for her. Furthermore, the female identity formation in adolescence, as depicted through Lauren, appears to be even more difficult than that of her male counterparts.

3.2.4. Most Cab Drivers Have Liberal Arts Degrees: Education of Generation X

As discussed before, academic fiction overlaps with the *bildungsroman* in many a way, yet the most important pertaining this thesis is the process of identity formation during studies. However, negotiating college experience with postmodern condition in the 1980s is not quite a success, at least in *The Rules of Attraction.* As Grassian notes, in regard to the decade and postmodernism: "[…] the common university goal of fostering individual identity and voice is at odds with postmodern theory, which sternly critiques the idea of stable, individual self" (2003, 78) Although *The Rules of Attraction* certainly belongs to the tradition of academic fiction, the actual material from the lecture halls and classrooms is rare. As Fodor & Varga note: "*The Rules of Attraction* almost entirely lacks the world of the classrooms and the teachers, and where these do surface, they are ridiculed at once". However, due to Camden's relatively remote location, most of the novel is confined to late-night dormitory rooms, campus bars, and cafeterias, with only few significant diversions in the outside world. In its isolation, Camden functions as the prime backdrop for a microcosm, whose inhabitants are disaffectedly eager to define the era in which they live—however pretentious and *blasé* their efforts might be. "The function of college is to provide a setting, free of past, future or an external reality", as Eder (1987) keenly observes in his review of the novel. Moreover, one of the characteristics of academic fiction is its criticism toward formal education, in which *The Rules of Attraction* thrives. Indeed, without excep-

tion, the educational system from the lower levels of school—"High school sucked" (*ROA* 124)—up to the college level, is systematically derided, or at best, treated with utter indifference and deemed to insignificance. In this section, the main aspects of the college life as depicted in *The Rules of Attraction* will be discussed.

Firstly, the entire student body of the Camden College seems to view the concept of the major subject mainly as insignificant and disposable. For example, of the three protagonists, only Paul has a fixed major—this bearing in mind that both Paul and Lauren are seniors, and Sean a sophomore (*ROA* 13, 57, 192). On the other hand, even Paul is ready to drop five of his senior year courses to be together with Sean: "I stopped going to Acting II, Improv Workshop, Set-Building, and Genetics. None of them made a difference anyway. At least not in the way he did" (*ROA* 95). In the beginning, Lauren is majoring in Art, but as she finds herself unable to paint anything in Victor's continuing absence, she changes to Poetry, where she is welcomed with approval and praise by her 70-year-old teacher Vittorio. At any rate, Lauren changing majors is impliedly nothing new: "'I'm changing my major. Are you listening?' 'Again?' Judy says […] She laughs. 'Again? Did you have to say that?'" (*ROA* 56). However fickle and indifferent Paul and Lauren's attitudes toward their major subjects appear, Sean's is by far the most vague. Indeed, his major subject is never quite revealed, albeit often guessed and suggested. His own take on it extends his credo: upon being asked about his major, Sean—unsurprisingly—replies: "Rock'n'roll" (*ROA* 45–6). Leading assumptions include a wide range of subjects from "Reagan' Eighties. Detrimental effect on underclassmen" (*ROA* 45–6) to Mechanics, Computers and all things in between. A casual romantic interest of his asks Sean whether he is "still an Art major", and at one point he lies to Lauren that he majors in Computers "which might end up being true" (*ROA* 203). The disposability of major subjects, if seen as beacons by which identity formation occurs, echoes the postmodern condition and the concept of volatile identity.

Sean's regard of the importance of his studies in Camden is aptly condensed in his reaction to Paul lying about failing two courses: "My type of guy" (*ROA* 60). Indeed, Sean is never, over the whole course of *The Rules of Attraction,* depicted passing a single class. Instead of centering their studies about their majors, the cast of *The Rules of Attraction* are often found reasoning college quite differently: for instance, as Lauren states disaffectedly after fellow student's suicide: "But what else is one to do at college except drink beer or slash your wrists?" (*ROA* 213). Lauren's oversimplification fits the tradition of academic fiction surprisingly well: whereas drinking beer represents success in adapting to the surrounding society and mores, slashing one's wrists is indubitably connected to failure and even loneliness. However, the fluidity of major subjects can also be viewed as a parallel to identity formation. Certainly, four years of studying a specific subject at the height of adolescent identity crises has its effect on an individual. Furthermore, and in the novel's case, as Mandel proposes: "in their quest for identity they are constantly changing their major; true to the newer-is-better logic of the commodity" (84). This logic can indeed be applied to the three protagonists: whereas Paul has a fixed major and his identity formation is arguably the most successful of the three, Lauren's consumerist attitude toward them parallels the identity crises and the incompleteness of her adolescent identity. Finally, Sean's dodging of questions concerning his major subject can, too, be seen as reflecting his identity in a sense that he has no answers himself.

Secondly, similar attitudes apply to courses and participation in studies. The cavalcade of courses named in *The Rules of Attraction* range from "[…] Kafka/Kundera: The Hidden Connection" (*ROA* 246), and Postmodern Condition given at Camden, to Richard's controversial made-up courses such as "'Gangbanging 111. Freebasing tutorial". [and] "Oral Sex Workshop" (*ROA* 167). Formal studying, let alone participation in classes appears close to extinct: for example, Sean justifies his participation in a class by saying: "I

cannot concentrate on anything and have only shown up in class because I don't have any pot left" (*ROA* 246–7). If a love interest is a sufficient reason for Paul to drop classes, Sean does not need quite as much: "I find the right room even if it looks like the wrong room. It's the teacher's office and there is no one here. I'm not that late either, and I wonder if maybe they've changed rooms. If they have, then I'm dropping this class, I'm not going to put up with that kind of bullshit" (*ROA* 64). Needless to say, term papers and exams play the minor role of "premonition" (Eder 1987)—at one point, Paul derisively explains Richard's erratic behavior as related to mid-term examinations (*ROA* 176). The apparent triviality of courses coupled with descriptions of courses running with little to no student participation, with lecturers either passed out on whiskey and cannabis (*ROA* 63) or having affairs with students (*ROA* 37), convey quite harshly how the novel views the entire concept of college education. All in all, Camden is portrayed as a haven of sorts for the students: "'I came here to get away from jock idiots and frat assholes'" (*ROA* 45), Sean states. Truly, the isolated Liberal Arts College offers a safe microcosm for experimenting and transitioning from the childhood into adulthood. On the other hand, the college as represented in *The Rules of Attraction* is reduced to a dissipated vacuum of debauchery and inconsequence with all possible clichés of sex, drugs and rock and roll: The party is the static background noise, and the occasional act of studying is a mere diversion from the everyday flow of drugs, promiscuity, and irreverence.

If Amory Blaine entered Princeton with high hopes, only to be crushed and rendered disillusioned of the system, no student of Camden College enters it with other hopes than entering a four-year party, and if all goes well, to achieve a degree, which will bear little to no consequence in their lives after they exit the premises. Although Generation X was at its time the most educated generation (New Strategist Editors 2014, 33)—only to be

surpassed by the following Millenials—the role of the college as a way to adulthood, responsibility, and work life was affected by their relationship with the Boomer Generation.

On one hand, the collegiate life depicted in *The Rules of Attraction* captures that of Generation X. Whereas Sean attends a Liberal Arts College as an act of rebellion against his Boomer parents, who impliedly would rather see him following their path into finance, for Paul and Lauren Camden College seems as an effortless and natural choice—Generation X going through motions, opting for whatever appears even slightly interesting for them in that moment with no intention of studying anything the preceding generation might view useful. Furthermore, as suggested by Mandel, the collegiate life in *The Rules of Attraction* is "commoditized through academic disciples" (2015, 84) in keeping with the consumerist culture and criticism toward American institutions of higher education with soaring tuitions. On the other hand, the cast of *The Rules of Attraction* cannot be directly viewed as the prime embodiment of Generation X with their background in wealth, or in that none of the protagonists, or, perhaps Sean[11] in the future fits the stereotype of the yuppie working on the Wall Street. However, this can then be seen to result from the mentioned wealthy background of each protagonist: they have and will inherit enough to never need to worry about something as trivial as work. Although this does not apply to the whole generation, by the 1980s the college education had become a staple in American adolescence.

3.2.5. Whatever Happened to Hippie Love: Intergenerational Attractions

The Rules of Attraction reads effortlessly as a vivid description of its time and undergraduate *zeitgeist* in the USA during the Reagan eighties. Echoing the accelerating consumer culture, the novel is flecked with slogans and similar tag lines familiar from the advertise-

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[11] Like his brother Patrick here and in *The American Psycho*.

ment world, which in the Liberal Arts mirror house are mangled into the postmodern fabric of Generation X. In terms of generations, the natural juxtaposition in the novel is between Generation X and the preceding Boomer Generation. Besides the parents of students, and staff, one of the most important and interesting manifestations of this juxtaposition is between the Yuppie students of the 1980s, represented by Sean, and a single, unnamed hippie girl representing the 1960s. Indeed, the hippie girl acts as a bridging factor between, not only the two generations, but also the two decades. In this section, the convoluted 'whatever' generational ethos of Generation X as depicted in *The Rules of Attraction* will be contrasted to the preceding Boomer Generation. Furthermore, the *bildung* and cultural location of Generation X will be discussed through the interrelationship between the two generations.

The Rules of Attraction depicts Generation X as nearly irretrievably lost and doomed with its protagonists walking in drug-induced sleep, aimlessly, grasping half-heartedly at the lost signifiers traditionally considered as stabile, such as reproduction, marriage or graduation. As Fodor & Varga point out: "The characters cannot decode the driving force behind either their, or other people's actions" (2014). Without such self-knowledge it appears almost impossible to proceed and achieve anything of real substance —for what is *real* substance to Generation X? All three protagonists act at times impulsively and passionately, yet at the same time they all are apt to quit and give in whatever requires their attention and effort, and thus: "[W]hen [the protagonists] seem to be acting openly and full of emotion, we perceive a disconnection between act and motivation" (Fodor & Varga 2014), which again connects Generation X to postmodern. In a sense, the protagonists are irrevocably dislocated from authenticity in emotion and intention.

The divide between the cast of the novel and their parents appears unbridgeable with the languages of the two sides turning mutually unintelligible. Each of the protago-

nists has a somewhat problematic relationship with their parents, ranging from internecine understanding and language to avoiding all contact. As Paul's mother Evelyn notes: "And for a very brief moment there it seemed as if I never had known this child. He sat there, his face placid, expressionless. My son – a cipher. How did it end up this way, I wondered" (*ROA* 177); the intergenerational contact is effectively rendered to code breaking and puzzle-solving.

However, the connection between the two generations, although ostensibly beyond repair, is not inexistent. Frequently, the Generation X cast is depicted as pondering how their parents or peers would respond to the state of the Gen X's collegiate lives: "What would her parents say if they knew that this is all she does here? Write haiku on her Apple, drink vodka like some crazed alcoholic fish, screw constantly? Would they disown her? Would they give her more money?" (*ROA* 125). Such prospects are portrayed looming behind the carefree attitude of the students at Camden College. However, most of the students have their futures secured with their wealthy origins—the Liberal Arts College is nothing but a four-year formality in the guise of half-baked rebellion, which resembles more a drunken summer camp than something of real value. In keeping with the tradition of academic fiction, the citations above read as criticism toward a system that on one hand allows depicted pseudo-collegiate undertakings, but on the other hand, is incapable of accommodating the needs of a new generation in the changing cultural landscape. Furthermore, the college signifies the transition from the childhood with parents to young adulthood in the society, and thus affects the relationship of the children emerging from home and their parents left behind.

As mentioned, *The Rules of Attraction* can be seen bridging Generation X and the Boomer Generation through an unnamed hippie girl with whom Sean has been sexually involved. "This was the Eighties, I kept thinking. How could there be any hippies left?"

(*ROA* 101), Sean wonders amidst his interest in the hippie girl. Indeed, in addition to the two generations, the character comes to connect the 1980s with the 1960s and the Counter-culture through her lifestyle: "JIMI LIVES was painted in big purple letters on her door. She wore tie-dyed shirts. […] She wore bell-bottoms and tried to learn how to play the sitar but was always too stoned. […] Like all rich hippies […] she spent a lot of time fol-lowing The Dead around" (*ROA* 102).

However, the same hippie drives a BMW, can afford all types of drugs and has no goals whatsoever: "She is both a fashion choice in the '80s and a residue of the '60s; she is defined by her carefully cultivated image and by her inherent hippiness" (Mandel 2015, 85). Her character is a compromise between the Countercultural logic and the 1980s con-sumerism and the extreme wealth from which the hippie comes: "her father owned VISA or something" (*ROA* 102). Fodor & Varga see her character as a part of larger phenomenon inherent in Generation X of *The Rules of Attraction:* "the causal principle behind the gen-erational logic itself becomes undone in the novel" (2014). On one hand, although the Gen-eration X is throughout the novel depicted as rootless and detached from history, the occa-sional nods in the shape of cultural references toward the past and the Boomer Generation who deprived their children of childhood, the rebellion of Generation X is convoluted with its distorted takes of history they never were allowed and a deep misunderstanding of, and failed attempts of reconciling both past and contemporary values. On the other hand, the rebellion becomes strikingly manifest at times. For example, as Mandel notes: "Sean's characterization of the hippie as someone he fucks inflects their relationship with violation and in this way reintroduces distinctions: not between beauties and monsters or agents and victims but between the '80s and the '60s, himself and the hippie" (2015, 86). All in all, the intergenerational rebellion is rendered futile and unconvincing—something that defines Generation X to the extent the reaction is fundamentally violating.

Similar notions can be found in the way *The Rules of Attraction* addresses culture. As discussed earlier, the novel and its cast's identity formation are heavily colored by consumerism and pop culture—phenomena, which in the novel are frequently contrasted with the 1960s and 1970s culture. Indeed, the juxtapositions and cause–effect relations of the 1980s cultural landscape in terms of both popular culture and academic world come to represent one of the keys in interpreting the cultural mood and its debts in the 1980s United States and among Generation X in the making. To Georgina Colby, the intergenerational cultural negotiation in *The Rules of Attraction* is characterized by "a cultural denial of past" (2011, 26). Furthermore, as Fodor and Varga argue: "Even though the text is doubtlessly full of references to the cultural icons of the 1960s and 70s, […], the modality that articulates this dilemma seems to parody the whole concept of generation, revoking rather than reinforcing its validity" (2014). Thus, in the postmodern context of *The Rules of Attraction,* naturally even the fundamentals of Generation X are characterized by parody.

In one particularly outstanding scene recounting the going-away party of a literature professor, a sleuth of drunken and drugged literature and poetry students dissect their own culture. The machine gun interchange between the students is contrasted with occasional inquiries addressed to the senile, alcoholic Professor Vittorio, whose ostensible disconnection to the contemporary functions not only as a signifier of generational gap, but also of the apparent detachment and lack of self-knowledge among Generation X. Although speaking of secular humanism, one of the characters in the conversation aptly condenses the cultural relation between Generation X and the Boomer Generation: "'But don't you think his whole secular humanism stems from the warped pop culture of the Sixties and not from a rigorous, modernist vantage point?'" (*ROA* 120). Indeed, in *The Rules of Attraction* the effects of the Counterculture and the 1960s are ubiquitous in negotiating the

cultural identity of Generation X. On one hand, the identity stems from the loss of the past ideals, but on the other hand, it is painfully clear that the influence of those ideals is of defining nature in Generation X's pursuit of its own distinct cultural heritage. The cultural reconstruction is channeled through comparisons and polarities, seen in statements such as: "'But don't you think rock'n'roll killed off poetry?" […] 'I learned more from Black Flag [pioneers of American hardcore-punk] than I ever did from Stevens or Cummings or Yeats or even Lowell, but my God, holy shit, Black flag *is* poetry man'" (*ROA* 221; emphasis original). However, the best example of Generation X's mood, simultaneously directed inwards and outwards in the generational continuum, is a monologue recounted by Sean:

> 'But Vittorio, let me ask you, don't you think that the admittedly Bohemian punk outlaw scribblings of these wasted post-Vietnam, post-Watergate, post- ... hell, post-everything minstrels, is the product of a literary establishment bombasting a lost generation with worthless propaganda exploiting greed, blase sexual attitudes and mind-corrupting, numbing jejunosity and that's why works like Just Another Asshole, a searing, searing collection of quote-unquote underground writing, become potent fixtures on the minds of this clan of maladjusted, nihilistic, malcontent, self-serving , . . well, hell, miscarriages, or do you think it's all …' And now Trav stops, searches for the right word. '… bogus?' (*ROA* 224–5)

The excerpt oozes irony, sarcasm, and condescension hurled at every direction. It stands as a testament to Generation X's self-acknowledgement of its cultural location in the post-modern world devoid of structure, and the mores of the time. Simultaneously, the excerpt includes frustrated commentary on how Generation X ended up in that situation: the past generations, whose failures are inherited by the contemporary generation trapped in the

cultural world of hyperrealistic consumerism, devoid of subject and meaning. Ultimately, the novel portrays significant nostalgia to a past cultural landscape. Indeed, Colby argues that *The Rules of Attraction* conveys a sense of "mourning of the literary and cultural tradition suffered by 1980s culture" (2011, 31). In the end, the ostensibly dismissed culture of the 1960s and 1970s represents a shelter among the uncontrollable deconstruction of cultural values precipitated by the 1980s.

Although *The Rules of Attraction* depicts Generation X primarily as amoral, aimless and devoid of emotion to the extent nearing numbness, underneath the desensitized surface there is a palpable undertone of nostalgic longing and melancholy in the ailing of adolescent characters who are and were entitled to virtually everything but childhood. To Colby the novel reads as "plaintive" (2011, 31), and in order to capture the nostalgia succeeds to escape the tradition of blank fiction (2011, 29). In defining Generation X, Fodor & Varga aptly propose that "the inability to rely on memory becomes not only the characteristic feature of a generation that has lost its past, its roots and in a sense its tradition, but also the result of manipulation and deception, dissimulation, and substitutability" (2014). Consequently, Generation X's nostalgia is utterly postmodern, a simulation, echoing Jameson's definition as nostalgia as a collective appropriation of the past idealized (1995, 203–4).

Not untypically for a *bildungsroman,* the cast frequently harkens back to the childhood innocence forever lost. Such reminiscing is often sparked by something particularly reprobate and scandalous. After an especially reprehensible scene precipitated by Paul's childhood friend Richard's malevolent outburst in a New York City restaurant with the two with their mothers present, Richard ends up recalling events of a childhood summer: "I miss those days," (*ROA* 191) he admits, although the memory itself includes his father getting children drunk on a boat to the degree that one of the children falls off, "I guess we

grew up" (*ibid.*). In Lauren's case, similar feelings and bewilderment brought about by disconnection with the passing of time is triggered by her abortion: "Come out on the street after Sean picks me up, forty-five minutes, an hour later. Two girls from the high school pass by. I'm thinking, I was once that young" (*ROA* 306). Bearing in mind the triggers behind these recollections, such longing to simpler times can be read as a sort of coping mechanism against the adolescent identity confusion and the looming adulthood, workings of which the cast are not quite equipped to comprehend. In a postmodern context, these ostensibly pure longings need to be treated as appropriation, and the very objects of nostalgia as mere idealizations—products of memories grown sweeter with time. In the world of *The Rules of Attraction,* Generation X does not have precedents on which they could model their actions amidst the trauma of the 1960s, and postmodernity. In much the same manner as the Lost Generation sixty or so years before them, Generation X is fundamentally left to its own devices, with defunct and inapplicable methods in the face of the world changed.

Furthermore, the disconnection to past and tradition manifests in the ways the cast of the novel views themselves—as persons and as a generation. In a particularly capturing analysis the problem of Generation X boils down to coolness—a concept that can be read as detachment, numbness and other such qualifiers often associated to lost generations. Fittingly, the account begins from Victor's hurt ego, yet ends up astute, generation defining and sympathetic:

This one girl who I had been watching most of the night stood squashed in the middle of the front row, and when she caught me looking at her, I gave her a smile. She made a gagging look and turned back to the band, swaying her head to the beat. And I got really disgusted and started thinking, what was this girl's problem? Why couldn't she have been nice and smiled back? Was she worrying about imminent

war? Was she feeling real terror? Or inspiration? Or passion? That girl, like all the others, I had come to believe, was terminally numb. […] Did she have a urinary tract infection? Why did she have to act so fucking *cool*? And that's what it all came down to: cool. (*ROA* 315)

Similarly to Amory Blaine, who in *This Side of Paradise* pictures himself as an outsider, and defines the Lost Generation he has come to embody, Victor—who truly is an outsider, as he is virtually non-existent with the exception of Lauren's dreams and an occasional stream of consciousness travel report until the final chapters—presents the most accurate and sympathetic generational analysis in *The Rules of Attraction:*

then I came to understand […] that these problems and the pain they felt were genuine. I mean, this girl probably had a lot of money and so did her dumb-looking boyfriend. Other people might not sympathize with this couple's problems and maybe they didn't really matter in the larger realm of things – but they still mattered to Jeff and Susie; these problems hurt them, these things stung… (*ROA* 316)

For ultimately, Generation X, who in the first place grew up all alone with their problems, remain alone with their problems in the end as well. Appropriately, the now widespread term 'first world problems' was originally coined in 1979, and Generation X was the first one to come of age surrounded by such an approach to problems. In the end, in the process of identity formation everyone needs their problems, however petty and insignificant they might seem in the larger scale, was it "[t]he Talking Heads record […] scratched", "or perhaps Dad [who] ha[s]n't sent the check yet" (*ROA* 315).

3.2.6. Cycle of Nothingness

> Vomit, beer, wine, cigarette smoke, punch, marijuana, even the smell of sex, se-
> men, sweat, women, permeate the room, hang in the air like haze. (*ROA* 200)

One of the key theorizations applied in this thesis is the cyclical nature of generations, as suggested by Strauss and Howe. Strauss and Howe distinguish between four different types of generations that appear in a cycle—similarly the American college is quadripartite: students come and go, first year students become sophomores become juniors become senior, and over again—the party never stops. Given that the college experience in the center of *The Rules of Attraction* is that of Generation X, the second lost generation of the 20th century, which calls for comparison to *This Side of Paradise.* Furthermore, the cyclical structure can be found throughout *The Rules of Attraction.* As often pointed out, the novel begins *in medias res,* with a sentence mid-way with, assumedly, Lauren recounting a story of losing her virginity in what appears to be a rape shot on video to an unnamed narrator. In a similar manner, the novel ends in the middle of the sentence, with Sean making physical advances to yet another girl after meeting her just a moment ago. Although the action begins and ceases at an unclear point, the similarity of those points hints toward a cyclical form. In the case of *The Rules of Attraction,* that cycle is a cycle of nothingness: of an endless party—of endless decadence of aimlessness in terms of sex, direction and life in general. This section comprises the comparison of the two novels and particularly how the cycle of nothing is described respectively.

Whereas Amory in *This Side of Paradise* attends Princeton roughly from 1913 to 1917, *The Rules of Attraction* takes place in 1985. The 70 or so years in between the two novels precipitate a drastic difference in times and mores, although the generations at issue are fundamentally similar according to Strauss and Howe. First, the most reprehensible and

scandalous acts in *This Side of Paradise* include binge drinking, infringement of the Mann act, blasphemy, and Amory's turn to socialism. Furthermore, the women in Amory's life come to preface the liberated flappers of the 1920s with their petting parties, of which the Victorian mothers know nothing about (*TSOP* 61). *This Side of Paradise,* too, features the cyclical nature, which is best detectable in Amory's identity formation: according to his own table, he starts being "fundamental Amory", who through various stages including his mother and different levels of education returns to the starting point.

Second, although a similar list of antics subjected to disapprobation in *The Rules of Attraction* could well be drafted, the sheer amount and the frequency of various decadent acts renders such listing largely unnecessary. For example, whereas binge drinking and driving under influence are shocking in 1915, in 1985 of *The Rules of Attraction* they are minor everyday misdemeanor by no means limited to students alone. Moreover, *This Side of Paradise* does not mention other illicit drugs, but the cast of *The Rules of Attraction* is either dealing or at least abusing everything with the slightest resemblance to drugs: "[…] open Vittorio's medicine cabinet, more out of boredom than curiosity. […] prescription of Librium. How hip. I take the bottle out of the cabinet and open it, pouring the green and black capsules into my hand" (*ROA* 223). Indeed, in *The Rules of Attraction,* the drug-use appears ubiquitous, and sequences altered by drugs play an important role in conveying the postmodern unreliability of subjective experience.

In the same manner as drug-use, *The Rules of Attraction* depicts sexuality as permeating and pervasive throughout the novel. Whereas Amory's four love interests within the span of seven years are considered questionably big a number, upon finding out that she is expecting a baby, Lauren figures out that she could be pregnant for six people, with whom she has slept over the course of the fall term. In *The Rules of Attraction*, sex is rendered measurable, a competition, of which unreliable lists act as vehicles: "And Judy and I

smoke pot, get high, make bloodys, try to list all the guys we've slept with at Camden but the list gets screwed by hazy memory and the pot and the nervous expectations a Friday night party brings and often we just write down 'Jack's friend' or 'Guy from Limelight'" (*ROA* 159). Furthermore, in *The Rules of Attraction* bisexuality is an unquestioned norm, primarily depicted through the relationship between Paul and Sean. Although *This Side of Paradise* features homosexual undertones in Amory's quest for masculinity, the novel lacks concrete sexual acts between two men. Similarly, whereas kissing on the first date is considered scandalous in *This Side of Paradise,* premarital sex with multiple partners while seeing someone else is nothing but normative behavior in *The Rules of Attraction:* "'Why should it matter how many I fucked? Or who I fucked? Since, like, when does having sex with someone else mean, like, I'm not faithful to you?'" (*ROA* 243), Lauren asks. To convey the all-permeating sense of sexuality, *The Rules of Attraction* furthermore features recounts of bestiality as a way to return to nature (222), sexual stimulation in restaurants (165) and public displays of pornographic material (245), and intergenerational disapproval stemming from said acts.

Lastly, when in *This Side of Paradise* ignorant and unsuspecting Jesse Ferrenby includes a citation attributed to Christ as a rhetorical tool, he is warned of being accused of irreligiousness, and literally falls down as reaction to finding out about the matter (*TSOP* 130). Simultaneously, in *The Rules of Attraction,* Sean, when asked whether he is Catholic, replies: "I don't remember" (*ROA* 82), which stands as an appropriate example of the meaning of religion for Generation X. In sum, *The Rules of Attraction* appears to be devoid of any religious or spiritual significance, with the occasional exception of drug-induced inclinations to Ouija boards and séances, or Oriental religions and its Westernized by-products such as yoga, which instead of Generation X, can be seen more connected to the Boomer Awakening. In the 1980s, such spirituality has become a stable part of pop culture.

However, upon slitting her wrists, astutely condensing the cycle of nothingness in *The Rules of Attraction,* the unnamed woman's fading stream-of-consciousness ends with profane yet utterly desperate pleading: "God jesus christ our my nothing savior" (*ROA* 195).

4. Conclusion

In the 20th century, 65 years is simultaneously longer and shorter period of time than it has ever been before. However, despite the indisputable advances in virtually all fields of life, in a sense surprisingly little has changed between 1920 and 1985: the college seniors are as disillusioned and aimless, with as little trust to institutions, which define their whole lives. When comparing Amory Blaine in *This Side of Paradise* to Sean Bateman, Paul Denton and Lauren Hynde in *The Rules of Attraction,* the magnitude of experience is of greatest difference. Such change, however, is nothing but expected: if modern life for Amory's changes "ten times faster than it ever has before" (*TSOP* 259), how fast does it change for the protagonists in *The Rules of Attraction*?

The bifurcated aim of this thesis was on one hand to analyze the connection of cultural changes and identity crises turned into generational crises in *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction,* and on the other hand, to examine how academic fiction works as a template for such work of fiction. In both novels, the academic coming-of-age of the protagonists was to varying extent defined by the surrounding cultural change: in *This Side of Paradise,* Amory Blaine, ill-equipped to grow up in the modern condition, had to negotiate his identity formation with the changing world in such polarizations as masculinity-effeminacy, individuality-society and outside-inside. Sean Bateman, Paul Denton, and Lauren Hynde, in *The Rules of Attraction,* found themselves caught in the postmodern loss of meaning, past and future. Desensitized by the time, each protagonist displays connection to the preceding generation and decades, against which they also had constructed their own fragmented Generation X identities among consumerism and mass culture. Furthermore, this thesis concludes that the genre of academic novel as a platform for such examinations and subject matter is highly suitable due to the age location on one hand, and

the microcosmic and society-representing nature inherent in the genre on the other. Lastly, this thesis argued that both *This Side of Paradise* and *The Rules of Attraction* are characteristically cyclical in nature, ranging from the concept of recurring lost generations to the cycle of nothing central in them.

Initially, the novels under study were chosen because of their shared reputation as lesser works by recognized and thoroughly analyzed authors. Although some aspects of this study, particularly in regard to *This Side of Paradise*, have previously been examined, no analysis drawing parallels between and comparing these two novels has been done. Similarly, *The Rules of Attraction* has been subject to disproportionately scant academic interest. In sum, this thesis can be considered as an addition to previous work on the authors, and I hope it is of use in studying not only the novels under study, but also the two lost generations. To address the identity formation and adolescence in a sufficiently comprehensive manner, this thesis analyzed numerous topics ranging from masculinity to love relationships. In order to do so, the theory section comprises not only literary studies but also sociology and psychology. However, more specific subjects of analysis, such as sheer construction of masculinity, could be further researched. Other possible future applications of this thesis could include, for example, other intergenerational comparisons.

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