OTHERNESS AND IDENTITY WITH F. SCOTT FITZGERALD

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Abstract: *The present article indulges into an exploration of cultural difference figures in some of Fitzgerald's novels and short stories, which develop the theory of American identity in the context of expatriates' life abroad. My intention is to develop one of the critical theories claiming that the "voluntary homelessness" of expatriates such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald indicates their "lack of commitment" to social or political causes: they are simply voyeurs of the decadent and exotic and see 'others' and 'otherness' but do not yet divine their roles as actors in the production of the world they believe they are simply observing, according to Caren Kaplan.*

Keywords*: other, otherness, identity, Fitzgerald, the Jazz Age, the Lost Generation*

Conceptual Framework

F. Scott Fitzgerald was a brilliant American writer and one of the leading figures of the Lost Generation. Spirited and intuitive, as well as charismatic, he was not only a prolific writer, author of some of the most captivating short stories and novels in the history of American literature, such as *The Beautiful and the Damned*, *This Side of Paradise*, and *The Great Gatsby*, but also an acclaimed critic.

His literary talent came with a yearning for fame, love for the spotlight and the notoriety brought about by his alcoholism. He was both a romantic and a tragic figure of the 1920s, the product of a dissolute lifestyle which he reconstructed, up to a certain extent, in his novels. Interestingly, he made use of personal experiences in order to successfully convey the image of a precarious, over-the-edge, morally questionable lifestyle, and proper to the American people during the 1920s. Not only did his works endeavoured to revive, but also to define an entire period in literary history: the Jazz Age. This era of prosperity, labelled with a new system of beliefs to which the younger generation in particular adhered immediately epitomized a very fragile culture based on pseudo-values such as materialism, superficiality, and carefree, aimless living.

As for his characters, it is pivotal that we mention the concept of 'doppelganger'- 'an apparition or double of a living person.'[**********] We have observed that this concept is marked throughout *The Great Gatsby* by the couple Jay Gatsby - Tom Buchanan. Apparently, the two men have clearly defined and opposing roles within the story: that of protagonist and respectively, antagonist. Nevertheless, they are both perfect, yet dissimilar depictions of the modern man, decadent and corrupt. Tom is a blend of aristocracy and modernism, which means that he is perfectly skilled in hiding his hedonistic indulgencies; though corrupt, he is discreet and refined. And it is because of his background which offers him social and financial security that he regains his balance at the end of the novel. Gatsby is his counterpart: member of the newly rich, he does not enjoy a solid social status, yet he too indulges in the finest pleasures and corruption. However, unlike his double, he is but an illusion of the modern man, for he enjoys no social continuity, therefore he has nothing to fall back on after losing his financial resources. Whereas Tom is corrupt to the bone, but misleads us

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[**********] http://oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/jazz?q=jazz- accessed on 15 June 2014

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into believing otherwise as a result of his refined attitude towards decadence, Gatsby is driven towards a corrupt lifestyle by a noble emotion: his love for Daisy. In order to deepen the significance of the doppelganger, we would like to stress other similarities between the two characters, such as: their love for Daisy, their dishonesty, the satisfaction they feel when indulging in the finest pleasures, their proper and improper behavior, their efforts to maintain (and create, in Gatsby's case) a solid social identity and their downfall. All in all, Tom and Gatsby should be perceived as two distinct, yet complementary identities of the modern man of the 1920s, struggling to preserve the appearance of balance, yet subjected to deeply rooted corruption, upon which they act without remorse.

Fitzgerald's Expatriate Years and the European Stories

During the peak of his contemporary popularity, F. Scott Fitzgerald lived abroad - mostly in France - for five years and eight months, much of that time pursuing a frenzied social life that impeded his literary work (from 1924 through 1931). On foreign shores he experienced misery and elation: his wife Zelda's romance with French aviator Edouard Jozan; completion, publication, and celebration of his third novel, *The Great Gatsby* (1925); new friendships with Ernest Hemingway and with Gerald and Sara Murphy; innumerable alcoholic binges and embarrassments; false starts on a fourth novel and increasing self-doubts; domestic rivalry and acrimony; Zelda's first nervous breakdown and treatment; his hotel life and fugitive magazine fiction. Only after returning to the US did Fitzgerald publish *Tender is the Night* (1934), a work that despite its flaws plumbs the paradoxes of desire more profoundly than did Gatsby. Understandably, *Tender is the Night* has preoccupied scholars and biographers seeking insight into the author's life abroad, for its thinly veiled treatment of the Fitzgeralds' domestic calamities, set against the crazy violence of post-war Europe, reveals much about the author's own identification with expatriate culture. But the many short stories set at least partly in Europe likewise merit closer attention, less for their biographical connections than for their representations of the American migration to Europe after World War I (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 118).

Fitzgerald's years abroad are a model of expatriate life celebrating "exile" (a term of contested applicability) as the enabling adventure that provided both the fictional raw material and the displacement essential to a Modernist point of view. Yet as Caren Kaplan insists, "all displacements are not the same" (Kaplan, *Questions of Travel*, 2). Distinguishing exile from expatriation, immigration, travel, and tourism, she comments that "Euro-American middle-class expatriates adopted the attributes of exile as an ideology of artistic production" (28). Kaplan adds that their "imperative of displacement" privileged distance as "the best perspective on a subject" (36). Most provocatively, she claims that the "voluntary homelessness" of expatriates such as Hemingway, and Fitzgerald indicates their "lack of commitment" to social or political causes: "More and more like voyeurs of the decadent and exotic, the expatriates see 'others' and 'otherness' but do not yet divine their roles as actors in the production of the world they believe they are simply observing" (47). Kaplan accuses Fitzgerald and his cohorts of being politically unconscious, disengaged from the socioeconomic realities playing out around them. Their experience abroad brought this group "not to a fuller understanding of the histories and particularities of the places they have traveled through," Kaplan writes, "but to a will to power that consolidates nationalist identities and confirms a repressive hierarchy of values" (49). But does a careful reading of

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relevant texts - the short stories about "Europe" - sustain this harsh indictment? (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 119).

The European stories fall into three distinct phases: a trio of pieces from 1925, infused with romantic optimism; ten stories, mostly about loss and disillusionment, appearing between 1929 and 1932; and two muted, nostalgic narratives written after his final return to the United States. Reading these pieces together, as a complete, virtual sequence rather than as scattered tales interposed between "Jacob's Ladder," "The Last of the Belles," and the Basil and Josephine stories, we witness the emergence of a larger, composite narrative of displacement and cultural encounter that delineates national identity as it critiques American naïveté; and excess. Between the earlier and later European stories we observe a notable shift from exuberant nationalism toward a more tolerant cosmopolitanism, as well as an intensifying awareness of expatriation's irreversible consequences (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 119).

Fitzgerald's September 1924 essay, "How to Live on Practically Nothing a Year," provides a benchmark for his changing consciousness. Composed shortly after going abroad - and conceived for a Saturday Evening Post audience assumed to share his ethnic and class biases - the article describes in comic terms the author's rocky adjustment to life in France. Acknowledging the economic basis of the expatriate movement, Fitzgerald portrays a couple (implicitly, the Fitzgeralds) going "off to the Riviera to economize" (Afternoon of an Author, 100-1) (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 119).

Yet the motivation is more complex: the radical difference in living costs, created partly by favorable exchange rates, enabled many displaced Americans to live abroad like "a sort of royalty" (as Charlie Wales remarks in "Babylon Revisited"), realizing not just a better way of life but often an altogether different class status than they would have known in the United States. Explaining the couple's motives Fitzgerald writes: "We were going to the Old World to find a new rhythm for our lives, with a true conviction that we had left our old selves behind forever - and with a capital of just over seven thousand dollars" (Afternoon of an Author, 102). For years "the poorest boy in a rich boy's school," Fitzgerald squandered his income on Long Island "extravagance and clamor" and embarked for Europe precisely to join the upper class - a gratification he betrays when describing the couple's "cool clean villa," an estate replete with a gardener who calls the American writer "milord" (113) (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 120).

This craving for upper-class or aristocratic status manifests itself elsewhere in "How to Live." Fitzgerald condescends to the French, who - whether taxi-drivers or real estate agents - are stereotypically portrayed as conniving, money-hungry types. When a porter bashes a cab driver over the head to settle the question of where the Fitzgeralds will lodge, the writer tosses "several nickels - or rather francs - over the prostrate carbuncular man" (Afternoon of an Author, 105). The largesse signifies both Fitzgerald's class difference from the driver and his casual attitude toward French money, which he later likens to "gold-colored hat checks" (114). The French language seems likewise meaningless, and Fitzgerald ridicules speakers of French as well as his own inexact Franglais. In one ludicrous scene he commands a doorman to speak French rather than English, then to repeat the information very slowly in English, before observing to his young daughter: "His French strikes me as very bad" (102). The episode suggests that multiplied wealth and newly elevated class status entitle American expatriates to mock French functionaries openly. This ruling-caste pretension acquires racial connotations when Fitzgerald describes himself and his wife "lounging on a

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sandy beach in France," burned to a "deep chocolate brown" so dark that they appear to be "of Egyptian origin; but closer inspection showed that their faces had an Aryan cast" (113). These fortunate folk occupy a privileged place on a restricted beach, attended, we are told, by African waiters who deliver drinks and occasionally "chase away the children of the poor" (113). Fitzgerald's glowing image of racial dominance - tanned "Aryan" Americans served by a Senegalese waiter "with an accent from well below the Mason-Dixon line" (114) - speaks volumes about both the assumed readership of the Post and the relative lack of racial and ethnic sensitivity marking Fitzgerald's early expatriate writing (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 120).

Yet the essay is not devoid of self-critical insight. Fitzgerald denounces other Americans for their avoidance of "French life" while satirizing the Fitzgeralds' own resistance to the foreign (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 120). While they munch deviled ham from Illinois and read the New York Times, they consider themselves "absolutely French" (113). Giving the issue of cultural contact a further twist, the author insists that the Fitzgeralds have become "cultured Europeans": "The secret is that they had entered fully into the life of the Old World" (114). But they do so by patronizing "quaint" restaurants not in the guidebooks and paying whopping sums for their meals. After a summer on the Riviera, their original seven thousand dollars has disappeared, but the author and his wife have no regrets; insulated from poverty and freed from all labor except writing, the American expatriate can retain a leisure-class status, secure in his superiority to a native population that exists but to serve him (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 121).

But "How to Live" also portrays the Riviera as a place of potential unrest. "The whole world has come here to forget or to rejoice," Fitzgerald writes, "to hide its face or have its fling, to build white palaces out of the spoils of oppression or to write the books which sometimes batter those palaces down" (104). Though the observation implies proletarian sympathy, Fitzgerald (as in *Tender is the Night*) betrays his empathy for aristocratic Russian exiles living in France (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 121). In marked contrast to middle-class American expatriates, whose elective displacement sometimes enables them to penetrate the upper class, the enforced exile of the Russians reduces them from dukes and czars to domestic workers. Fitzgerald could denounce fugitives from Bolshevism as builders of "white palaces" from "the spoils of oppression"; but he typically did not, instead romanticizing their fall from grandeur and implicitly revealing what Renato Rosaldo calls "imperialist nostalgia" (Kaplan, Questions of Travel, 22).

This romanticizing impulse soon produced "Love in the Night" (November 1924), Fitzgerald's earliest effort to adjust his narrative trajectories to the European scene - and his first magazine story after completing Gatsby. His young protagonist, Val Rostoff, is the offspring of a Russian Prince and an American woman whose father (Morris Hasylton) helped finance the Chicago World's Fair of 1892. The Rostoffs own one of those "white palaces" - a villa in Cannes purchased with "American gold" - and the narrative hinges on Val's romantic encounter one April evening with a nameless American girl aboard a yacht in the harbor. But the girl goes away, and the heartsick hero falls into the maw of history, returning to Russia just in time for the 1917 revolution. After his parents have been executed "to atone for the blunders of the Romanoffs," the young man quits the Imperial army and returns to Cannes, where he becomes a taxi-driver. After war, revolution, and several years of poverty have "conspired against his expectant heart" (Short Stories, 312, 313), Val prepares to flee

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the city in shame after learning of the return of a certain American yacht (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 121).

But at the story's turning point, Fitzgerald notes a significant shift. Although Val had, on first meeting the American girl, insisted adamantly upon his Russian identity (307, 309), the prospect of seeing her again stirs his American instincts:

> The blood of Morris Hasylton began to throb a little in Val's temples and made him remember something he had never before cared to remember - that Morris Hasylton, who had built his daughter a palace in St. Petersburg, had also started from nothing at all.
>
> Simultaneously another emotion possessed him, less strange, less dynamic but equally American - the emotion of curiosity. (315)

At the American consulate, his query about the yacht produces a swift reunion with his first love, whom he subsequently marries (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 122).

Unique among Fitzgerald's European stories for its narration from the subject position of a European exile, "Love in the Night" nevertheless insists on the dual nationality of Val Rostoff in order to comment on national and ethnic differences. Val's Russian origins enhance his romantic imagination, for among the three nationalities who use the Riviera as an expatriate "pleasure ground," Fitzgerald theorizes that although the English are "too practical" and the Americans have "no tradition of romantic conduct," the Russians are "a people as gallant as the Latins, and rich besides" (303). Val's father, Prince Paul Rostoff, has sumptuous tastes and philandering habits, and his son at seventeen regards Cannes as a "privileged paradise" where because he is "rich and young" with aristocratic blood, he anticipates a "unique and incomparable" encounter with "a lovely unknown girl" (303). Val's mother conversely represents the prim and proper American: she storms "hysterically" at evidence of the Prince's infidelities, refuses to let her son kiss her because he has been "handling money," and always speaks with a "faint irony" when referring to "the land of her nativity" (303-4). As if to deny her humble origins, her early years over a butcher shop in Chicago, she teaches her son to "look down on Americans," but - Fitzgerald notes significantly - "she hadn't succeeded in making him dislike them" (305). Thus Val falls in love with the American girl and five years later responds explicitly as an American to the opportunity of seeing her again (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 122).

In the closing paragraphs, however, Fitzgerald reinscribes the hero's cultural otherness by invoking the danger of international marriages. According to home-grown wisdom, unions between Americans and foreigners "always turn out badly" (316). But in his early, optimistic phase, Fitzgerald cites this cynical "American tradition" to refute it: at story's end, the Russian émigré Val owns a taxi fleet in New York and revisits Cannes each April with his American wife (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 122). In this youthful fairytale, affluence presumably resolves cross-cultural differences.

While the coda hails an international marriage that has turned out well, the happy ending nevertheless requires us to forget the marriage of Val's parents, which did not. International romance and marriage, a theme inherited from Henry James, would recur in Fitzgerald's later European stories as an important test of cultural relations and differences, with the frequent failure of cross-cultural relationships suggesting (as it does so often in James) incompatible national sensibilities (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 123).

But the psychosocial reality of cultural displacement could also affect liaisons between Americans abroad. Like James, Fitzgerald seemed particularly intrigued by encounters between Europeanized Americans and less sophisticated American travelers,

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and two stories in 1925 explored that potential pairing. Although the author probably had "Not in the Guidebook" (February 1925) in mind when in April 1925 he alluded to the "horrible junk" he had lately written, the story nevertheless depicts an unusual expatriate romance (Life in Letters, 101). Heroine Milly Cooley, an American of Czech and Romanian descent, travels to France to economize with her husband Jim, a shell-shocked, decorated war hero. But abandoned by her dissipated spouse, she arrives in Paris alone, only to be rescued from French hoodlums by Bill Driscoll, a war veteran and tour guide who has amassed a "swelling packet of American bonds" (*The Price Was High: The Last Uncollected Stories of F. Scott Fitzgerald*, 167) living by his wits in France. Fluent in French and well informed about French culture, he has for two years operated a tour bus bearing the legend: "William Driscoll: He shows you things not in the guidebook" (167) (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 123). In fact, Driscoll proves a savvy entrepreneur engaged in the post-war touristic commodification of France; aboard his "rubberneck wagon," Milly is soon "whirled through fifteen centuries of Paris" (170), entertained by his patter. Yet Driscoll shows himself to be "unusually level-headed" (169), an admirable fellow who cares for Milly without exploiting her vulnerability. And he is modest: while escorting a group that includes Milly to the battlefield at Chateau-Thierry, he recollects the fighting and jokes that he wasn't shot because he was "shaking so much they couldn't aim at [him]" (175). Yet when Milly insists on contrasting Driscoll's panic with her estranged husband's supposed courage, Driscoll admits his modest "professional lie" and tells the truth: he had been wounded the night before the battle, capturing a copy of German orders that a sneak thief later stole from him. Incredibly, Milly recognizes in these very details the story of her husband's spurious valor and instantly discerns the true hero from the false one. The following spring, after Driscoll and Milly are married, they embark on their honeymoon in the tour bus, filling its vacant seats with pedestrians picked up along the "poplar-lined roads of France" (176) - a charming image of their acculturation. In a story marred by shifts in point of view and by the colossal coincidence of the intercepted German orders, Fitzgerald portrays a resourceful expatriate thriving in France because he knows things not in the guidebook – and because he invests his income in American bonds and his love in an American woman (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 123).

Likewise marred by plot contrivances, "A Penny Spent" (July 1925) focuses on the relationship between a rich American girl and a profligate American expatriate, Corcoran, who was born and raised at the Brix Grill (identified in manuscript as the Paris Ritz). Having wasted a half-million dollars because "a childhood and youth in Europe with a wildly indulgent mother had somehow robbed him of all sense of value or proportion" (Bits, 117), Corcoran takes a position as cicerone to Hallie Bushmill, the daughter of an American millionaire. The young man's cultural competence includes the ability to "speak most languages" (115), to correct the historical slips of a Belgian guide (118), and to orchestrate dazzling social events that bring Hallie in contact with titled Europeans. In giving Corcoran his delicate assignment, Mr. Bushmill has set strict fiscal limits to help him recover a commonsense American regard for money and value, and for a time Corcoran practices a Franklinesque frugality as he arranges visits to Brussels and Waterloo aboard a tour bus. Fitzgerald distinguishes here between the long-term expatriate and the tourist: a European native who has never done vulgar "sight-seeing," Corcoran must study histories and guidebooks so that he can regale Hallie and her mother with touristic information (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 124). Although he already knows Europe "like a book" (116), as the place of his birth and residence, he has no sense of its otherness as a cultural commodity to be approached in

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a “rubber-neck wagon” (118). But when Hallie becomes bored with monuments and battlefields, he demonstrates his European connections by arranging a country-club luncheon with “Prince Abrisini, Countess Perimont and Major Sir Reynolds Fitz-Hugh, the British attaché” (122). Abandoning his guidebooks, Corcoran rents a lodge and introduces Hallie to more European aristocrats, reverting to his free-spending ways to entertain the girl and expand her cultural horizons (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 124).

His eagerness to help Hallie spread her wings in Europe contrasts with the paternalism of Claude Nosby, the obnoxious American to whom Hallie is “practically engaged” (120). Upon his arrival in Europe, Nosby finds Hallie “less docile and less responsive” than before and worries that Corcoran has infected her with “nonsense” that will make it harder to take her back to the factory town and “the little circle where she had grown up” (129). Hallie responds eagerly to the expansive cosmopolitan life that Corcoran represents, and on the Isle of Capri (where the Fitzgeralds stayed in February 1925), she finally escapes Nosby’s presence long enough to profess her love for Corcoran, who redeems his spendthrift reputation in Italy when he saves Hallie from a gang of criminals bent on robbery and kidnapping (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 124). Conscious of threats posed by the Mafia and the Black Hand, Corcoran spots a car full of pursuing banditti and confounds them by throwing money away - literally, by scattering English banknotes across the landscape. Having recorded the serial numbers to prevent the bills from being exchanged for lire, the clever Corcoran saves Mr. Bushmill’s capital as well as his daughter. The young hero succeeds both by using his knowledge of Europe and by casting off the expatriate insouciance that deprived him of “all sense of value or proportion.” He negotiates cultural difference in a way that affirms both American values and Continental sophistication. As in the two earlier stories, Fitzgerald portrays Europe as a scene of romance; a touristic exploration of cultural differences helps to cement the attachment between the cosmopolitan male and a less worldly American female. At this early juncture, despite domestic tension after Zelda’s 1924 dalliance with Jozan, the author still idealized life abroad as a glittering transcultural adventure that led inevitably to a romantic ending (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 125).

During those years the Fitzgeralds lived principally in Paris, near the Arc de Triomphe, and on the Riviera, within the social orbit of the Murphys; they spent one winter in Rome and part of another in the Pyrenees, where Zelda received treatment for colitis. Upon their return to the United States in late 1926, though, Fitzgerald abandoned the international theme in his short fiction for almost four years, mainly because the American scene recaptured his attention and because he was channeling expatriate story lines into a novel set in France (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 125). Income from the Basil stories financed Fitzgerald’s third trip abroad, a five-month visit to France in 1928 that he undertook to complete his novel-in-progress about a glamorous expatriate couple. The Fitzgeralds rented an apartment on the rue de Vaugirard opposite the Jardin du Luxembourg, and Zelda plunged maniacally into ballet lessons with Madame Egorova. If Fitzgerald made little headway that summer in his major project, he did meet James Joyce at a dinner party (and offered to leap from a window in homage); but the visit yielded no new stories featuring foreign themes or transatlantic contrasts. When he returned the following spring, however, for what would be his last, harrowing sojourn in Europe, he began almost immediately to mine the related subjects of international relationships and expatriate social life. Between May 1929 and April 1931 he wrote ten new stories about Americans abroad, and although the earliest follows the romantic scripting of the 1925 stories, the narratives composed thereafter focus more typically on

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the complications of European courtships and marriages and often expose the decadent, self-indulgent behavior of the American leisure class. Especially in the seven stories written after Zelda's 1930 breakdown, Fitzgerald appears increasingly mindful of the boorishness and blindness that accompanied inflated expatriate wealth (Kennedy, in Prigozy, 2002: 125).

Concluding Remarks

Fitzgerald returned to the subject of expatriate life on two occasions in 1940: in a never-completed story called "News of Paris - Fifteen Years Ago" and in a filmscript based on "Babylon Revisited." In both works the foreign scene figures as little more than a superficial backdrop; with the world at war, half of France under German occupation, and Fitzgerald living in Hollywood, the Paris of the twenties seemed remote and nearly unimaginable. Yet in April 1940 he wrote to Zelda, "I have grown to hate California and would give my life for three years in France" (*Life in Letters*, 442). Badly in need of health and replenishment, already writing about his career in the past tense, Fitzgerald shared Archibald MacLeish's nostalgia: "I am sick for home for the red roofs and the olives,/ And the foreign words and the smell of the sea fall." In his nearly six years in Europe, Fitzgerald had despite adversity produced a body of short fiction that relentlessly exposes the revealing conflicts and practices of Americans abroad. Beyond timeworn clichés about the "Lost Generation," Fitzgerald's stories about Americans abroad focus persistently on the encounter with difference that defined expatriation.

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