

## ERNEST HEMINGWAY, F. SCOTT FITZGERALD AND THE JAZZ AGE

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### Abstract

This paper concerns the main reasons that led the Jazz age authors, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald to leave their home country, and start expatriate lives in Paris, France. First, an overview of the transformation of Victorian age to early modern literature is given, with an accent to Ernest Hemingway's and F. Scott Fitzgerald's roles in it. After that follow the main scandals of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, which shook the society, with a special context to the youth and other important realities that were not common. The most echoing occurrences were the exponential increase of the number of millionaires, massive concentration of the population in urban areas, Prohibition known as the Volstead Act, Teapot Dome scandal, Black Sox Baseball scandal and the Armory Show and last but not least post-World War I experience in the United States.

This paper also includes description of far more advanced Paris in terms of culture, art and freedom as contrary to Prohibition and culturally conservative America. It is fair to consider here Gertrude Stein's Salon, which gathered all her contemporary artists, and Sylvia Beach's library Shakespeare and Company, which was a touching point for all English speaking expatriate writers in Paris. Another important fact is the favorable dollar rate in France. Before the great depression approximately one hundred thousand Americans lived in France due to dollar rate. The final part of this paper considers a conclusion, based on the highlights and the main points of this paper.

**Keywords:** *expatriate, Jazz age, prohibition, literature, culture, art.*

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### 1. Introduction

The end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century marked the end of the Victorian age and the beginning of Modern literature. The industrial revolution had presented to the world machines that intensified the life in the United States and elsewhere as never before. These inventions revolutionized the science as well as art. Literature was no exception. The Victorian conventional authors just could not fit in the new reality. There was a need for a change in terms of direction of the American literature. Many young people, including young writers of the time sensed that there was a gap to be filled. Two Midwestern boys would carry the weight of the beginning of the new era in literature known as "the Jazz Age," and later on renamed by a garage keeper in Paris to "the Lost Generation." F. Scott Fitzgerald got the credit for the first name, while Ernest Hemingway brought the other name on the surface with the help of his mentor – Gertrude Stein.

"Those who were lucky enough to be born a little before the end of the old century, in any of the years from 1895 to 1900, went through much of their lives with a feeling that the new century

had been placed in their charge; it was like a business in financial straits that could now be rescued by a change of management. As Americans and optimists they believed that the business was fundamentally sound and would triumph over its predecessors. They identified themselves with the century; its teens were their teens, its world war was theirs to fight and its reckless twenties were their twenties. As they launched forward on their careers they looked about them for spokesmen and the first they found was F. Scott Fitzgerald.” (Cowley, 1954, p. vii)

F. Scott Fitzgerald was the representative of his own generation. He was the leader of the Jazz Age. Despite the fact that he died thinking that his life and work was a big failure, he was a respected author among his peers, earned a lot of money from his first novels, and a fortune from his short stories, published mainly in prestigious newspapers and magazines such as *The Saturday Evening Post*, *Esquire* and *Scribner's Magazine*. Although he claimed that sometimes it appeared to him that he and his wife, Zelda, lived like his characters in his novels, his life was not much of a fairy tale. His life was not as adventurous and lively as, for instance Hemingway's life.

First of all, Ernest Hemingway became famous for his short sentences:

“Hemingway created a style of writing admired by nearly every writer of fiction in English, and he left that style as perhaps his most important legacy. He made the short, declarative sentence an ideal for legions of subsequent writers. It has been said that half of all 20th-century American writers tried to imitate Hemingway's style and the other half tried not to. John Updike says in a foreword to the book *John Updike: The Early Stories 1953–1975* (2003) that his own ‘main debt . . . was to Hemingway; it was he who showed us all how much tension and complexity unalloyed dialogue can convey, and how much poetry lurks in the simplest nouns and predicates.’” (Oliver, 2007, p. 21)

Apart from his literary achievement, Hemingway – unlike F. Scott Fitzgerald – lived his life to its fullest. Moreover, he participated in World War I as an ambulance driver in Italy, in World War II as a correspondent, and also in the Spanish Civil war as a correspondent. One may misjudge Hemingway for being devoted to a better world, if his adventures are left aside. Hemingway was very much engaged in the outdoor life such as fishing, hunting, safari, bullfighting and boxing.

Young, ambitious and determined, both Fitzgerald and Hemingway became between the first authors to protest the Victorian tradition. Their names would always be connected to the Jazz age and lost generation, while their works would become alpha and omega of their common literature era. What is more is that their works will move beyond the borders of their age to become classics of what is called literature written in English. One would not exaggerate pointing that these writers did not only cross the borders of their discourse, but also became part of almost every national literature as a part of world literature.

## **2. Methodology of Research**

This paper uses the historical, biographical and analytical methods to collect data, process them and present the data. With the help of historical method, this paper uses the social, cultural, and political context to approach the issue of this paper. The biographical method applies the experiences of the authors as another tool to highlight their influence on the problem of this paper. The analytical approach gives details of the main issues addressed in the paper.

## **3. Sorrow American Reality at the Beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century: The Jazz Age Eclipsing the Victorian Convention**

Let us not forget that the Jazz age period and its main writers, known as the lost generation writers, had the United States of America as their homeland. Before an overview of the Jazz Age is given, it is fair to consider the social and political environment in United States, mainly because it may well serve as a background and prerequisite of the Jazz Age.

The Jazz Age period preceded some of the greatest changes in United States in political and social regard in the roaring twenties of the twentieth century. Among other landmarks, it makes perfect sense to distinguish the exponential increase of the number of millionaires, massive concentration of the population in urban areas, Prohibition known as the Volstead Act, Teapot Dome scandal, Black Sox Baseball scandal and the Armory Show and last but not least post-World War I experience in the United States as a questionable involvement. Undoubtedly, there were many other events that had also impressions on the Jazz Age writers; however the targets mentioned in the paragraph above are most influential to be considered.

In 1919, the godfather of gamblers in New York, Arnold Rothstein, with the help of eight Chicago Sox players fixed the World Series. Highly favorites Chicago Sox were to play against the underdogs Cincinnati Reds. Apparently, the owner of the club Charles Comiskey underpaid his players, who did not wash their uniforms as a protest to the washing fee. Arnold Rothstein took advantage of the tense atmosphere in Sox's camp. He gave cash to eight players to lose the World Series. The scandal went public, and the actors came to face the law. Rothstein was quick to steal all the papers, so consequently none of the eight players involved in the scandal was found guilty. Despite the favorable sentence in court, the players were banned from playing baseball for life. The law could not find any evidence for the involved in the scandal outside the field as well. Apart from the verdict, this scandal, known as the Black Sox Baseball Scandal, had its influence on the young of the time, including the Jazz Age generation.

No longer than six years from the scandal, F. Scott Fitzgerald did not hesitate to mention the Black Sox Baseball scandal in his masterpiece *The Great Gatsby*. The hero of the story, Jay Gatsby has an influential friend from New York, named Meyer Wolfshiem whom he introduces to the narrator Nick Carraway:

“Meyer Wolfshiem? No, he's a gambler.” Gatsby hesitated, then added coolly:

“He's the man who fixed the World's Series back in 1919.”

“Fixed the World's Series?” I repeated.

The idea staggered me. I remembered of course that the World's Series had been fixed in 1919 but if I had thought of it at all I would have thought of it as a thing that merely happened, the end of some inevitable chain. It never occurred to me that one man could start to play with the faith of fifty million people--with the single-mindedness of a burglar blowing a safe.” (p.47)

From the passage above it becomes obvious how frustrated people were from the scandal. No one could really believe how easy it was done. The Black Sox Scandal staggered the basis of the conventional America. However, it was not as overwhelming as for instance the Teapot Dome.

The Teapot Dome scandal was the greatest political scandal in the United States at the time and it remained so until the Watergate scandal in 1970. “Two (Warren G.) Harding administration officials were convicted of bribery, two more killed themselves before their full involvement could be revealed, and Harding's secretary of the interior, Albert B. Fall, was directly involved in the infamous Teapot Dome affair. Fall had taken control of federal oil reserves at Teapot Dome, near Caspar, Wyoming, and had granted drilling rights to certain oil companies in exchange for money and other favors. Fall would later be convicted of bribery and became the first administration official ever to serve prison time.” (Serafini, 2013, p. 344) These scandals shook the mentality of

the fragile youth of the United States, and gave them another reason not to trace their ancestors' path and consequently seek a new route to follow their dreams. Prohibition just added fuel on fire.

Prohibition known also as Volstead Act started on January 1920 and lasted up to the fade of the Depression in 1933. During this period, consumption of alcohol was not allowed in a federal level. All those who drunk liquor were breaking the law. On one hand, it looked like a promising affair as officially it reduced rapidly drinking and consequently production of alcoholic beverages. On the other hand, the need for consumption of alcohol was met by bootleggers. That made the situation even worse than it was before. Again, the youth had no other option but to blame the conventional old generation.

Malcolm Cowley, one of the lost generation authors, in his essay on F. Scott Fitzgerald named *The Romance of Money*, traces the feeling of the youth at the time:

"They were truly rebellious, however, and were determined to make an absolute break with the standards of the prewar generation. The distinction between highbrow and lowbrow (or liberal and conservative) was not yet sharp enough to divide American society; the gulf was between the young and the old. The younger set paid few visits to their parents' homes and some of them hardly exchanged a social word with men or women over forty. The elders were straitlaced or stuffy, and besides they had made a mess of the world; they were discredited in younger eyes not only by the war and what followed it—especially Prohibition—but also, after 1923, by the scandals that clustered round Teapot Dome and the little green house on K Street, in Washington, where members of President Harding's Cabinet, and sometimes the President himself, played their cozy games of poker with the oil barons. So let the discredited elders keep to themselves; the youngsters would then have a free field in which to test their standards of the good life." (p. 245)

In the nineteen-twenties, for the first time in United States history the cities were more populated than the rural areas. There were many reasons for people to move to bigger cities such as jobs and businesses. There were variety of events going on in the cities starting from musical events and dancing, artistic shows and cultural exhibitions. None of the above mentioned events was as influential as the Armory Show. "Modern art arrived in the United States with the 1913 Armory Show in New York City, which exposed the American public to the work of European impressionists, neoimpressionists, and cubists for the first time. The exhibition, housed at the 69th Infantry Regimental Armory in Manhattan from February 17 to March 15, sparked a new spirit of experimentation among American artists. Equally important, it encouraged interest among American art patrons in the new styles emanating from Paris, thereby creating a market for modern art produced by Americans." (Ciment, 2013, p.64) The same show, which included the likes of Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso, also was presented in the Art Institute of Chicago as well as in the Copley Society of Art in Boston.

And last but not least the post-World War I disillusionment: "The men of Hemingway's generation, born between the early 1880s and the turn of the twentieth century, had been decimated by the Great War. The United States suffered 125,000 combat deaths, and the major European antagonists together buried more than 7 million soldiers. In the wake of the armistice, the generation that had fought in the trenches seemed spiritually adrift. Mechanized mass slaughter on the battlefield had made a mockery of Victorian bywords such as "chivalry" and "honor," and disillusionment with the peace had done a great deal to undermine faith in the liberal democratic world that the victors promoted. Critic Edmund Wilson saw in the rootless, aimless protagonists of F. Scott Fitzgerald's novels the representative figures of this Age of Confusion: men and women who had known only war and chaos, and who had abandoned the values of their forbearers without finding new ones to replace them. Fitzgerald, like Stein, Dos Passos, and many others, fled an American milieu that seemed at once puritanical, dishonest, and vapidly materialistic. In Europe,

they found an environment that, if not necessarily more open to their literary experimentation, was at least indifferent to their eccentricities.” (Paras, 2013, p. 448)

Once again, the American youth faced the reality they were witnessing. The ones borne to leave a mark had too many questions. Was it possible to leave a mark in the conventional method, as their parents did? Was the favorable bank account enough to be considered as the peak of success? Was the American society going to witness the masterpieces of the old continent, or it was to start to do something about it? Were Princeton and Yale to be admired, or not? Was it time to follow the artists of the Armory Show, and perhaps maybe learn the business from them? Was it time to head to Paris and start over?

#### **4. The Oases of Eccentrics: Paris in the 1920's**

In the roaring 1920s, Paris was the center of many artists and literary figures. It included domestic ones, but mainly, were the foreign individuals who took the lead. Paris was the city of the famous Pablo Picasso, Ernest Hemingway, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Ezra Pound and Gertrude Stein. The latter would become what is known as the godmother of Hemingway and Scott Fitzgerald. She would be their spiritual leader to success. Her salon was equipped with the paintings by Picasso, Henri Matisse, Manet, Renoir, Gauguin and many others. “The Stein ménage in Paris (a *ménage à trois* consisting of Gertrude, Leo, and Gertrude's lifetime companion Alice B. Toklas) was a Mecca for the modern- minded. The principal attraction was the collection of Cézanne oils and watercolors, the early pictures by Matisse and Picasso, the paintings by Renoir, Manet, Gauguin and Toulouse-Lautrec, which she and Leo had had the funds and the foresight to buy. The walls of their atelier were hung to the ceiling with now-famous paintings, the double doors of the dining room were lined with Picasso sketches. In the early decades of the century, hundreds of visitors flocked to the display of vanguard art: many came to scoff, but several went away converted. It was a brilliant scene--and a historic one. For all intents and purposes, Leo and Gertrude Stein had inaugurated, at 27 Rue de Fleurus, the first museum of modern art.” (Mellow, 1968)

The American expatriates spend their time talking and sharing ideas in bistros and bars, such as the Ritz Bar, Dingo Bar and The Select. Nevertheless, they never stopped writing. “Shakespeare and Company” was the bookstore that novel writers used for their readings. What is more is the fact that it was more than a simple bookstore. Hemingway would later in his life recall “Shakespeare and Company” in *A Moveable Feast*: “I borrowed books from the rental library of Shakespeare and Company, which was the library and bookstore of Sylvia Beach at 12 rue de l'Odeon. On a cold windswept street, this was a warm, cheerful place with a big stove in winter, tables and shelves of books, new books in the window, and photographs on the wall of famous writers both dead and living.” (p. 16)

Sylvia Beach's Shakespeare and Company is a mandatory subject matter every time the Lost Generation is discussed: “Many of the writers who made up the Lost Generation were brought together by Shakespeare and Company, an English-language book store in Paris run by Sylvia Beach, made famous by publishing the first edition of James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922). Throughout the 1920s, the store acted as a meeting place for aspiring American writers, a lending library, and a resource for the many editors who scouted the store for new talent for the numerous transatlantic literary journals.” (Paras, 2013, p.449)

Nobody questions why European artists resided in Paris, for it was pretty much clear that it was a center of culture and extravagance. However, all researchers treated the American expatriation in their own way. Needless to say, most of them came to similar conclusions. Now, if the time is rolled back, researchers agree on two reasons for why the American literary icons chose

Paris as their home in the 1920s. The first is the exchange rate of United States dollar to French franc at the time: “Paris nevertheless saw an influx of global expatriates eager to exploit the labor shortage or to profit from the mounting inflation that produced crazy exchange rates: a dollar valued at seven francs in 1919 fetched more than fifty francs by 1926. For Americans, Parisian cafés and bars offered an escape from Prohibition, and many watering holes, like the two featured in *The Sun Also Rises* (the Select and the Dingo), styled themselves “American bars” to attract thirsty U.S. exiles.” (Kennedy, 2013, p.154)

Michael Reynolds (1996) in his essay *The Sun in Its Time: Recovering the Historical Context*, gives details on the buying power of the US dollar, and he also gives details on the flus of Americans in France, in the 1920’s: “The bull market roared and the dollar climbed, peaking that fall at 26 francs when a half franc bought a mug of beer, 1.65 francs bought a loaf of bread, and 800 francs rented a furnished flat for a month. Americans flowed into Paris, changing everything. By early 1924, 100,000 English-speaking residents crowded the city; during the summer season their number doubled. On the Left and Right banks, Americans were everywhere.” (p. 48)

The second reason, and the most important, was the fact that Paris was considered the center of culture, civilization and creativity. The critics of the time agreed about this, the ones afterwards agreed as well: “Gertrude Stein called them the Lost Generation, writers of the 1920s—such as Fitzgerald, Lewis, Ernest Hemingway, John Dos Passos, T.S. Eliot, Ezra Pound, E.E. Cummings, and Sherwood Anderson—who lived in Europe and produced works of literature that critiqued American society, especially the traditions and values of rural life or, in their words, “the village.” Disillusioned by their involvement in World War I, these writers reflected that mentality in their characterization of the period. Theirs was a lost generation, according to Malcolm Cowley in *Exile's Return: A Literary Odyssey of the 1920s* (1934), ‘because it was uprooted, schooled away and almost wrenched away from its attachment to any region or tradition.’” (Shindo, 2013, p.160)

## 5. Conclusion

The data presented in this paper first highlight the unfavorable reality that was present in America during the 1920’s. Among other facts, the following are mostly regarded as main reasons that practically made Hemingway and Fitzgerald leave: Prohibition known as the Volstead Act, Teapot Dome scandal, Black Sox Baseball scandal and the Armory Show and last but not least post-World War I experience in the United States.

The second point of this paper is the favorable atmosphere in Paris, France in the 1920’s. This paper highlights many benefits that Americans had at that time, among other things the favorable US dollar rate, the ability to drink and the concentration of world artists.

The artists and authors themselves had their own say about Paris as a muse for them and a place of inspiration. In 1950, on a letter to a friend, Ernest Hemingway wrote: “If you are lucky enough to have lived in Paris as a young man, then wherever you go for the rest of your life, it stays with you, for Paris is a moveable feast.” This expression, of course, served as epigraph to Hemingway’s memoirs *A Moveable Feast*, which would become a keystone description of ‘the lost generation’ memoirs. While F. Scott Fitzgerald in his essay *Echoes of the Jazz Age* would say: “It was an age of miracles, it was an age of art, it was an age of excess, and it was an age of satire.” (1931)

In short, Ernest Hemingway and F. Scott Fitzgerald preferred Paris over their homeland due to many reasons. First, the unfavorable conditions in America offered limited freedom for writers with global impact. Apart from the reality in America, France offered exactly the opposite: freedom of expression as well as economic freedom.

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