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## **Expatriation as Laboratory in Ernest Hemingway's and James Baldwin's Parisian Memoirs**

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Abstract— This paper explores the themes of expatriation and identity in Ernest Hemingway's A Moveable Feast and James Baldwin's Notes of a Native Son. It examines the meaning and the function of expatriation and how it relates to the search for personal identity for both American writers by looking at the intertext of their Parisian memoirs. It shows how these transatlantic authors strategically use expatriate space as a laboratory to reconstruct personal identity as individuals and as artists via the high level of intellectualism self-exile stimulates in a social context characterized by alienation.





Keywords— Ernest Hemingway, James Baldwin, America, alienation, Expatriation, Personal Identity

This article explores the meaning and function of expatriation for Ernest Hemingway and James Baldwin. Through an examination of their Parisian memoirs, A Moveable Feast and Notes of a Native Son, 1 it shows how they are self-made thinkers and individualist writers who use self-exile to Paris strategically to construct personal identity and intellectual authority in the post-Great Wars periods. These American authors never went to university, and the lived experience offered by expatriate space becomes their college. They are self-taught persons rooted in a type of Humanism associated with what the Greeks call paideia, that is, "deep education" versus "cheap schooling."<sup>2</sup> As members of the New/Lost Generation, they believe that great art could be produced by Americans and use exilic space as a *laboratory* for personal experience and intellectual engagement to construct their identity as individuals and as artists.

The education experiences the young artist goes through in expatriate space are radically different from the [F]undamentally about knowledge and freedom. Yet these acquire meaning not as abstractions—as in the rather banal statement "You must get a good education so that you can enjoy a good life"—but as experiences actually lived through. An intellectual is like a shipwrecked person who learns how to live in a certain sense *with* the land, not *on* it, not like Robinson Crusoe whose goal is to colonize his little island, but more like Marco Polo, whose sense of the marvelous never fails him, and who is always a traveler, a provisional guest, not a freeloader, conqueror, or raider. (59-60)

This exilic positionality exemplifies a politics of intellectual self-reliance and non-alliance. Writing in such a conception

system of formal schooling. The process by which the expatriate acquires knowledge and develop skills is not a classroom-bound activity, nor is it defined by geographical, political, and cultural prescriptions and restrictions. As Said writes in *Representations of the Intellectual*, the intellectual is

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>11</sup>Hemingway's *A Moveable Feat* is written during the second half of the 1950s and posthumously published in 1964. The memoir offers sketches of the young Hemingway's life in the Paris of the early 1920s. Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son* is published in 1955 and chronicles his post Second-World War experience of exile in Paris.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>Paideia is a form of symbolic death and rebirth. This metaphysical cycle is effected through a process of painful self-examination as a condition to moral-teething and intellectual growth. See, West, "Intellectual Vocation."

has neither borders nor allegiances other than its own economy and independent identity. On one occasion, Hemingway compares the writer to the Gypsy. He explains that the writer, like a Gypsy, is at odds with all governments and bureaucratic apparatuses (Selected Letters 419). He is a liminal figure who inhabits the 'borderline' actually and metaphorically. In Hemingway's The Old Man and the Sea, the sea becomes a symbolic space for a Gypsy-like lifestyle. It is imagined as a state of being in which the individual loses all sense of identity, place, and belonging. For Hemingway, this condition of homelessness and loneliness is the fate as well as the ideal intellectual model for the artist.

Hemingway claims writing as ultimate identity, and starts his construction of personal identity as an artist by putting the national literature of his country under review. The production of a literature that is true to personal experience, emotionally honesty, and is represented in simple, authentic style becomes Hemingway's main concern as a writer. He notes ironically in his memoir that his discovery of Russian literature in Paris "made the writing of Stephen Crane on the Civil War seem like the brilliant imagining of a sick boy who had never seen war" (117). In the interview-like section in the beginning of Green Hills of Africa, some of the best of American writers fail Hemingway's criteria for good writing. Edgar Allen Poe is reduced in his analysis to a mere impressive stylistic construction that would not "last:" "It is skillful, marvelously constructed, and it is dead." Even those who are expatriates through what little "voyaging they embarked on," ruined their writing by wrapping it in "rhetoric." He goes on to say that the writings of authors like Emerson and Hawthorn, "exiled English colonials," fail the test of originality and integrity because they are merely engaged in the reproduction of England and its classics in America. Equally important for Hemingway, such American authors look like ghosts because they dazzle the reader with only the life of the mind. Moreover, because these writers locate themselves in the gentlemanly tradition, Hemingway argues, they do not use the speech of everyday experience, "the words that survive in language" (13-14). Compared to even major Lost Generation American expatriates, Hemingway is "plus vru." His revisionist approach in

expatriate space exposes a national literature characterized by lack of authenticity.

Similarly, the God-mother of the Lost Generation, Gertrude Stein, is not the ideal expatriate model Hemingway aspires to. Her life-style is seen by him in his Parisian memoir as somehow sedentary, confined most of the times to the happy life of her saloon in which she is a "Roman emperor" (105). Hemingway, by juxtaposition, presents himself as a figure in constant movement and action, walking, boxing, going to the races, going to Spain for the Pamplona Fiesta in the summer and to the Vorarlberg for the snow and skiing in the winter. Unlike Stein, Hemingway is a journalist who roams the world, showing up in cultural congresses and political conferences, and reporting on them. Furthermore, Stein is interested in "the gay" state of affairs of the globe and is indifferent to its tragic events (23). She is also put off by the language Hemingway uses in writing his early stories, arguing that it is, like a painting, "inaccrochable" (17). Stein's description of Hemingway's diction as "dirty" echoes his own mother's feelings of shame and disgust with his 'immoral' writing.<sup>4</sup> In his response to this type of criticism in his memoir, Hemingway appeals to truthfulness to experience (14).<sup>5</sup>

Hemingway's refusal to be herded under the category "Lost Generation" may be rooted in the anxiety of influence. Miller writes that both Hemingway and Baldwin "ultimately view expatriate Paris as war zone, where victory is artistic and intellectual integrity, and defeat is the loss of identity caused by the influence of one's countrymen" (121). When Plimpton brings out the classic issue of literary mentors and influence, Hemingway feels a little uneasy in talking about it. He tells his interviewer that "there was no group feeling" in the Lost Generation Parisian literary scene. He goes on to say that "Miss Stein wrote at some length and with considerable inaccuracy about her influence on my work. It was necessary for her to do this after she had learnt to write dialogue from a book called The Sun Also Rises." ("Interview with E. Hemingway" 22). Hemingway's reaction shows how rivalry may sour friendship, and even stir the desire in the contenders to 'destroy' one another in text. In A Moveable Feast, Hemingway is even more aggressive in his portrayal of his associates. For instance, Sherwood Anderson and Stein represent for him selfishness, intellectual "laziness," and luck of "discipline"

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>Authors Jerome Charyn and Michel Dion agree that whereas Dos Passos is a writer of "style" Hemingway is "plus vru" (See, Dion). Commenting on his style, Hemingway writes, "In stating as fully as I could how things really were, it was often very difficult and I wrote awkwardly and the awkwardness is what they called my style" (Hotchner, Papa Hemingway 198).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>Hemingway rejects wholeheartedly in one of his letters his mother's criticism. All he is concerned about in writing what he writes, he argues, is honesty (Selected Letters 243).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Appealing to realism and to dispassionate fictional representation, Hemingway writes to his father that one "can't believe" writing that is only about what is "beautiful" (Selected Letters 153). His stylistic choices may also be viewed as a modernist anti-bourgeois sensibility which aims at bringing about the impact of shock (Ott 29; 35).

(27).6 Wyndham Lewis's abuse of Hemingway in a 1934 essay titled "The Dumb Ox: A Study of Ernest Hemingway", makes him a delicate prey in Hemingway's Parisian memoir: "I do not think I had ever seen a nastier-looking man [...] Lewis did not show evil; he just looked nasty" (96-97). Although the young Hemingway may be faulted for playing at strong or for moralizing in the portrait of his contemporaries in the Parisian literary scene, the last thing he ever wants is dishonesty as a man and as an artist.

Hemingway's memoir first posits the expatriate act as a kind grafting. This is a survivalist technique deployed to re-transplant the dislocated and alienated subject in a removed space. It is a strategic move to anchor and empower the lost and vulnerable self, an act which could be viewed as an imitation of observable natural phenomenon. It could be compared to a seed carried by turbulent wind, only to be finally transplanted to grow and blossom in alien territory. It looks like a biological necessity: "It was called transplanting yourself, I thought, and it could be as necessary with people as with other sorts of growing things" (4-5). This process continues for the post-war estranged young man and would-be artist by his making of cafe space a "clean well-lighted place," a home where the good work can be done. Hemingway is no tourist,7 pretentious bohemian or fake writer who hangs around cafes for "exhibition" (70).

It is in the Parisian expatriate laboratory that Hemingway 'watches' how his once talented friends and mentors are done as writers. Particularly disconcerting for him is the sight of a Scott Fitzgerald engulfed in the swamp of sterile partying and boozing life-style of the "rich," a social class Hemingway satirizes in his oeuvre. Hemingway remembers in his memoir how he himself had once been "infiltrated" by "the rich," adapted to tastes of bourgeois culture, and naively trapped in the "fiesta concept of life" (181). Fitzgerald is broken by the world, but Hemingway survives its destruction by recognizing the dangers of expatriation and the uses it can be put to. For Hemingway, expatriation becomes a scientific laboratory for personal experience and for character-building. It provides him with

a distanced space where 'lab-rats' are watched, their behavior is examined, and lessons are drawn.

Writing in his best café, *la Closerie des Lilas* at St Michel Boulevard in the Left Bank, Hemingway has also the opportunity to observe *les blessé du guère* who were forming a society by themselves. He writes in his memoir:

I watched how they well were overcoming the handicap of the loss of limbs, and saw the quality of their artificial eyes and the degree of skill with which their faces had been reconstructed. There was always an iridescent shiny cast about the considerably reconstructed face. (70)

Here, Hemingway problematizes race in modernity by depicting the image of a post-war white man whose Caucasian pigmentation is 'fading away.'8 The power of science, however, manages to reconstruct the war-ruined faces. Hemingway seems to adore "the degree of skill with which their faces had been reconstructed," positing science, in its humanistic efforts, as empowering to the traumatized post-war individual. In Hemingway's "In Another Country," the narrator has likewise the chance to watch from close how a young man who keeps their small group of the wounded sometimes company "wore a black silk handkerchief across his face because he has no nose," and how the doctors "rebuilt his face, but he came from a very old family and they could never get the nose exactly right" (257-258). The boy's identity of origin is even lost here and science is posited as a lofty, if limited a human effort to empower man. Hemingway's writing show us the instability of notions of race and origin in a fast and radically changing post-Great War period.<sup>10</sup>

Following in Hemingway's giant footsteps, the expatriate moment marks for James Baldwin a radical rethinking of American literature and culture. Like his white forebear, the black artist has been preoccupied during his life-long career with the writing of "true sentences." In fact, Baldwin almost reproduces ad verbatim Hemingway's statement when he says in the 1984 interview for *The Paris Review* that the *raison d'être* for a writer lies in the perpetual challenge of trying "to write a sentence as clean as a bone" ("J. Baldwin: The Art of Fiction"). <sup>12</sup> Hemingway

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Hemingway writes in his Parisian memoir that the tension with Stein begins when he travesties Sherwood Anderson in his novel, *The Torrents of Spring* (1926), because he "attacked" one of her allies (26).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>Hemingway writes in one of his letters to Faulkner that Dos Passos is "a 2nd rate writer" and is less of an expatriate than a "tourist" (*Selected Letters* 623-624).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>In her analysis of some of Hemingway's short stories in which race is central, Strong argues that the writer uses what she calls "the trope of racial transformation" as a literary device to show that race is a social construct and that identity is a kind of performativity (46).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>In this short story, which is set in Italy, Hemingway fictionalizes his own personal experience as an ambulance driver in the Italian front during the First World War, an experience which renders him himself a *blessé du guère*.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>For Hemingway, the war and its colossal impact serve as "a metaphor for modernity" (Holcomb and Scruggs 9).

<sup>11&</sup>quot;Write the truest sentence that you know," Hemingway writes in *A Moveable Feast*. It is "severe discipline," he concludes (12).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>12</sup>To Harvey Breit, Hemingway writes that William Faulkner's fiction is done by "tricks" and "rhetoric." He explains that a true artist attempts to produce timeless writing "with a simple declarative sentence" (*Selected Letters* 769-770).

and Baldwin abhor rhetoric and venerate simplicity and honesty in writing as a means by which to evolve an authentic self.

"Everybody's Protest Novel," 13 Baldwin In disassociates himself from his black mentor, émigré writer Richard Wright, and presents his own point of view as regards the problem of writing about the American black man. He launches this literary project in order to establish his own originality and liberate his potentialities as a human being and as an artist. For Baldwin, what has been written before him on the African-American experience, from Stowe's Uncle Tom's Cabin (1852) to Wrights' Native Son (1940), is limited in its scope and complexity of representation. He explains that this type of writing ultimately produces a boomeranging effect: the "categorization" of the black man and the production of a literature of "sentimentality" and "violence," and hence the reproduction of discriminatory tropes. In such a literature, Baldwin argues, the complexity, the depth, and the potentiality of character are never probed. Baldwin concludes his essay by referring to Wright's novel, Native Son, to illustrate his argument. In this novel, the protagonist Thomas Bigger is motivated predominantly by rage, dread and gratuitous violence, a representation which, in the final analysis, reproduces stereotypical categories. Removed expatriate space enables Baldwin to critique both Eurocentric writing by white canonical authors as well as "protest" fiction by their black countrymen as the two dominant trends in American literature.

Hemingway's laboratorial use of expatriate space find striking parallel in Baldwin. When David Leeming is about to meet Baldwin for the first time in a party in Istanbul, he is told, tongue-in-cheek, that the black author is interested in meeting him to see how Americans behave in Turkey. 14 This incident refers to Baldwin's favored 'technique' in reconstructing reality. Like his predecessor, Hemingway, Baldwin develops this method earlier in Paris. Indeed, he 'watches' how his countryman Richard Wright 'behaves' in expatriate Paris and takes that exercise as "an object lesson" ("Alas, Poor Richard" 260), very much the way Hemingway takes forbears like Stein, Anderson, and Fitzgerald as 'specimens' to be studied by analytical thought in the expatriate laboratory. The language being used by Baldwin, similar to the one deployed by his adopted model, Hemingway, corroborates my argument about the 'lab-rat' as a nice metaphorical device to analyze the function of expatriation to Paris for the white as well as for the black author. For both writers, "Paris is [...] a necessary part of a man's education" (Hemingway, "A Paris Letter" 156).

Baldwin's expatriation is motivated by the need to "operate in Paris without being menaced socially." Like Hemingway's protagonist in "The Snows of Kilimanjaro," Baldwin assumes the role of a stranger and a "spy" ("Snows of Kilimanjaro" 56), watching everybody with a ghostly presence. The black artist is enabled now in expatriate space to return the "gaze" after very long periods of time in which "the white man has enjoyed the privilege of seeing without being seen" (Sartre, Black Orpheus 13). Unlike his black predecessor, Wright, the uses to which Baldwin puts expatriation to are subversive. Baldwin refuses to see Paris purely, like Wright does, as a "city of refuge." He refuses to get trapped in that situation, having escaped the American myth only to adopt the European one (249).

Like Hemingway, Baldwin becomes early on conscious of "the uses and hazards of expatriation," as he himself puts in his essay on Wright (260). Watching and studying the behavior of the black mentor in the artist's laboratory in expatriate space, Baldwin presents expatriation as the ultimate test for the black forebear. What Wright's deeds amounts to in Paris for Baldwin is merely the re-enactment of the role of the "exceptional Negro" and the reinvention, rather than the subversion, of the myth of racial superiority dramatized at home (261). Baldwin explains in his essay that what Wright does in Paris is in fact the establishment of a hierarchy among black people modelled after a type of white elitism in which the exceptional 'white Negro' would venture to civilize the black family according to the assumptions of racial mythology. The consequence for Wright is estrangement from his people and pure alienation: he is tortured by a "war in the breast between blackness and whiteness" (268). Like the so-called writers of Hemingway's Montparnasse, Baldwin feels that Wright ends up in Paris as part of a showy and crummy circle of black authors (265).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>13</sup>An early essay by Baldwin published in Zero Magazine in Paris in 1949 before it appears in *Notes of a Native Son* a few years later. Richard Wright takes the essay as an affront to his person and as a betrayal to the black community. He thinks that Baldwin wants to ruin his reputation by dismissing his fiction as "protest" and attempts to use his "work as a springboard" to launch his own career as a writer. When Wright argues that "All literature is protest," Baldwin responds by saying that "all literature might be protest but all protest was not literature" ("Alas, Poor Richard" 256-257).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>14</sup>Talking about his first meeting with Baldwin in a party in Istanbul on December, 1961, Leeming recalls how "someone" tells him tongue-in-cheek, "why don't you go into the kitchen to meet Jimmy, he wants to see what Americans in Istanbul like" (see, Leeming in, J. Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket). In fact, Baldwin's oeuvre could be described, as he himself writes in "The New Lost Generation," as a "sketch of Americans abroad" (660).

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>15</sup>See, Baldwin's statement in, J. Baldwin: The Price of the Ticket.

Expatriation for Baldwin serves to zoom in on the behavior of self and others in a removed foreign setting. Whether in Paris or in a Swiss village, the situation the black artist engages in looks like an imagination of an original moment of creation in which perception comes for the first time in contact with the world. It is a search for a starting point in which identity would be constructed from 'scratch.' "We were in Paris, after all, because we had presumably put down all formulas and all safety in favor of the chilling unpredictability of experience," he writes in "The New Lost Generation" (664). America has shattered his heart, and "repairing the human heart is like repairing an automobile: You have to take everything apart, just examine everything—then you can put all back together."16 He writes in his Parisian memoir that the process of selfexpression for a black man must necessarily begin from point zero, an enunciation situation in which he would confront blank spaces in his mind (7). Using such a strategic method, Baldwin sets out to imagine and re-invent identity through the power of the intellect in his expatriate laboratory in order to deal with the problem of alienation. His objective is first to liberate the self from the burden of the interiorized culture he has dragged behind him across the ocean. Here, freedom for Baldwin is something, and power is something else. Miller remarks that the implied context of Hemingway's and Baldwin's Parisian memoirs is war (127) but that "both writers posit 'freedom,' not 'peace,' as the opposite of war" (121).

Such a restructuring of personal identity via the medium of expatriation to Europe is nowhere exemplified and made clearer than in the essays titled, "Encounter on the Seine: Black Meets Brown," "A Question of Identity," and "Stranger in the Village," appearing in Baldwin's Parisian memoir in that order. In "Encounter on the Seine," the encounter offered by removed expatriate space between the American white man and the American Negro redramatizes forms of wrestling with an American identity tormented by guilt:

In white Americans he finds reflected—repeated, as it were, in a higher key—his tensions, his terrors, his tenderness. Dimly and for the first time, there begins to fall into perspective the nature of the roles they have played in the lives and history of each other. Now he is bone of their bone, flesh of their flesh; they have loved and hated and obsessed and feared each other and his blood is in their soil. Therefore he cannot deny them, nor can they ever be divorced. (89)

The encounter with a black African would only heighten the sense of alienation. This is because the American Negro discovers that he is "brown," physically and metaphysically, a hybridized identity formed by the black man's actual lived experience in another continent. In short, Baldwin makes an academic and political argument for the acceptance (by himself and others) of the identity of the black man as an American entitled to the land ("his blood is in their soil"). A voracious reader of Russian literature, like Hemingway, Baldwin appropriates the technique of *ostranenie* (defamiliarization/make strange)<sup>17</sup> in expatriate space in order to animate the freshness of experience and probe the question of identity and the origin of culture in the Euro-American context.

Expatriation thus becomes for Hemingway and Baldwin the litmus test through which standards are filtered. Both writers have made compelling use of expatriate space as a laboratory to achieve artistic fulfillment and intellectual growth. In removed exilic space, they critique aspects of American identity—literature, race, nation—as organic artists and intellectuals. Their effort consists in subjecting their culture to a radical self-examination to orient the disoriented subject in the context of modern alienation. They believe that social change is possible and that the world can be made a better place for the human community. They begin this effort by reviewing personal and national identity, making strategic and creative use of the double-perspective of expatriate space.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>16</sup>Quoted out of context in the 2015 American movie titled *Demolition*, and appropriated here to further illustrate Baldwin's plight as the alienated American Negro who struggles to come to terms with himself and others through identity-reconstruction in expatriate space.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>17</sup>For a definition and discussion of this literary term (*ostranenie*), see, Payne and Barbera 183-184.

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