



**WHITE SKIN, WHITE MASK:  
PASSING, POSING, AND  
PERFORMING IN *THE GREAT GATSBY***

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The scandal of Jay Gatsby's success can only be described, it seems, through a series of ethnic and racial analogies. In the bewildered eyes of Nick Carraway, Jay Gatsby could have sprung more easily from "the swamps of Louisiana or from the lower East Side of New York" than alighted fully formed on the shore of Long Island Sound with no family, history, or origins (54). Later in *The Great Gatsby*, Tom Buchanan engages in the same comparative logic, characterizing Gatsby's wooing of Daisy as tantamount to "intermarriage between black and white" (137). For both Tom and Nick, racial miscegenation and immigrant ethnic assimilation provide models of identity formation and upward mobility more easily comprehensible than the amalgam of commerce, love, and ambition underlying Gatsby's rise. Framing the revelation of Gatsby's past with African-American and ethnic comparisons, F. Scott Fitzgerald reveals a lacuna in the narration of white, working-class masculinity.

If the scandal of Gatsby's success lies in his ambiguously ethnic, white, working-class origins, the success of his scandalous behavior resides in his imitation of African-American and ethnic modes of self-definition. In this essay, I argue that Gatsby's mode of self-invention may be fruitfully read against those of the protagonists of Harlem Renaissance and Americanization fiction of the late teens and twenties. In the works of African-American novelists such as

James Weldon Johnson, Walter White, and Nella Larsen and such Jewish-American writers as Abraham Cahan, Anzia Yeziarska, and Mary Antin, racial and national identities become objects of imitation, appropriated by parvenu protagonists through the apparatus of speech, costume, and manners. I should make clear that it is not my intention to subsume the differences between the narrative strategies or political contexts of these two genres. While the protagonists of passing narratives usually succeed by concealing the past, often at the risk of violent retribution, the *telos* of the immigrant narrative typically demonstrates an ambivalent integration of the ethnic past and the American present. Despite their differences, passing and Americanization fiction provide examples of the theatrical character of assimilation, as do Gatsby's parties, largely bypassed in Fitzgerald scholarship. Paralleling the Jewish actors of early Hollywood film, who, according to Michael Rogin's thesis, appropriated American identities through the vehicle of blackface, the performers at Gatsby's parties craft social personae through the appropriation of African-American cultural forms into their acts.<sup>1</sup> However, *The Great Gatsby's* explosion of the dialectic between imitation and authenticity, which Miles Orvell has argued is characteristic of the modernist era, transcends the novel's concerns with performance, ethnicity, and race.<sup>2</sup> The "commodity aesthetic"—what Jean-Christophe Agnew has characterized as a mode of identity formation that "regards acculturation as if it were a form of consumption and consumption, in turn, not as a form of waste or use, but as deliberate and informed accumulation" (135)—that all the characters in this novel exercise implicates them in the logic of imitation, even those who struggle most forcefully to protect themselves from it. Demonstrating the complicity of the Anglo-Saxon leisure class with the cultures of consumerist, racial, and performative imitation (usually considered the prerogative of parvenus and outsiders), Fitzgerald refutes the possibility of any identity, whether racial, class, or ethnic, as "the real thing."<sup>3</sup>

### **Staging Social Mobility: Race, Ethnicity, and Imitation**

The masculine *bildungsromane* of the Harlem Renaissance and ethnic immigration provide a new entry point into *The Great Gatsby*, demonstrating the unspoken affinity of Fitzgerald's narrative with these genres. Jimmy Gatz's failed transformation into Jay Gatsby incorporates elements of both, initially suppressing Gatsby's past in the tradition of passing fiction and finally locating the roots of his success in his Franklinesque immigrant ambition. Reading *Gatsby* in tandem with James Weldon Johnson's *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912; 1927) and Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David*

*Levinsky* (1917)—pivotal examples of the passing and Americanization genres, respectively—illuminates Fitzgerald's tacit dialogue with the African-American and ethnic literary context of the era. Like *Gatsby*, Johnson's ex-coloured man and Cahan's *Levinsky* perceive "personality" as an "unbroken series of successful gestures" (*Gatsby* 6), gaining access to leisure-class America by adapting their appearances and manners to an Anglo-American ideal. Cahan's novel traces the rise of a working-class Jewish immigrant to a powerful position in the garment industry; the hero of Johnson's novel, the light-skinned son of a biracial union, embraces the economic and social mobility whiteness offers. Like *Gatsby*, each hero fetishizes success in the American marketplace and achieves economic success through unscrupulous means. Each mobilizes the romance plot as a source of social mobility; as *Gatsby* idealizes Daisy's "beautiful white girlhood" (24), Johnson's narrator weds a white woman and cuts himself off from his past, and *Levinsky* uses a series of women as stepping stones for his rise to power. In addition, all three heroes violate masculine heterosexual norms. Johnson's ex-coloured man notes his own extreme beauty and is mentored by a probably gay white man, David *Levinsky* enjoys a fervent same-sex friendship with a boyhood friend, after which future heterosexual relations pale in intensity, and *Gatsby* acts as a vessel for Nick's ambiguously homoerotic attentions.<sup>4</sup> Despite the readily available similarities between *The Great Gatsby* and these texts of black and ethnic mobility, however, scholars have continued to treat the African-American, ethnic, and Anglo-American traditions discretely, as does Gerald Bergevin, who writes that *The Great Gatsby* "takes place in a suburban world that operates as if the simultaneous Harlem Renaissance did not exist" (21). In contrast, this essay claims that modernist urban difference thoroughly saturates the largely suburban world of *The Great Gatsby*, as Fitzgerald's oblique sampling of the discourses of black and ethnic mobility of the era reveals.

Fitzgerald situates *Gatsby* in the context of early-twentieth-century literary models of black and ethnic self-invention as Nick and *Gatsby* cross the Queensboro Bridge on their first trip to New York. As Fitzgerald writes, Nick and *Gatsby* encounter

A dead man . . . in a hearse heaped with blooms, followed by two carriages with drawn blinds and by more cheerful carriages for friends. Their friends looked out at us with the tragic eyes and short upper lips of south-eastern Europeans and I was glad that the sight of *Gatsby's* splendid car was included in their somber holiday. As we crossed Blackwell's Island a limousine passed us, driven by a white

chauffeur, in which there sat three modish Negroes, two bucks and a girl. I laughed aloud as the yolks of their eyeballs rolled toward us in haughty rivalry.

"Anything can happen now that we've slid over this bridge," I thought; "anything at all . . ."

Even Gatsby could happen, without any particular wonder. (73)

As Nick structures the scene, the "negroes" and immigrants gaze at him, rather than he at them or they at each other. Obsessed with the alternately "tragic" and "haughty" eyes of these others—directed toward himself and Gatsby—his own gaze disappears. Nick's inductive reasoning positions immigrant and African-American mobility as a precedent for the strange miracle of Gatsby's existence; Gatsby appears less as a man than as something of an event (something that could "happen"), existing as a shadowy aftereffect of the models of racial and ethnic self-invention on the bridge.

The "modish Negroes" and melancholic immigrants on the bridge provide one example of how racial and ethnic paradigms of identity formation irrupt into *The Great Gatsby*; however, they are hardly alone. The Jewish Meyer Wolfshiem, the novel's most apparent vestige of the Americanization fiction of the 1920s, corroborates Daniel Itzkovitz's reading of representations of Jewish men in early twentieth-century America: the Jewish male, Itzkovitz writes, "was American but foreign; white but racially other; consuming but nonproductive. He was an inauthentic participant in heterosexuality, and inauthentically within the walls of high culture. In all of these cases the Jewish male was imagined to be a secret perversion of the genuine article" (177). Nick first characterizes Wolfshiem in the vocabulary of inauthenticity, asking upon their first meeting, "Who is he anyhow—an actor?" (77). In the manuscript version of the novel, Tom evinces a similar anxiety about the residents of West Egg: "These theatrical people are like Jews," Tom asserts. "One Jew is all right but when you get a crowd of them—" (*The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile* 171). Tom never gets to finish his point, but it seems clear that he associates Jews with the propensity to mass, challenging the singularity of the Anglo-American aristocracy. Like the "old Yiddish comedians" (68) that Gloria Gilbert disparages in Fitzgerald's *The Beautiful and Damned* (1922), Wolfshiem appears dominated by one characteristic, his nose, which, as Sander Gilman notes, served as the "central locus" of Jewish difference in the anti-Semitic imagination (180). Wolfshiem's nose overcomes the rest of his face, "covering Gatsby" with its "expressive" (74) qualities and later "trembling" "tragic[ally]" (77). Physiognomy substitutes for character, in Fitzgerald's closest echo of the scientific racist thought of his day.<sup>5</sup>

If Fitzgerald's ambivalence toward ostensible ethnic vulgarity and actual ethnic success marks his representation of Jews, his depictions of African Americans in the mid-1920s place his readers on much less comfortable ground.<sup>6</sup> In a letter to Carl Van Vechten praising *Nigger Heaven* (1926), for example, Fitzgerald's enthusiasm for the novel that outraged W. E. B. Du Bois underscores Bergevin's point. As Fitzgerald writes, "[Your novel] seems . . . to sum up subtly and inclusively, all the *direction* of the northern nigger, or rather, the nigger in New York. Our civilization imposed on such virgin soil takes on a new and more vivid and more poignant horror as if it had been dug out of its context and set down against an accidental and unrelated background" (490). Despite Fitzgerald's deeply offensive language, this unguarded comment deepens the analogy between the "modish Negroes" on the Queensboro Bridge, *Gatsby*, and Fitzgerald himself. The product of a cross-class and cross-regional marriage, Fitzgerald considered himself something of an aberrant hybrid.<sup>7</sup> As seen here, he reads both *Gatsby* and the "negroes" on the bridge as such: the first a product of the melding of the decadent culture of the East Coast elite and the midwestern postimmigrant working class and the second the unfortunate imposition of "our civilization" on ostensibly unspoiled black culture. The letter also figures African Americans prior to the Great Migration as a feminized national body, in a parallel fantasy to that of the unspoiled continent, the "fresh, green breast of the new world" Nick envisions at *The Great Gatsby's* conclusion (189). As Carraway's gaze comes to parallel Fitzgerald's, urban Northern African Americans, the working-class man turned leisure-class dandy, and the product of a cross-class and cross-regional alliance mirror and model the nation itself.

### **The Performative Apparatus of Americanization**

Fashion makes explicit the imitative trajectories of narratives of both passing and Americanization. In *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, the gift of tailor-made clothing allows the ex-coloured man to reconstitute himself as white, while Cahan's David Levinsky "was forever watching and striving to imitate the dress and the ways of the well-bred American merchants with whom [he] was, or trying to be, thrown" (260). The imitative qualities of *Gatsby's* clothing—like that of the novel's other sartorial social climbers—ironizes his efforts at originality. As *Gatsby* exposes the contents of his armoire to Daisy, for example, his clothing compensates for his lack of familial lineage. Figuring his closet as a kind of Fort Knox, with "bricks" of shirts "piled a dozen feet high," *Gatsby* appropriates images of might to mask the deficiencies of his origins. If in his "hulking cabinets"

Gatsby attempts to approximate Tom Buchanan's brutish economic and physical mastery, Gatsby's acquisition of his clothes signals his alienation from it. Significantly, Gatsby is unaccountable for his own sartorial style, relegating the job to a middleman: "I've got a man in England who buys me clothes. He sends over a selection of things at the beginning of each season, spring and fall" (97). Allowing Dan Cody to outfit him with a new set of clothes, Gatsby, like Levinsky and the ex-coloured man, capitalizes on his homosocial, professional, and personal associations to facilitate his social mobility.<sup>8</sup>

Like his clothing, Gatsby's efforts to transform his physical appearance also suggest his bodily alienation from the Anglo-American leisure class. We remember that Gatsby watches mesmerized as Daisy raises his "pure dull gold" brush to her blonde hair. The monosyllabic description of the brush, with its lack of serial commas, suggests an inimitable quality ostensibly matching Daisy's own perfection. But as Gatsby notes to Nick, "It's the funniest thing, old sport . . . I can't—when I try to—" (97). Gatsby's near-speechless moment as he watches Daisy brush her hair, emphasized by its dashes, calls attention to hair itself, another link between *Gatsby* and the fiction of passing and Americanization. Hair lies on a bodily boundary, occupying a liminal position between self and world, and alterations to male hair certify the self-transformation in narratives of both passing and Americanization. For example, the loss of David Levinsky's sidelocks on his first day in America effects his symbolic transformation into an American (Cahan 101). When the ex-coloured man vows to live as a white man, he claims that he will "change his name, raise a mustache, and let the world take [him] for what it would" (Johnson 190). As a child, the narrator exploits the light/dark contrasts of his skin and hair to convince himself that he is white: upon learning of his mother's blackness, the ex-coloured man "notice[s] the softness and glossiness of [his] dark hair that fell in waves over my temples, making [his] forehead appear even whiter than it really was" (Johnson 17). Fitzgerald's depiction of Gatsby's hair casts class mobility in the terms of the manipulation of both self- and external perception both Johnson and Cahan's narratives suggest. While Gatsby's hair "looks as if it were trimmed every day" (54), Nick accentuates the continuities between Gatsby's body and the objects around him, noting that his own lawn has been "well-shaved" by Gatsby's gardener (93). During Gatsby's tenure as Dan Cody's assistant, he styles his hair in a dashing pompadour (99), making himself "just the sort of Jay Gatsby that a seventeen year old boy would be likely to invent" (104). Like Cahan's David Levinsky and Johnson's ex-colored man, Gatsby's changes to his hair style encode his efforts at self-revision on the body for the external gaze.

In the *Gatsby* manuscripts, Fitzgerald underscores the class and gender implications of hairstyle, linking Gatsby's style choice more closely to those of Daisy's. At Gatsby's second party, Daisy and Tom encounter the Star. The Star's eagerness to copy Daisy's haircut flatters Gatsby; Daisy, refusing to be "the originator of a new vogue," claims that being imitated would "spoil it for me" (*Great Gatsby: Revised* 102). Reversing the norms of fandom, in which audiences yearn to resemble those on screen, here the star yearns to appropriate Daisy's perfection. However, for the working actress to imitate the woman of leisure threatens the boundary between the classes that the Buchanans deem essential: the Star is sustained by publicity, from which Daisy must protect herself to preserve her class position. The circulation of men's images may enhance their reputation, while it threatens those of women: the reproduction of Gatsby's image, whether through news, rumor, or legend increases his power; Tom's scandals land him in the papers but fail to unseat him from his class position. However, the circulation of the female image harbors particular dangers, evoking the historical connection between public women, actresses, and prostitutes (Gallagher 47).<sup>9</sup> Fitzgerald links Daisy and the Star through parallel kissing scenes: when Gatsby recalls kissing Daisy on the Louisville street in 1917 (117), the author uses the same images of whiteness, moonlight, and flowers that he distributes around the director's embrace of the Star (113). For Daisy to admit such parallels, however, is impossible: the circulation of Daisy's image would force her into uneasy familiarity with the actress, endangering both her class and sexual position.

While Fitzgerald might be expected to draw a contrast between those aspects of "personality" (6) that may be externally manipulated—like possessions, clothes, and hair—and those more ostensibly a function of the body—like physical characteristics, Fitzgerald renders just such characteristics the function of imitation and repetition. While Gatsby's smile, for example, first appears to harbor singularity, Fitzgerald ultimately reveals it too as a reproducible commodity:

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. It faced—or seemed to face—the whole external world for an instant, and then concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just so far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself and assured you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (52–53)

The passage enacts the movement from mass audience to individual viewers; metonymizing the smile until it stands in for Gatsby, Nick allows himself to bask in its glow. Stepping out of the role of mass viewer for a moment, Nick experiences a moment of communion with Gatsby, feeling that that their relationship, like Gatsby's with Daisy, is "just personal" (160), liberated from the realm of objects.

However, Gatsby's smile works as a commodity that extends his social power, recalling that of David Levinsky, who develops a "credit face" to solicit investments despite his own lack of capital (Cahan 202). Like Levinsky, Gatsby's smile enables him to elicit trust, facilitating his economic rise. Like an advertisement in its use of the second person, the passage reports Nick's seduction by Gatsby's charisma, marketing Gatsby's smile to the reader as if it were a commodity. In the manuscript, however, Fitzgerald transformed Gatsby's face into an art object: "He was undoubtedly one of the handsomest men I had ever seen—the dark blue eyes opening out into lashes of shining jet were arresting and unforgettable" (*The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile* 53). The transition from the language of art—with its aura intact—to that of reproducible object or advertisement suggests Fitzgerald's increasing awareness of the problem of commodity aesthetics. As Daisy remarks later in the novel, Gatsby "resemble[s] the advertisement of the man" (*Gatsby* 125), although Tom prohibits her from telling us precisely which one. In her identification of Gatsby's nonspecificity, Daisy gets it closer to right than she knows: even Gatsby's seeming uniqueness is bound up with his likeness to a set of commodified representations.

Fitzgerald's collapsing of the boundary between the frankly imitative and the ostensibly authentic links the character at the very top of the novel's economic and racial hierarchy—Daisy—with Wolfshiem, who resides on or near the bottom. *The Great Gatsby* links Daisy and Wolfshiem by contrasting the ostensibly innate class superiority of her voice with the openly imitative aspects of both his and Gatsby's. Most memorably, of course, Daisy's voice metaphorizes the seeming innateness of her class position, while Gatsby's near-Victorian formality recalls the immigrant struggle to master American speech and etiquette, poignantly presented in Cahan's *Rise of David Levinsky*. In addition, Meyer Wolfshiem, the novel's worst speaker, creates a degraded copy of English through his transformation of "Oxford" into "Oggsford" and "connection" into "gonnegtion" (76, 75). Fitzgerald appears to endorse a kind of vocal nativism, in which the decline of English mimics Tom's anxieties about the decline of "Nordic" superiority.

However, where Daisy's "thrilling voice" (13) ostensibly evokes her aristocratic class and racial position, Jordan senses in it the conflict between repression and desire, noting that "perhaps Daisy never



went in for amour at all—and yet there's something in that voice of hers" (82). Fitzgerald's manuscripts reveal the conflict between class, gender, and sexuality that Daisy's voice harbors: when Gatsby comments on Daisy's voice, Nick first responds, "She loves you. Her voice is full of it" (*Trimalchio* 96). Nick's sentimentalization of Daisy, notably absent from the novel's final version, reads her voice as the vessel for her suppressed emotions; Gatsby, who has forcibly assimilated the trappings of the leisure class, assesses it more coldly, interpreting the richness of her voice as a signifier of the class position she works to sustain.

Similarly, Wolfshiem's immigrant diction, which Fitzgerald takes such care to differentiate from the Anglo-American norm, reiterates one of *Gatsby's* signal themes. In a novel whose plot turns on causal uncertainty—notably, Nick reads the fixing of the World Series as something "that merely *happened*, the end of some inevitable chain" (78; emphasis added)—references to "connection," or the lack thereof, suggest the repression of causal links necessary to the maintenance of both the Buchanan and Gatsby worlds. The word "connection," reshaped by Wolfshiem's immigrant accent, becomes literally unspeakable, underscoring the economic and homosocial imperatives underlying the novel's ambiguous causal linkages. Wolfshiem's business "gonnegtions" link men for profit, exposing the conflation of economic and gendered power that is partially responsible for Myrtle's death. Wolfshiem's interest in forging "gonnegtions" registers his mastery of American mores of class and gender rather than his failed imitation of them.

Reading *Gatsby* in tandem with narratives of racial passing and ethnic Americanization complicates Fitzgerald's class politics, transforming Gatsby's persona into one in which the ostensibly biological imperatives of "race" and the supposedly more fluid boundaries of class are complexly and ambiguously intermingled. Inauthenticity, the trope of identity in passing and Americanization fiction, emerges as close to the norm for almost all of *Gatsby's* characters, even those whose class and ethnic status are usually considered unshakeable. Where this section has located *Gatsby* in respect to African-American and Jewish-American ethnic literary texts of the 1910s, the next section situates it in relation to the racial and ethnic performance culture of the era, which lends Gatsby's West Egg parties their "spectroscopic gayety" (49).

### **Mass Entertainment at West Egg**

Gatsby's parties, which glamorize mixing, mass entertainment, and imitation, the qualities most taboo in the Buchanans' East Egg milieu, serve as the setting for the reproducibility and travesty of

white leisure-class identities. In one paradigmatic moment, a "gy[ps]y in trembling opal . . . moving her hands like Frisco dances out alone on the canvas platform . . . the erroneous news goes around that she is Gilda Gray's understudy from the 'Follies.' The party has begun" (45). The allusion to Gilda Gray, one of Florenz Ziegfeld's most famous showgirls, complicates critical understandings of both the cultural politics of *The Great Gatsby* and the Americanization of immigrants in the 1920s culture industry. As Michael Rogin has extensively documented, some Jewish performers in early Hollywood facilitated their transition into Americanness through the donning and exploitation of blackface. However, Rogin's exclusive focus on male actors, Jewish immigrants, and the persistence of minstrelsy precludes the extent to which other white ethnics were engaged in similar processes of appropriative and performative Americanization. For example, Fitzgerald's "gypsy" popularizes African-American cultural forms for a white audience by emulating Joe Frisco, a black male performer who inaccurately touted himself as "The First Jazz Dancer" (Stearns and Stearns 190). In her history of the Ziegfeld showgirl, Linda Mizejewski has shown that impresario Ziegfeld racialized the image of the American Girl by insisting not only that the women he hired were American-born but also that their "parents and grandparents and remoter ancestors were also natives of this country" (qtd. in Mizejewski 109). Ziegfeld's preference for "Nordics" encouraged white ethnic dancers to engage in Gatsby-like name changes, and Gilda Gray was in fact the Polish-born Marianne Michalski (Mizejewski 120).

The racial connotations of the putative understudy's performance do not end there. In the *Follies* of 1922, which premiered in the summer of Gatsby's extravaganzas, Gray's signature number commented on the success of *Shuffle Along*, claiming that

It's getting very dark on old Broadway,  
You see the change in ev'ry cabaret;  
Just like an eclipse on the moon  
Ev'ry café now has its dancing coon . . .  
Real dark-town entertainers hold the stage,  
You must black up to be the latest rage. (qtd. in Woll 76)<sup>10</sup>

The song travesties notions of racial authenticity, with blackness infinitely reproducible through the vehicle of burnt cork. However, it also refers to the popularity of Broadway musicals featuring black actors, for as Susan Gubar has argued, "New York's theater district was undergoing a racechange" in the 1920s (114).<sup>11</sup> When Gray announces, "[Y]ou must black up to be the latest rage" in the face of "[R]eal dark-town entertainers," she suggests the potential obsoles-

cence of white performers like herself in the vogue of African-American performance. Mizejewski notes that the staging of this piece in the 1922 *Follies* made explicit "the acknowledgments and anxieties of cross-racial desire," using lighting and brown make-up to make the white showgirls resemble the "dusky belles" on stage in *Shuffle Along* (129). Drawing upon a constellation of rumor, the uncertainty of origins, and the collapse of authenticity into imitation, the dancer miniaturizes Gatsby's self-transformation.

Fitzgerald's renderings of Gatsby's mansion, car, and entertainments place him at the crossroads of middle-class Broadway realism (Owl Eyes calls Gatsby "a regular Belasco" in ironic praise of his ability to turn his house into a stage set [50]) and such popular spectacles as the circus (128), "amusement parks" (45), and the "world's fair" (86). Vladimir Tostoff's "Jazz History of the World"—described extensively in the manuscripts of *The Great Gatsby* but elided from the published version of the novel—emblemizes the tensions between bourgeois and popular culture that the parties expose. In the final published form of the manuscript, Gatsby's parties endeavor to rein in the carnivalesque energies of popular culture, but as Mitchell Breitwieser suggests, the "scars" of the revision haunt the final product ("*The Great Gatsby*" 66).<sup>12</sup> Shadowed by the excision of racial and ethnic performance, Gatsby's parties simultaneously celebrate the power of popular entertainment and manifest the efforts of bourgeois culture to contain it.

Just as Fitzgerald's revision of the party scenes mutes the presence of African-American and ethnic performance, it parallels similar efforts within 1920s popular culture itself. As Jeffrey Melnick has demonstrated, the composers and lyricists of Tin Pan Alley—many of whom were immigrant or second-generation Jewish Americans—crafted nostalgic representations of southern life that had little to do with the reality of urban Northern African Americans.<sup>13</sup> Gatsby's participation in the expressive culture of the 1920s marks a comparable effort to gain access to an idealized national past. In the manuscripts, for example, Gatsby has written songs reminiscent of Tin Pan Alley, a "vague compendium of all the stuff of fifteen years ago," "which dealt at length with the 'twinkle of the gay guitars' and 'the shining southern moon'" (*The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile* 177). Figuring Gatsby in the role of parvenu composer, writing songs reminiscent of a white southern past he did not experience, makes the mansion at West Egg more a distant outpost of Broadway than a possible competitor with the East Egg milieu.

The manuscript versions of the party scenes underscore Gatsby's exclusion from the narrative of American racial, class, and ethnic history in which Nick and the Buchanans are so comfortably situ-

ated. For example, Gatsby's second party was originally a costume party, allowing Fitzgerald to explore race and class tensions more openly than in the published version. In the design of the party, Gatsby attempts to screen contemporary urban race and class relations through the lens of an idealized agricultural past: "It was a harvest dance with the conventional decorations—sheaves of wheat, crossed rakes, corncobs, arranged in geometrical designs and numerous sunflowers on the walls. Straw was knee deep on the floor and a negro dressed as a field hand served cider which nobody wanted at a straw covered bar" (*The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile* 146). The "negro dressed as a field hand" suggests that Gatsby's tastes have not become too sophisticated to eschew the tropes of minstrelsy, while the harvest setting recalls the socially prescribed festive periods of an agricultural order, the changing seasons that comfort Jordan and Nick. Gatsby's nostalgia for African-American field hands, like that of Tin Pan Alley songs that glorified the sunny Southland, suggests his desire for a past not his own. That past resurfaces later in the excised version of the party, in which Gatsby asks Daisy to leave Tom. Daisy refuses, and when asked what she and Gatsby are discussing, remarks, "We're having a row . . . about the future—the future of the black race. My theory is, we've got to beat them down" (152), a reprise of Daisy's first sarcastic allusion to Tom's theories of Nordic supremacy. After Daisy confesses the failure of her marriage—and thus Tom's infidelities—to Nick, she tells Tom that she and Nick "talked about the Nordic race" (*Gatsby* 24). In both cases, the rhetoric of white supremacy defends against cross-class adultery, casting sexual relations in race and class terms.

The most significant elision from the party scenes is that of the "Jazz History of the World," which links the popularization of an ostensibly "authentic" genre—jazz—with the ambiguous status of blacks and Jews in the popular cultural world of the 1920s. As Gerald Early argues, the "Jazz History" most probably refers to Paul Whiteman's "symphonic jazz" concert at Aeolian Hall, the moment at which jazz attained popular and critical acceptance. Whiteman's piece aimed to "make a lady out of jazz" (qtd. in Early 131) by creating a musical historical narrative of its evolution, beginning with the first recorded jazz piece, "Livery Stable Blues" (recorded in 1917 by the Original Dixieland Jazz Band) and ending with George Gershwin's *Rhapsody in Blue*. According to Early, the allusion to Whiteman "indicates that Gatsby is not only wealthy enough to hire" a large dance-band "to come to his house but pretentious and status-conscious enough not to have a 'hot' Dixieland-style jazz band play for guests" (131). As Melnick argues, by the 1920s, such Jewish immigrant artists as Gershwin and Berlin were instrumental in recasting jazz as an "Ameri-

can" art form by loosening it from its African-American moorings. Mitchell Breitwieser has commented with great depth and subtlety about the novel's whitening of jazz and the excision of the "Jazz History of the World" from the novel's final version; however, in Fitzgerald's original version, jazz wears not only a white face, but an ethnic and distinctly declassed one. In the published version of *The Great Gatsby*, the composer is the vaguely aristocratic Vladimir Tostoff, whose name, as Michael Holquist notes, suggests Gatsby's improvisatory approach to history and identity (466); in the original, the plebeian-sounding Leo Epstein is the composer. The composer's name change, like Jimmy Gatz's, sublimates ethnicity and class, making difference only faintly palpable.

As depicted in the manuscript, the best-received element of the "Jazz History" absorbs and popularizes racial and ethnic difference. Fitzgerald concludes his depiction of the "Jazz History" with "recognizable straws of famous jazz" (*The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile* 54), "Alexander's Ragtime Band," "The Darktown Strutters' Ball," and "The Beale Street Blues." Each piece Fitzgerald references marks the appropriation and domestication of black popular culture, whether through its composition or its performance. "Alexander's Ragtime Band" (1911), which launched the careers of both lyricist Irving Berlin and performer Al Jolson, mocks the pretensions of a black bandleader. The piece alludes to an idealized southern past through echoes of Stephen Foster's "Old Folks at Home," a minstrel piece voicing ex-slaves' ostensible nostalgia for the plantation.<sup>14</sup> African-American songwriter Shelton Brooks wrote "Darktown Strutters Ball," as well as "Some of These Days," for the Jewish-American singer Sophie Tucker, who rose to fame as a "coon shouter." Handy's number leads the listener on a tour through Memphis's gritty "Beale Street" (Breitwieser, *The Great Gatsby* 67), reproducing ostensibly authentic black working-class culture for white middle-class consumption.<sup>15</sup> Like Gatsby's techniques of class assimilation, the "Jazz History" substitutes imitation for authenticity: when the "Jazz History" actually uses jazz, it uses only the pieces most familiar and unthreatening to a white middle-class audience. The ultimate excision of the "Jazz History" masks parallels between Gatsby's self-transformation, racial passing, and ethnic Americanization, driving a deeper wedge between notions of race, ethnic, and working-class difference.

To tell global history through jazz would turn a linear narrative of progress on its head, replacing it with what Michael Holquist notes is an "improvisatory" and contingent mode of change (470). However, such a mode of change would legitimate the Gatsbys of the world, elevating theatrical modes of identity formation over essences. The absent presence of the "Jazz History" parallels the absence of

Gatsby's narrative of self-transformation from the novel; the omission of the "Jazz History" provides a vivid example of how Fitzgerald's revisions obscure both the novel's and the hero's roots. My readings here have suggested affinities between Gatsby's performance of leisure-class masculinity and the black and ethnic popular culture of the era; the final section of this essay recuperates Gatsby's feminized, declassed, and consumerist mode of identity formation through an analysis of the semiotics and politics of color.

### **What Did We Do To Be So Red, White, and Blue?: or, Fitzgerald Colorized**

Fitzgerald's rhetoric of color samples both the burgeoning consumer culture of the 1920s and the nativist paranoia of the era, metaphorizing class in racial terms. As William Leach reports, early-twentieth-century innovations in glass, lighting, and the dye process had introduced over a thousand new shades and hues into the color spectrum, engendering a new color vocabulary designed to increase consumption. In just one example of the new color rhetoric, Estelle DeYoung Barr asked participants for a survey in her Columbia University doctoral thesis in social psychology, "What simple names would you give these colors?" The colors in question were "beige, rose-rust, Chianti, new leaf, Clair de lune, egg-shell, sun dust, biscuit, Spanish flame, rust, mauve, Algeria, ambertone, blanc farina, parokeet, dahlia, taupe, blackberry, aquamarine, Chartreuse, and capucine" (19). If in the case of consumer culture, a new realm of signification threatened to unsettle a stable nineteenth-century notion of color, the results of *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896) had altered the meaning of color in a radically different way. If white skin no longer guaranteed a legally white person, the tripartite function of whiteness as skin color, hue, and symbol, risked destabilization (Dyer 45).

Fitzgerald's rhetoric of color responds to the culturally and racially charged implications of color by subsuming the anxiety over the visual perception of color—and thus its stability as symbol—into the practice of viewing colorful objects of desire. Thus, Daisy Buchanan is neither a "Nordic Ganymede" like Gloria Gilbert (Fitzgerald, *The Beautiful* 106) nor a "white-Saxon-blonde" like Nicole Diver (*Tender* 67), but wears white dresses and pearls and owns a "little white roadster" (*Gatsby* 79), instantiating her whiteness and class position through her objects. As Alison Lurie notes, because white clothing is so easily soiled, it "has always been popular with those who wish to demonstrate wealth and status through the conspicuous consumption of laundry soap or conspicuous freedom from manual labor"

(185). Daisy's commodity aesthetic filters race and class through the conventionally gendered lens of consumerism. Like Daisy, Gatsby and the novel's female consumers transform color into a volatile tool of social mobility, using colorful costumes and objects as tools of theatrical apparatus of self-fashioning.

As historian Matthew Jacobson has demonstrated, 1920s racial theorists argued fiercely for the relation of whiteness to American citizenship (68); similarly, Fitzgerald's rhetoric of color pinpoints the connections between racial and national identity. The title Fitzgerald pressed for at the last minute, *Under the Red, White, and Blue (The Great Gatsby: A Facsimile xiv)*, attests to the power of the colors of the flag as national symbol. Both the proposed title and the novel itself hint at the flag's surveillant authority, suggested by the "red, white and blue banners" that "tut-tut-tut-tut in a disapproving way" as Jordan Baker walks by in wartime Louisville (*Gatsby* 79). Jordan's New Womanhood, signified in her skirt that rises with the wind, seems to offend the conservative ideology the flag represents; it appears to be no accident that Daisy's house has the biggest banner, suggesting the iconicity of her status as a white leisure-class southern woman. However, color marks both the idealized racial nation—white America in wartime—and its paranoid twin, the white nation fearing decline in the face of the rise of the "colored races." Walter Benn Michaels has identified Tom Buchanan's inaccurate citation of Lothrop Stoddard's *The Rising Tide of Color Against White-World Supremacy* (1922), the tract whose "stale ideas" fuel Tom's racial anxieties (25); Tom, whom Michaels characterizes as a "nonironic spokesman" of the "Klan's style of racism" (23), asserts that "The Rise of the Coloured Empires," as he terms it, is "a fine book and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don't look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged" (17). However, one might argue for a more complex interplay between Stoddard and Fitzgerald than the simply allusive, for while Stoddard figures races as colors, Fitzgerald articulates color with racialized class positions. The centerfold map of *The Rising Tide* is filled in with red (ironically standing in for white), yellow, brown, black, and orange (for "Amerindians"), attesting to the difficulty of literalizing racial identity through color. Forecasting a battle between white Europeans and Americans and the world's "colored races" for global control, *The Rising Tide of Color* provides a competing model of history to the occluded "Jazz History of the World." In *Gatsby*, color alternately secures and confounds racial, ethnic, class, and national identities. The rising pile of Gatsby's shirts, for example, feminizes Stoddard's "rising tide of color," relocating Gatsby's ambiguously ethnic whiteness within the rising culture of consumption. The shades in the "soft rich heap" growing before Nick and Daisy's

eyes are "coral" and "apple green" and "lavender" (98, 99), reflect the new color vocabulary of the 1920s but violate normative masculine dress codes of the period.<sup>16</sup> Significantly absent are the hues that decorate Daisy's southern home—red, white, and blue—marking Gatsby's exclusion from the color field of white American leisure-class masculinity.

Fitzgerald's semantic play with the word "white" suggests its pliancy as a signifier for racial purity, female virginity, and class superiority. The importance of whiteness as a symbol of sexual, national, and racial purity subjects Daisy to particularly intense scrutiny from her husband, who identifies Daisy as white only after a moment of "infinitesimal hesitation" (18). While Tom seems determined to prove that women in white are not necessarily white women, Daisy alerts the reader to the cultural sanctioning of her whiteness, and perhaps her own ironizing of it, through the incantational phrase "our beautiful white girlhood" (24), whose repetition Tom cuts off. In the Plaza scene, after Tom compares Daisy's affair with Gatsby to "intermarriage between black and white," Jordan murmurs, "We're all white here" (137). In the manuscript version, she tartly adds, "Except possibly Tom" (*Trimalchio* 103). Tom's "hesitation" before identifying Daisy as white recalls what Michaels calls the "feminine threat to racial purity" characteristic of nativist modernism (18, 41); however, Jordan's exclusion of Tom from whiteness primarily calls attention to his bad taste. Because the word "white" adheres to a variety of realms of identity, without fully belonging to any of them, it is particularly vital that Daisy have a child who resembles her—rather than Tom—and who dresses like her in white. The child forms the one unassailable link in Daisy's series of racialized objects: Nick notes that Gatsby had never "really believed in *its* existence before," underscoring Pammy's role as synecdoche for Daisy (123; emphasis added).

While Daisy's daughter vouches for her whiteness, the novel's working-class women are not so lucky. Although, as Klipspringer sings during Daisy's tour of Gatsby's mansion, "[T]he rich get richer and the poor get—children" (101), the novel betrays the song's assertion. Myrtle and George have been married for twelve years without reproducing, and Michaelis's question to George goes repeated and unanswered: "Ever had any children? . . . Did you ever have any children?" (165). With the white working-class largely nonreproductive, the upwardly mobile women of the novel manipulate commodity culture to approximate white leisure-class femininity. As several scholars of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century culture have noted, soap and cosmetic advertising propagated racialized ideals of beauty, linking clean, flawless skin to whiteness.<sup>17</sup> Powder emerges as the feminized version of the "foul dust" (*Gatsby* 6) that contami-



nates both Gatsby's dreams and the valley of ashes; while for leisure-class women, makeup serves as an effort to mask and enhance, it transforms independent, working-class women into degraded copies of their ostensible betters. Daisy's powder appears noticeable to no one but herself and Nick, as it floats into the air with her laughter (122), suggesting that Daisy powders herself only to protect her own beauty, rather than to enhance it. Powder subtly masks the brown hue on Jordan's fingers (122), referencing both the 1920s suntan craze (Piess 151) and Jordan's slightly masculine outdoor athleticism. In contrast, Catherine, the novel's fleeting portrayal of a bohemian flapper, seems in need of a makeover. With her "complexion powdered milky white," lending a "blurred air" to her countenance (34), Catherine's cosmetic self-fashioning transforms her white face into a white mask.

Although Myrtle Wilson attempts neither to mask nor to enhance her "smoldering" "vitality" through a layer of cosmetics (30), she endeavors to prove herself a woman of Daisy's status through a melange of color, fashion, and commodities. Fitzgerald signals Myrtle's thwarted desires for self-improvement, her sexual imprisonment, and her ultimate demise through the "list of things" that Myrtle has to "get," which include "a massage and a wave and a collar for the dog and one of those cute little ash trays where you touch a spring and a wreath with a black silk bow for mother's grave that'll last all summer" (41). Anyone who changes her clothes three times in one day has a point to make: on the day of the Harlem party, Myrtle begins in a "spotted dress of dark blue crepe-de-chine" (30), whose color suggests working-class respectability, while its fabric—a bit dressy for work in a gas station—implies Myrtle's yearning for mobility. After changing for her trip to town, Myrtle uses color in an attempt to approximate the Buchanans' class position. Selecting a "lavender-colored" taxi with "grey upholstery," Myrtle's style, as Ronald Berman writes, "suggests an ideal of moneyed tastefulness; while a gray interior goes with her communication of 'impressive hauteur,' signifying that she should indeed become Mrs. Buchanan" (53). The gray interior is more ambiguous than Berman suggests: even as the upholstery signifies her effort to master a new canon of taste, it simultaneously recalls the gray zone of the valley of ashes. Finally clad in "an elaborate afternoon dress of cream colored chiffon" (35), Myrtle attempts to signify access to the Buchanan class through color, costume, and gesture. Wilson's wife differs from Daisy in crucial ways, however: in the face of Daisy's singularity, Myrtle produces only copies, most obviously in her repetition of Daisy's name, which causes Tom to break her nose in a "short deft movement" (41). In contrast to the elaborateness of Myrtle's gown, Fitzgerald notes only the white-

ness of Daisy's dresses, underscoring the simple elegance Myrtle lacks. The distinction between "cream" and "white" marks a colorized class boundary, as the two shades differentiate themselves along the lines of excess versus simplicity, maternal sexuality versus non-reproductive asceticism. As Myrtle attempts to craft a commodity aesthetic that aligns her with women of Daisy's class, racial, and sexual purity, the specificity of Fitzgerald's language suggests her inability to approximate it.

Gatsby's efforts at sartorial and commodity self-fashioning situate him within a distinctly feminized and middle- to working-class mode of identity construction. When Nick and Gatsby make their first trip into New York, he is clad in a "caramel-colored" suit, a color that matches his own "tanned skin" (69, 54). In a candy-colored suit, Gatsby presents himself as a desirable object of consumption for Nick; by harmonizing his brown suit with his tanned skin, which evokes his past as a manual laborer, he removes himself from the canon of whiteness established by Daisy's commodity aesthetic. Gatsby garbs himself in brown for his lunch with Wolfsheim, who is openly excluded from the possibilities of whiteness. Gatsby similarly manipulates color codes later at the rendezvous with Daisy, wearing a "white flannel suit, silver shirt and gold colored tie" (89). Ironically, the splendor of Gatsby's costume is at odds with his physical appearance, for he appears "pale as death," with "dark signs of sleeplessness beneath his eyes" (91, 89). Where working women might use powder to mask their exhaustion, men cannot; pallor links Gatsby to the other pale white men of the novel, Mr. Wilson and Mr. McKee, both workers on the edge of the middle class dependent on the leisure class for their subsistence.

While Gatsby appears able to approximate Daisy's racialized commodity aesthetic, it is his disruption of the masculine and class dictates of his culture that helps bring his masquerade to a close. While Gatsby's first two suits display his efforts to harmonize with his surroundings, providing him a means of camouflage, Gatsby arrives at the Buchanan mansion garbed in the feminized color pink. Significantly, Fitzgerald does not mention Gatsby's costume when he enters the Buchanan mansion, but notes that he "stood in the center of the crimson carpet and gazed around with fascinated eyes. Daisy watched him and laughed her sweet exciting laugh" (122). Gatsby's aesthetic choices mark his transgression of normative categories of class and masculinity in the eyes of Tom Buchanan, for whom wearing a "pink suit" marks the impossibility of being an "Oxford man" (129). Later, however, Nick notes, "I must have felt pretty weird by that time because I could think of nothing except the luminosity of his pink suit under the moon" (150). Significantly, Nick perceives the

ability of the suit to transgress the codes of lineage: the "gorgeous pink rag of a suit ma[kes] a bright spot of color against the white steps" of what Nick ironically calls Gatsby's "ancestral home" (162). However, Nick also identifies the suit as a "rag," underscoring its hint of class violation but linking it to the syncopation common to the music of the elided "Jazz History of the World." If, as Ira Gershwin put it in 1918, "The Real American Folksong is a Rag," Gatsby's suit epitomizes the disruptive appropriation of African-American and ethnic codes underpinning his performance of white American masculinity.

Gatsby's death links him to Myrtle and Wilson, the novel's other working-class victims, and the final section of the novel blurs the boundaries between the wealthy communities at the tip of Long Island and the adjoining working-class towns. In the valley of ashes, the consumerist, class, racial, and ethnic implications of color meet and merge. The sheer preponderance of color imagery in this section marks the novel's efforts to categorize the white working class. The color imagery with which Fitzgerald marks Wilson suggests his class ambiguity: his skin "mingl[es] immediately with the cement color of the walls. A white ashen dust veiled his dark suit and his pale hair as it veiled everything in the vicinity" (30). In a suggestive repetition of W. E. B. Du Bois's metaphor for America's racial divide, Fitzgerald uses the image of the veil to demarcate the boundary between the working and leisure classes. Unlike passing protagonists, however, who typically manipulate their juxtapositions of black and white, Wilson appears a victim of his own intermixture. Elided from the ostensibly pure elite at the novel's center, he lacks the bloodline and the color (we learn that he is "anaemic" and "pale" [29, 30]) to secure the whiteness of the Carraway and Buchanan "clans." In the valley of ashes, grayness characterizes not only white working-class masculinity, but also marks the ambiguous status of the European immigrant: a "grey, scrawny Italian child" setting off firecrackers by the railroad tracks—in an ironic allusion to national independence—matches the color of his surroundings, as does Wilson (30). Later laughing "in a colorless way" (144), Wilson—like the immigrant child and other inhabitants of the valley of ashes—lacks a firm place in the novel's race/color system.

In the aftermath of Myrtle Wilson's death, Fitzgerald's color imagery reprises the juxtaposition of African-American and immigrant modes of mobility Nick first glimpses on the Queensboro Bridge. Color serves as a key to culpability and agency here, as the police link the color of the car to its putative driver. The Greek immigrant Michaelis identifies the car as green, in a suggestive link to the immigrant's "greenhorn" state, the green light on Daisy's dock, and the "fresh, green breast of the new world" at the novel's conclusion

(189). Then, however, a "pale, well-dressed Negro step[s] near" to assert that "[I]t was a yellow car . . . Big yellow car. New" (147). Despite the momentary presence of the middle-class African-American man (although it is tempting to speculate that he is the unnamed second motorist who runs to Myrtle's body in the road), he is occluded from the official narrative of Myrtle's death. The Greek immigrant, exemplifying what Matthew Jacobson calls the "probationary whiteness" of southern and eastern European immigrants (177), serves as the "principal witness" at the inquest (143), mediating between the African-American eyewitness and the Anglo-American milieu of the courtroom.<sup>18</sup>

The silenced eyewitness provides Ralph Ellison with a synecdoche for the invisibility of African Americans in the European-American literary tradition. In "The Little Man at the Chehaw Station," Ellison creates a model for a resistant African-Americanist critic who sees the condition of blackness as part of the "American experience . . . [as] a whole" and "wants the interconnections revealed" (499). He argues that the "little man," "[R]esponding out of a knowledge of the manner in which the mystique of wealth is intertwined with the American mysteries of class and color . . . would aid the author [Fitzgerald] in achieving the more complex vision of American experience that was implicit in his material" (498). However, Ellison goes on to argue that Fitzgerald's treatment of the eyewitness demonstrates his failure to achieve such complexity: "How ironic it was in the world of *The Great Gatsby* the witness who could have identified the driver of the death car that led to Gatsby's murder was a black man whose ability to communicate (and communication implies moral judgment) was of no more consequence to the action than that of an ox that might have observed Icarus's sad plunge into the sea" (499). Ellison correctly notes, but overstates, Fitzgerald's flattening of the eyewitness. The text suggests that the eyewitness saw the car, rather than the driver; Fitzgerald's eyewitness glimpses the (literal) vehicle of class privilege rather than its agent. The symbol of class privilege simultaneously figures class mobility: the identification of a parvenu by his car recalls the car of the "modish Negroes" on the Queensboro Bridge—the "limousine" that bears them out of town. Here the author reverses Nick's earlier examination of the black middle-class, allowing a representative of this group to return the gaze of the white elite, providing its definitive—albeit unrecorded—interpretation. Ellison's "little man," reading this incident from an African-Americanist revisionist perspective, might ask the following: What would it mean to consider *The Great Gatsby's* analysis of white working- and leisure-class relations as framed, or even mediated, by the black middle-class gaze?

Situating *The Great Gatsby* against African-American and ethnic literary and popular culture of the 1920s demonstrates Fitzgerald's engagement—albeit tentative and ambivalent—with a culture shaped by racial and ethnic difference. Far from ignoring or repressing this aspect of his day, Fitzgerald sublimated difference to the level of style, engaging with the racially and ethnically diverse popular culture of his day through textual allusions and stylistic innovations. Ellison's sense that a "more complex vision of American experience" resided in Fitzgerald's material was thus correct (498); however, the novel's earlier, more palpable engagement with the interweaving of the "mystique of wealth" with "class and color" lay too deeply buried in manuscript material and dense cultural allusions for the "little man's" excavation (498).

The conclusion of *The Great Gatsby* registers the evacuation of the white Anglo-American elite from the shores of Long Island. Tom and Daisy "retreat back into their money or their vast carelessness or whatever it was that kept them together" (187–88), Jordan settles for marriage, and Nick withdraws into his fantasy of the "fresh, green breast of the new world" prior to the degradation of colonial expansion (189). The deaths of Myrtle, Gatsby, and Wilson—the novel's representatives of the white laboring class—foreclose on the possibilities of cross-class union or upward mobility. Despite the white flight that marks the novel's conclusion, however, traces of ethnic and racial difference haunt both the narrative's and the nation's outer limits. Perhaps the black middle-class eyewitness glimpses those traces, but he—like the excised passages, altered titles, fleeting images, minor characters, and oblique cultural references that haunt the novel—has too easily fallen to the side in *Gatsby's* critical history. Illuminating the racial and ethnic subtexts of *The Great Gatsby* reveals the interdependence of white working-class identity formation with African-American and ethnic models, exposing an alternative genealogy for the man who remains, in Maxwell Perkins's words, "more or less a mystery" (Letter, 20 Nov. 1924. 83).

## Notes

I would like to thank Carmen Gillespie, Marie McAllister, Mason Stokes, and the editors of *Modern Fiction Studies* for their helpful comments with repeated drafts of this essay.

1. See Michael Rogin 73–120. Through a reading of Al Jolson's performance in *The Jazz Singer*, Rogin argues for the role of blackface performance and the appropriation of African-American popular culture as the medium for the transition from immigrant to American

identity on screen. Rogin labels *The Jazz Singer* "the collective autobiography of the men who made Hollywood" (84), suggesting its importance in his argument as a paradigm for Jewish-American masculine identity formation.

2. In referring to the dialectic of imitation and authenticity, I allude to Miles Orvell's *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880–1940*. Although Orvell usefully charts the transition from a Victorian fascination with mimesis to a modernist search for the real, his location of this shift solely within Anglo-American culture detracts from the work's relevance for a multiethnic approach to modernism.
3. In *Our America: Nativism, Modernism, and Pluralism*, Walter Benn Michaels links Gatsby's liminality to the racial and ethnic others of the 1920s. However, the rhetoric of qualification and analogy pervade Michaels's argument, allowing him to claim in one section of *Our America* that "Gatsby isn't quite white, and Tom's identification of him as in some sense black suggests the power of the expanded notion of the alien" (25), while he asserts in the notes that "Gatsby needs to change his name to begin to count as a Jew" (150). Michaels deserves credit for identifying precisely the ambiguity around racial and ethnic identity in *Gatsby* and in modernist fiction generally that the slipperiness of his own prose implies. However, the paradigm shift he proposes in his reading of the novel—reading it as a site of solely racial and ethnic rather than class conflict—obscures rather than illuminates the novel's complexity.
4. Thomas Ferraro notes that the *Rise of David Levinsky* and *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* "insinuate, between ethnic and class mobility, a homosocial 'passing' into heterosexuality" (201). Siobhan Somerville argues for the homoerotics of *Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (111–25). On the ambiguous masculinity of both Nick and Gatsby, see Fraser and Kerr.
5. Thomas Pauly argues that both Gatsby and Wolfshiem echo representations of the Jewish gangster Arnold Rothstein and possibly one of Rothstein's fronts, Dapper Dan Collins (Robert Tourbillon), known for his fine clothes and grooming.
6. See, for example, "The Off-Shore Pirate" (1920), "A Diamond as Big as the Ritz" (1922), and "Dice, Brassknuckles and Guitar" (1923). While each places African Americans in highly conventional situations—as musicians, slaves, and servants, respectively—in each story, Fitzgerald demonstrates how white elite characters depend on African Americans for their wealth and comfort and how they appropriate speech and behavioral styles from African Americans.
7. Fitzgerald worried over his own ostensible "parvenu" status. As he wrote to John O'Hara in 1933:

I am half black Irish and half old American stock with the usual exaggerated pretensions. The black Irish half of the family had the money and looked down upon the Maryland side of

the family who had, and really had, that certain set of reticences and obligations that go under the poor old shattered word "breeding" (modern form "inhibitions"). . . . So were I elected King of Scotland tomorrow after graduating from Eton, Magdelene to Guards, with an embryonic history which tied me to the Plantagonets, I would still be a parvenu. (503)

On Fitzgerald's depiction of himself as a cross-regional and cross-class hybrid, see Irwin 4–6.

8. Gatsby's passion for costume recalls that of the two 1920s celebrities, the Prince of Wales, whose sartorial exploits were well-known in the early 1920s, and the racially and sexually ambiguous Rudolph Valentino. On Gatsby's affinities with Valentino, see Clymer.
9. Fitzgerald links almost all the novel's social climbers to the mass circulation of images, particularly photography. The question of mass circulation informs the ambiguity around Jordan Baker, who allows her image to be captured in the "rotogravure pictures of the sporting life" and lets her name be circulated through rumor (23). Her farewell scene with Nick underscores her reproducibility: as Nick tells his story, the narrator notes that "she looked like a good illustration" (185).
10. The enormous popularity of *Shuffle Along* and *The Follies* would have been difficult for Fitzgerald to ignore in 1922. The Fitzgeralds were such avid theatergoers in the early 1920s that, as Zelda Fitzgerald once wrote to her husband, "you took it off the income tax" (qtd. in Bruccoli 300). Ruth Prigozy shows that Fitzgerald knew and used lyrics of the Gershwins, Irving Berlin, Cole Porter, Jerome Kern, and a host of others.
11. Gray, who was believed to have invented the shimmy, explicitly denied the role of black performance in her success: "There weren't any Negroes in Milwaukee," she said, where she claimed to have invented the dance while "shaking her chemise" (qtd. in Stearns and Stearns 105). As Mizejewski notes, the staging and lyrics of "It's Getting Dark on Old Broadway" also "enact the wider appropriation of African-American musical traditions—Ziegfeld's purchase of acts from the *Darktown Follies* and his usage of African American choreographers to instruct white dancers" (129).
12. As Mitchell Breitwieser notes ("*The Great Gatsby*" 63), the most obvious moment of textual "scarring" in the final version of the novel comes immediately after the excision of the Jazz History. Nick remarks, "[T]he nature of the piece eluded me" (54), which as Breitwieser suggests, intimates that he did not fully comprehend the piece, rather than not liking it or not listening ("*The Great Gatsby*" 64). Max Perkins echoed both Nick and Fitzgerald's ambivalence toward the piece: "it pleased me as a tour de force, but one not completely successful" (Letter, 20 Jan. 1925. 92).
13. In *A Right to Sing the Blues*, Jeffrey Melnick asserts that Jewish-American composers like George Gershwin and Irving Berlin claimed identities as makers of cultural fusion through the appropriation of

African-American popular cultural forms and the denial of the contribution of black artists. Melnick documents how Jewish-American Tin Pan Alley composers often used their "seeming closeness to African American people and expressive forms" in exploitative ways (13), and demonstrates how Jewish-American efforts to appropriate whiteness often involved a distancing from any ostensible affinities with African Americans (see especially chapters 1–3). However, a note of hostility toward his Jewish subjects—and even those African-American writers like James Weldon Johnson who were more sanguine than others about the possibilities of African American-Jewish American collaboration (147)—pervades Melnick's account, qualifying its richness as a source for students of early twentieth-century inter-ethnic relations.

14. See Melnick 40–44 for a detailed analysis of Berlin's "minstrel travesty" (43) in "Alexander's Ragtime Band."
15. W. C. Handy's autobiography, *Father of the Blues*, provides the reader with a good introduction to Handy's ambivalence on questions of race, music, and his own past.
16. That *Gatsby's* monograms, rather than the shirts themselves, are sewn in "Indian blue" only supports my argument (98). Signifiers of both his real and fake identities, the monograms (in a color associated with the flag, yet distanced through the label of "Indian") capture *Gatsby's* simultaneous Americanness and foreignness.
17. See, for example, McClintock 209–30 for a discussion of how Victorian soap advertisements associated domesticity with both whiteness and the denial of female labor. Piess demonstrates how early-twentieth-century cosmetics advertisements exploited "the aesthetic dimensions of racism—gradations of skin color, textures of hair" (42), linking lightened skin and straightened hair to greater marital and professional opportunities for African American women in particular. Dyer notes the linking of cleanliness, whiteness, and beauty in mid-twentieth-century cosmetics advertising (77–78).
18. In reading this episode and Ralph Ellison's response to it, Breitwieser makes a similar point: "the episode is brutally prohibitive . . . but the act of exclusion *shows*" ("*The Great Gatsby*" 47). Breitwieser and I differ in our conclusions, however, regarding Ellison's critique of Fitzgerald and role of the immigrant in mediating the black eyewitness's account.

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