



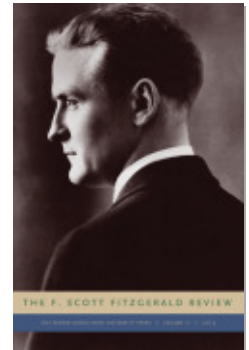
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Philip McGowan

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Exile and the City

F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Lost Decade"

Philip McGowan

The connections, many of them biographical, between F. Scott Fitzgerald and New York City have become so well established in critical studies of his work in recent decades that they barely require repeating. Whether as the location of his marriage to Zelda Sayre in April 1920; or as the backdrop to many of the intrigues that fill *The Great Gatsby*; or as the principal city of Fitzgerald's delineations of the Jazz Age; or as "the magnificent façade of the homeland" (217) which greets Dick Diver's return from Europe for his father's funeral in *Tender Is the Night*, New York recurs as a central and defining coordinate within Fitzgerald's work and his life. Despite this, and the critical focus garnered by some of his other New York short stories such as "May Day" (1920) or "The Rich Boy" (1926), it is intriguing that one of his last fictional engagements with the city remains peculiarly under-considered in discussions of his work. "The Lost Decade," written in July 1939 and published in *Esquire* in December of that year, twelve months before Fitzgerald's death from a heart attack in Hollywood, is a brief fictional episode both absorbing and yet unnerving in its portrayals of this most iconic American city. At the heart of its unsettling appeal stands an architect, Louis Trimble, who has returned to New York after an apparent ten-year sojourn away from its precincts. As a tale specifically about New York, it resonates with Fitzgerald's oft-cited "My Lost City" essay from 1932, a double-edged account of the glamour and downfall of New York before and after the Wall Street Crash, which remained unpublished until after Fitzgerald's death (Curnutt 86). While the two pieces share similar attributes, whether in terms of their specific metropolitan setting and subject matter, or the mutual "lost" at the center of their titles, they produce divergent effects in their mapping of New York and in their understanding of the self's relation to the city's modern evolution. Beyond fruitful comparisons with Fitzgerald's other work, re-reading

“The Lost Decade” is germane, as this essay will demonstrate, to other New York texts and contexts, from the early nineteenth century to the start of the twenty first.

A New York Story

Before examining the story in detail, it is important to note that, across Fitzgerald’s work, New York is not represented as a singular entity. Indeed, even within the brief span of “The Lost Decade” Fitzgerald creates alternative New Yorks that differ from each other both temporally and metaphorically: one is the remembered city of the 1920s, another the city as encountered on Trimble’s return in the late 1930s, both of which are filtered through Fitzgerald’s own oscillating assessments of New York past and New York present shaped in part by his residence in Hollywood in the final period of his career. As an example of New York fiction, “The Lost Decade” unsurprisingly invokes other writing from or about New York, and not just by Fitzgerald. An updated variation on Washington Irving’s “Rip Van Winkle” (1819), Fitzgerald’s story plots the reappearance of the potentially anachronistic Trimble onto the streets of New York City, specifically the midtown area of Manhattan, in the late 1930s. Yet, despite its echoes of the earlier tale’s storyline of absence and return and the pivotal role played by alcohol in the protagonist’s disappearance, Trimble’s is not actually a return at all: it transpires that he has never been away, physically, from the city. Where Irving’s Van Winkle journeys to the Catskills, imbibes a liquor offered to him there by a mysterious stranger, and consequently sleeps for twenty years, Trimble emerges from a decade-long drinking spree that has ensured the New York that he helped design remains unknown to him. Trimble’s disconnection due to his drinking is marked by a failed capacity to remember the facts and details of places for which he was, as architect, intimately responsible. For Irving’s eponymous character, the disconnect he experiences is explained by his two-decade disappearance in the Catskills, a period encompassing the Revolutionary War and the first years of American independence; he returns to a world in which his wife has died, George III’s image outside the village tavern has been replaced by that of another George (Washington), and the former subjects of the British crown are citizens of a newly independent and politicized republic.

By invoking Irving’s earlier tale, however fleetingly, Fitzgerald once more layers motifs of pre- and post-Revolutionary identity into one of his fictions,

a theme most explicitly signaled in *The Great Gatsby*—whether it is “the Marie-Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons” (98) of Gatsby’s mansion, the “scenes of ladies swinging in the gardens of Versailles” (35) upholstering Myrtle’s over-large furniture of her uptown apartment funded by Tom, or the fact that the events of the novel straddle the Fourth of July celebrations, *The Great Gatsby* is laced with the narrative coordinates of revolution and subversion. Van Winkle’s status as a potential subverter of the American revolutionary cause is coded in his obsolete adherence to a previous era’s political and social order. As a living anachronism Van Winkle embodies a forgotten, almost mythical, time despite initially appearing to offer a latent anarchic threat to the new American order. Fitzgerald’s characterization of Louis Trimble sidesteps any deployment of him as either a marker of temporal difference or as a radical element within society. The revolutions of “The Lost Decade,” if any such upheavals exist within its eleven hundred words, are not based in the marked differences between time periods or generations. They are detailed in the narrative’s focused present tense arrangement that simply relates a straightforward walk around the recently completed architecture of a redesigned Fifth Avenue during which the preconceptions of one man, Orrison Brown, are overthrown by the elementary actions of another, Louis Trimble, the cipher of both story and city.

What Fitzgerald develops in “The Lost Decade” is a compelling mix of uncertain memory and fiction, fact and history, place and architecture, enclosed within a deceptively unassuming story describing a brief stroll along Fifth Avenue. Indeed, given Trimble’s vocation as an architect, it is unsurprising that the buildings of New York, in particular those on or adjoining Fifth Avenue, form at the very least a backdrop to the story’s events. Midtown Manhattan is central to the narrative trajectory: Trimble’s return to the city fulfills a number of objectives, its pretext his seeing buildings that he has not consciously appreciated before this point in time. In addition to this motive, “The Lost Decade” concentrates on the minute physical textures and interactions of what it means to be alive set against the urban environment of New York’s architecture: “He felt suddenly of the texture of his own coat and then he reached out and pressed his thumb against the granite of the building by his side” (*Short Stories* 750). The story closes with this comparison of, and need for, contact, for feeling real, concrete objects and acknowledging the substance of the things that form the living, public city environment. Coming to terms once again with the real, what it means to be a citizen of this particular city in the wake of personal trauma, is integral to Trimble’s quest *and* to the effect that he has on the

story's other character, the journalist Orrison Brown, who is here left silenced and needing to re-establish contact with the materiality of city life on an almost molecular level.

Self-Portrait of the Artist (as a flâneur)?

Biographical readings that position Trimble as a veiled self-portrait of Fitzgerald possibly offer some useful ways of approaching "The Lost Decade." Louis Trimble's relocation of himself within New York City after a decade of alcohol misuse can readily be interpreted as an aspect of Fitzgerald's own disappearance from the city that, as he highlighted in "My Lost City," had previously held "all the iridescence of the beginning of the world" (Wilson 25). Trimble's absence from a New York that, in part, he himself had helped to create mirrors Fitzgerald's own exile from the city which had adopted him "as the arch type of what New York wanted" (Wilson 26). Trimble's lost decade is the direct result of his drinking and being "every-which-way drunk" (*Short Stories* 749), a theme as well as a lifestyle that Fitzgerald knew only too well himself. Both Trimble and Fitzgerald learn that New York is a place that "had limits" (Wilson 32); for Trimble it is a city that he needs to "see" again (*Short Stories* 749), though by the time of this story's publication Fitzgerald would have made his last visit to New York. Sight and vision, perception and alternative perspectives are live issues central to "The Lost Decade" just as they are the structuring elements of its predecessor essay "My Lost City." Trimble's exile in "The Lost Decade" could stand as a commentary on Fitzgerald's own exile in Hollywood at the end of his life, looking back east to a New York City evolving in his absence while simultaneously remembering the city as it was being developed at the close of the 1920s. For today's readers, this issue of vision is doubled on closer examination: Fitzgerald offers both a nostalgic look back at the late 1920s when the architectural projects of the boom period were being conceived while at the same time providing an historical eye on the consequences of that era of excess.

Despite its brevity, "The Lost Decade," which remained uncollected until the 1951 Cowley edition of Fitzgerald's stories, charts a number of interconnected narratives. Trimble's former alcohol dependence, his role in the creation of part of the New York cityscape, and the belief that the decade he has lost (from the Wall Street Crash forward) was a good one to miss, all jostle for attention on a first reading. Further examination reveals the core of the story, Trimble's

intimate need to reconnect, not just with the physical spaces, but also with the people of New York. Added to these questions is the revelation of what can be viewed as Fitzgerald's West Coast perspective on his own lost city intercut with the remembrance of his former life there, and the larger question of America before and after the Depression strikes, figured in the citizens of its principal city attempting to recover from their own personal collapses.

To characterize Fitzgerald's associations with New York in the last years of his life as those of a man in exile from the city may at first glance appear to be too strong a claim. However, if exile in this case refers to displacement, the phenomenon of being out of place, of being *dislocated*, then "The Lost Decade" can be understood as a narrative of displacement, created by an author who had by this stage relocated to Hollywood. Such equivalence is further supported by the readymade fact that Fitzgerald and his character share biographical similarities (connected through alcohol misuse), but to understand "The Lost Decade" primarily via this issue would do the story an injustice and is, in any case, something of a red herring. Unlike his seventeen Pat Hobby stories (1940–41) or "Babylon Revisited" (1931), another before-and-after-alcohol narrative that seeks some form of recovery and reconnection, drinking is not the central concern of "The Lost Decade." In these other possible companion tales Fitzgerald concentrates on the effects of alcohol, whether comic or deleterious, on the lives of Pat Hobby and Charlie Wales, respectively. While appearing of initial significance, these alcohol stories become as irrelevant to an understanding—contextual, comparative, or otherwise—of "The Lost Decade" as alcohol is to the brief episode that the story narrates. It is not the issue of drinking or repentance for past abuses that occupies either Trimble's or Fitzgerald's time or their attentions in "The Lost Decade"; rather it is New York itself and the attempt to grasp once more the fundamental concepts that constitute its enigmatic status that dominates this narrative. For this reason, "My Lost City" offers a more immediate and ultimately more relevant comparison to "The Lost Decade" as Fitzgerald returns in both to consider the pull that New York had exercised on both his life and his work.

While "The Lost Decade" omits Trimble's former drinking exploits—"there was nothing about him that suggested or ever had suggested drink" (*Short Stories* 750)—it concentrates its attentions elsewhere to register an alternative New York to the one presented in "My Lost City." No longer the fallen edifice of former glories, New York is mapped as a tangible city that can be relied upon to bolster Trimble's reorientation of himself within society. Seeing and experiencing the city, understanding how its citizens move individually and collectively

within its urban geography, are the catalysts for Trimble's adaptation back into city life. The story's focus falls on the fundamental coordinates of one's being alive within New York: Trimble's departing figure at the story's close reinforces the narrative's acknowledgement of the physical, human geometrics of existence in the urban environment, requiring his interlocutor Orrison Brown to begin again to plot his own physical relationships with the spaces he inhabits. With one eye on Fitzgerald's biography, it must be remembered that, no matter how identified with New York he may have been on account of *The Great Gatsby*, his other New York fictions, or his synonymity with the Jazz Age, he was always an outsider in this city; as much a midwesterner as Nick Carraway or James Gatz, Fitzgerald's life in New York was one lived in exile from his roots, as would those parts of his life lived in Europe or Montgomery or Baltimore or California.

Exile, originating in his being displaced from his own Minnesota background and upbringing, was a permanent state of existence for Fitzgerald and is a strong undercurrent in his writing. Whether in terms of the expatriation of the Divers in *Tender Is the Night*, all of the westerners who inhabit East Egg and West Egg in the "riotous" (10) summer of 1922 in *The Great Gatsby*, or here, in "The Lost Decade," where he provides the issue of exile with an inverse application via a city dweller, indeed a maker of the city, who has been displaced within its physical spaces for more than a decade, the question of exile is an implicit coordinate of his work. Writing back to and about the city that informed so much of his illustrious work from the 1920s, this 1939 fictional encounter with New York revokes Fitzgerald's own by then displaced status as an exile from New York. It creates a reinvention of the city that reimagines it building by building and body by body. Trimble's rebirth after his lost decade engenders a reconception of the city that simultaneously defamiliarizes urban life for Orrison Brown, requiring him to see and touch the buildings beside him, to feel the texture of his own clothing, to comprehend—as he had never done so before—the basic components of contemporary city life. Trimble's apparent seeing of New York and New Yorkers for the first time similarly renders the city and its citizens anew for Brown, requiring that he too return to first principles and establish once again first contact with the homeland.

Brown's primary role as guide to the returning Trimble is overthrown by the latter's wholly disarming behavior. Mistakenly, Brown ponders whether his companion "could have possibly spent the thirties in a prison or an insane asylum" as he tries to answer his own question to Trimble: "You've been out of

civilization?" (*Short Stories* 748). The conundrum Trimble represents to Brown is complicated further by how the architect moves within the city and what he lists as the things that he wishes to see and do. Whereas Brown had assumed that his role for the afternoon was as a temporary tour guide around parts of Manhattan to someone reacquainting themselves with the city after a possible period of incarceration, what transpires in the story dismisses any such notions. Trimble returns to see the realized city having known only the original blueprint impressions of its buildings on paper. Neither criminal nor mentally unsound, he is part-author of the city that Brown claims to know but only dubiously understands. Unlike Brown's occupational familiarity with New York, Trimble's reengagement with his city exhibits central aspects of the *flâneur's* relation with modern urban space: he is a man of the city who also can stand apart from it as an urban spectator.

That said, Trimble's concern with the city does not emanate from a position of knowledge, as detailed by Walter Benjamin's conceptualization of the *flâneur*, but from the motivation to discover anew facts about the city of which he was unaware although for which he was, as architect of some of the city's new buildings, partially responsible. Benjamin's theory of the *flâneur*, developed between 1927 and 1940 (the year of his death, three months before Fitzgerald's) in his unfinished *Passagenwerk* (*Arcades Project*), corresponds at points with Trimble's characterization: "To the *flâneur*, his city is—even if, like Baudelaire, he happened to be born there—no longer native ground. It represents for him a theatrical display, an arena" (Benjamin 347). Yet, unlike Benjamin's walker of the city streets, Trimble is not interested in the commodified urban experience, nor does he seek to disappear or become lost in the city. Indeed, it is a counter impulse that drives him: to locate himself in the city of which he currently has no knowledge and acquaint himself with the lives of its citizens. Moreover, it is the material mechanics of the city and not its materialist economics that intrigue him. Among the few observations that Brown is able to make about Trimble "was his countryman's obedience to the traffic lights" and that "Trimble's face tightened at the roar of traffic" (*Short Stories* 748): Trimble, more sabotaged by traffic than its saboteur (Benjamin 42), does not register New York in terms of either its commercial or commuter potential. His "predilection for walking on the side next to the shops and not the street" (*Short Stories* 748) reveals an instinct for self-preservation; it also aligns his character with what is substantial and permanent in the cityscape, rather than with what is transient, the latter an aspect of New York more familiar to Brown as a journalist. Trimble's bearing

in the story moves the focus elsewhere: breaking down the complexities of the city; understanding something as simple as which building stands beside which other one; questioning how communities are formed; or how individual humans function in routine, everyday, urban circumstances. These are the component parts of Trimble's quest—not trade and not traffic, neither consumer nor commuter, but as spectator and interpreter of the basic facts of city life.

Revealing that Trimble has not been wholly absent from New York over the course of this lost decade is significant: he admits that he has been around but that he has absolutely no recall of the ten-year intervening period. To redress this issue, he walks Manhattan's streets, as if for the first time, to see and experience its buildings and people, and to familiarize himself with the elementary mechanics of motion within the geometrics of place. His exile has been more metaphysical than physical, a metaphorical exile rather than an actual one. It has rendered the city and its citizens as unknown to him instead of rendering Trimble as unknown to them: "as they left the restaurant the same waiter looked at Trimble rather puzzled as if he almost knew him" (*Short Stories* 749). Knowledge and identity are uncertain things; this becomes the object of Trimble's expedition in the story, to make sense once again of the urban world around him. This accords with a dominant strain within Fitzgerald's writing after the hedonistic glories of the Jazz Age had dissolved into trace memories, plotted most clearly in "The Crack-Up" essays published in *Esquire* in 1936. The 1930s was a period during which Fitzgerald used his writing to reflect upon the excesses of the previous decade; significant portions of his fiction, as well as the essays he produced in the ten years before his death, identify the dark side of the boom era while simultaneously registering the consequences of either personal or social dissipation. The symbiosis between personal and national depression was manifested in Fitzgerald's writing just as it had charted his own successes during the 1920s; as Bruccoli notes, "he seemed to personify both the excesses of the Boom and the anguish of the Depression" (477). Whether in "My Lost City" in particular or essays such as "Echoes of the Jazz Age" (1931) or "Early Success" (1937) more generally, or "Babylon Revisited" or *Tender Is the Night*, or the Pat Hobby stories, or even the unfinished novel *The Last Tycoon*, Fitzgerald was producing alternative commentaries on the 1920s narratives of American success with which he had been singularly identified.

Concurrent with his writing of "The Lost Decade," *The Last Tycoon* was the main fictional project that Fitzgerald had set himself to complete while he was

in Hollywood. That novel's descriptions of Wylie White's drinking parallel the alcohol dependent flipside of Louis Trimble's character, the side that "The Lost Decade" insistently withholds from view. Echoes of Trimble's loss of, or exile from, identity are evident in Wylie's awareness of his own predicament: "I spoke to half a dozen people but they didn't answer. That continued for an hour, two hours—then I got up from where I was sitting and ran out at a dog trot like a crazy man. I didn't feel I had any rightful identity until I got back to the hotel and the clerk handed me a letter addressed to me in my name" (15). However, where "The Lost Decade" differs is that, instead of dwelling on themes such as alcohol dependence, exile, and loss and maximizing their negative potential, it repositions them within an alternate, and ultimately optimistic, worldview.

It bears within its narrative trajectory some of the inflections of *Tender Is the Night*, though not in terms of the twinned biographies of Diver and Trimble that, as with Wylie's, are riven by alcohol misuse. That said, with Diver's disappearance into the smalltown geography of upstate New York, *Tender* closes where arguably "The Lost Decade" opens five years later: where one Fitzgerald character dissolves into the undifferentiated upstate landscapes north of the metropolis, a second emerges onto the specified streets of Manhattan's midtown to relocate himself as a solid citizen in a contemporary urban world. In this regard "The Lost Decade" can be placed alongside *Tender* as another instance of Fitzgerald's theoretically based fiction, acknowledged in a letter to John Peale Bishop, dated 7 April 1934, in which Fitzgerald refers to *Tender* as a "philosophical, now called psychological" novel (*Letters* 383). "The Lost Decade" is a philosophical rather than a romantic or dramatic tale. Where *Tender* develops an interest in psychoanalysis and, in part, registers the impact World War I had on its generation, this late story produces an algorithmical reconception of the city by one of its architects that matches Dick Diver's "hovering between the centripetal and centrifugal" forces that gather at the outset of his relationship with Nicole Warren (156). In *Tender*, the complex impulses and drives of the human mind that shade the non-chronological arrangement of episodes dealing with infidelity, incest, the Great War, and expatriation in Europe and that pivot in the destructive relationships of the Divers provided Fitzgerald with one method of constructing fiction in the aftermath of breakdown, but this was not his only mode of response in the 1930s. As "The Lost Decade" makes clear, positive reconceptions of the self within the modern world are also made available to offset the darker fictional and autobiographical expressions of Fitzgerald's world during this decade.

Other Contexts for Reading “The Lost Decade”

While multiple ways of reading “The Lost Decade” are clearly possible, what is certain is a central ineffability; it is a quite odd, and ultimately haunting, story. Its title intimates temporal loss indicating that the narrative which follows will be centered in lost time or will be a discussion in part of the decade that has been lost. Yet, within its short span, lost time is something that is recorded only briefly in passing, and then as a beneficial thing: “Some people would consider themselves lucky to’ve missed the last decade” (*Short Stories* 747). Unlike Irving’s Van Winkle, Louis Trimble is not an anachronistic emblem of a different era. The story appears, in one reading, to grant the architect Louis Trimble a level of foresight for having exiled himself from society for “almost twelve years” through his drinking (747). Described by Bruccoli, in his head note to the story, as the “*most remarkable of Fitzgerald’s late elliptical sketches*” (*Short Stories* 747), as it unfolds it becomes clear that temporal loss is a secondary issue when compared to spatial loss, to dislocation, to a severing of contact with place, with specific locations that themselves are specific to New York City. Time and its attendant changes during the decade that has been lost are absent features of the narrative. Furthermore, “The Lost Decade” moves to offer a counter-narrative, one dedicated to the slow retrieval of contact with the people and the places of the present, not of the past. It could be argued that “The Lost Decade” is a take on the recovery narrative, though not primarily in terms of addiction and alcohol dependence; the recovery undertaken occurs at a much more baseline level as Trimble seeks to fit together again the physical world of New York with the biological architecture of its peoples’ lives.

With its emphasis on place and on the textures of material things in the city, it becomes clear why Fitzgerald chose an architect to be the central figure in the story. Placing Trimble in the guise of a writer would have been too close, obviously, to Fitzgerald for anything other than biographical readings to dominate analyses of it. Moreover, presenting Trimble as an author would have provided too easy an opposition to Orrison as a hack journalist to the possible detriment of the story, obscuring its structural interest in the real world and in how the calculus of identity is calibrated by the places in which people live and move. Indeed, it is the writer Orrison who is forced to reconsider his relation to the city at the story’s close. Trimble, unlike Van Winkle in Irving’s tale of returned exile, is no storyteller of former times: he recounts nothing of his previous decade because he has no recall of that period, nor does he have any reason to do so; similarly, he does not impart any information about life before his lost

decade. Yet, the effect that he has on Orrison Brown is life changing, producing a shift in his understanding of the city, and decisively impacting how he now relates to his contemporary world, whether as a journalist or as an individual human being.

In terms of the particular city in question, alongside its symbolic status within the global psyche, New York has long been home to multiple races, creeds, and nationalities, “a permanent exhibit of the phenomenon of one world” (White 47). As noted earlier, reflecting back on the city after World War I, Fitzgerald recalled how “New York had all the iridescence of the beginning of the world” (Wilson 25). For the generation emerging out of the Great War, New York represented a new genesis and the architectural redesign of Manhattan, “compelled to expand skyward,” the epitome of modern possibilities (White 30). The festival of celebration that greeted the troops showed that America was “the greatest nation” and New York the nation’s greatest city (Wilson 25). Across his work, New York for Fitzgerald is a space of possibility, of romance, of intrigue; a place where, crossing the Queensboro Bridge, “[a]nything can happen,” “[e]ven Gatsby . . . without any particular wonder” (75). The boom of the 1920s multiplied the city’s pluralities and potentialities; an “[i]ncalculable city” (Wilson 26) Fitzgerald recalls elsewhere in “My Lost City,” a city offering singularly personal peaks and troughs, glittering successes and devastating depressions. For Fitzgerald, it is the barometer both of the nation’s escapades during the Jazz Age and its collapse after the Wall Street Crash.

The affinity between New York’s biography as viewed by Fitzgerald and his own is unmistakable, a paired and analogous interplay with relevance to “The Lost Decade.” Trimble is the man identified with New York City, Orrison Brown having been introduced in the story’s opening paragraph as coming to the city from a previous position as the editor of “the Dartmouth *Jack-O-Lantern*” (*Short Stories* 747), the student newspaper of the Jack-O-Lantern Humor Society of Dartmouth College in New Hampshire.¹ Brown’s callowness is arguably his main feature, an individual who lives in New York but has no real knowledge of it, whereas Trimble represents a particular and first hand relation with an urban environment that he helped conceive. Where Brown begins their sightseeing mission hypothetically as the guide, this role quickly transfers to Trimble, architect and cipher of the city’s meaning, Fitzgerald’s surrogate self taking in one last New York adventure.

Fitzgerald’s lost New York in “My Lost City” remains for him a conflicted place that is recalled with a mixture of disappointment and disillusion. Reflecting on how he was inevitably caught up in the city’s own “Bacchic diversions”

(Wilson 29), his regret is mostly pointed inward, toward his own misconceptions of the city, as he registers his changing attitudes to New York. In a valedictory movement that closes “My Lost City,” recalling a visit to the Empire State Building in the autumn of 1931, Fitzgerald from “the roof of the last and most magnificent of towers” discovers New York’s “crowning error”: that it is a delimited, not a limitless space; that its geographies, cartographies and architecture are finite, not infinite like the “expanse of green and blue” beyond its man-made, urban topography (Wilson 32). Kirk Curnutt is right to highlight the essay’s closing indictment of the city (and by extension of the American nation) for its “myopia and delusions of invincibility that, directly or indirectly, had contributed to the Great Depression that Fitzgerald laments” (87). The darkness of Fitzgerald’s acerbic eye on New York in “My Lost City” is unquestioned. New York, while a city of possibility, is one riven with failure, mapped with a foreboding, arguably apocalyptic, dimension to its hyped ambition:

Full of vaunting pride the New Yorker had climbed here and seen with dismay what he had never suspected, that the city was not the endless succession of canyons he had supposed, but that *it had limits*—from the tallest structure he had seen for the first time that it faded out into the country on all sides, into an expanse of green and blue that alone was limitless. And with the awful realization that New York was a city after all and not a universe, the whole shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground. (Wilson 32)

Ultimately, New York reveals itself not as a fantasyland of endless possibility and romance, nor as a creation capable of transcending its own physical limitations, but as a real, living entity, prone to the same fate as other man-made things, as mortal in many ways as the people who designed it or as those who live there. What Fitzgerald had previously imagined as true is shown to be a naïve self-delusion. New York is not incalculable at all; indeed the very opposite is the case: it is all too calculable and resolutely finite and thus prone to (self-) destruction.

The pessimism and negativity that accompanies such a realization is revisited and redeployed by the time Fitzgerald writes “The Lost Decade.” By reconceiving the city precisely in terms of its calculability, and by accepting the reality of its textures and investigating how anonymous strangers function within their urban world, the later story recasts the earlier essay’s negativity, reclaiming the possibility of a nascent experience of New York.

Having taken his disheartened leave at the close of “My Lost City,” Fitzgerald returns, it could be argued, in the guise of Louis Trimble in “The Lost Decade,” “a pale, tall man of forty with blond statuesque hair and a manner that was neither shy nor timid, nor otherworldly like a monk, but something of all three” (*Short Stories* 747). Impossible to categorize, Brown immediately registers the otherworldly nature of Trimble, a man portrayed as a near-spectral figure, haunting the midtown streets of Manhattan in arguably similar ways to how Fitzgerald apparently haunted the avenues and boulevards of Hollywood at the close of the 1930s and during 1940, the last year of his life. Frances Kroll Ring, Fitzgerald’s secretary at the time, recalls a particular walk with Fitzgerald along Sunset Boulevard late in 1940: “He was wearing a dark topcoat and a grey homburg hat. As we kept pace, I looked over at him and was chilled by his image, like a shadowy figure in an old photograph. His outfit and pallor were alien to the style and warmth of Southern California—as if he were not at home here, had just stopped off and was dressed to leave on the next train” (99). Fitzgerald’s appearance of displacement in Los Angeles is marked, his an emphasised out-of-placeness, in exile from New York, the place in “My Lost City” which he notes “however often I might leave it, was home” (Wilson 30).

This issue of specters links with the widely accepted back story of “The Lost Decade”: Fitzgerald, forty-three when he wrote the story, may have, according to Alice Hall Petry’s account in Bryer’s *New Essays on F Scott Fitzgerald’s Neglected Stories*, produced “The Lost Decade” as a retort to a youthful Budd Schulberg who, when told in November 1938 that he would be working with Fitzgerald on a screenplay about Dartmouth College’s Winter Carnival, is reported to have said “My God, isn’t Scott Fitzgerald dead?” (qtd. in Petry 255). While this may be a trace subtext within the narrative, there is clearly more to this story than a brief and token rebuke of a callow writer at the beginning of his career. Allegory, it would seem, is in the air on the rare occasions critics approach “The Lost Decade.” Ron Berman argues that

The ostensible subject of “The Lost Decade” . . . is being drunk for ten years together. I think, however, that that is a figurative way of imagining the mysterious present in which everything we know has to be relearned. The story is not about the difficulty of drying out (which might well have been its logical center) but rather about the difficulty of recognizing new codes of reality. Because of that, the story is less real but more thematic. (41)

Berman correctly identifies the evasions that "The Lost Decade" undertakes in relation to the alcohol question and Trimble's former dependence on the substance; and he offers the correct vocabulary for a fuller understanding of the narrative by referring to its "logical center" and its insistence on "recognizing new codes of reality." These are useful first steps in reading "The Lost Decade," although Berman then retreats from the logical center of his own observations, preferring to read Fitzgerald's last meditation on New York as "less real" and "more thematic." Discounting his last observation and examining the story once more through this identified need to relearn reality produces a more significant and constructive contemplation of New York City than had previously been acknowledged, and one that simultaneously redresses the pessimism of "My Lost City."

Reading allegorically offers one route of inquiry but obscures central details of Fitzgerald's story. Bryant Mangum identifies "the starkness of the description" that contributes to Trimble's "disorientation in a world that he is really seeing for the first time in a decade" (162). Indeed, taken a step further, "The Lost Decade" is a story precisely about history, what one does with it, as well as being about its own present tense conceptualization of time. It is a narrative dedicated, once again, to the possibilities of New York City. It is a chronicle of place and locations, an account that is specific about geography; it plots a distinctive graph of what occurs between the intersecting axes of time and place, of history and geography. "The Lost Decade" is about relearning centered in relocating the primary units of knowledge. This is the narrative of an individual's ontological conception of the world that is allied to an anthropological interest in the motions and emotions of other people. It carries a precision in its demands that tallies with Trimble's quest to reconnect with the real world: "I simply want to see how people walk and what their clothes and shoes and hats are made of. And their eyes and hands. Would you mind shaking hands with me?" he asks of Orrison Brown (*Short Stories* 749). The demand is simple: for the re-finding of why things are the way they are, of how people move independently and connect communally.

Trimble wishes to discover the foundational units of existence, based in real experience, from the actual lives of individual people; he seeks a simple version or account of reality in the wake of collapse, resetting the balance that "My Lost City" had tipped significantly toward a pervasive disenchantment with New York life. "The Lost Decade" re-evaluates the city free of the illusory baggage of its former constructions in Fitzgerald's writing, motivating a reconnection with New York and New Yorkers that is no longer mythical but actual, no longer an

admonishment of the city's existence but an endorsement of its reality. Where "My Lost City" is structured around symbolic encounters with New York that Curnutt identifies as sharing an "elusiveness" (91) that jars with the reality of the city that Fitzgerald registers, "The Lost Decade" dispenses with such symbolic motifs to produce an insight into New York divested of nostalgia and rooted in the day-to-day, unassuming truth of ordinary people living ordinary lives. Just as Brown is disarmed by Trimble's guilelessness, the cynical tone of "My Lost City" is defused by this late story's rediscovery of the city through seeing how its inhabitants exist within its spaces once again.

If "The Lost Decade" writes back to "My Lost City," it does so to provide reassurance to set against "the awful realization that New York was a city after all and not a universe," which leads to Fitzgerald's acknowledgement that "the whole shining edifice that he had reared in his imagination came crashing to the ground" (Wilson 32). It resets a balance within the city that is constantly in tension; Fitzgerald identified this capacity for ruin in "My Lost City." The dissonant tone of that earlier essay once more brings to the fore related aspects of Benjamin's theory of the *flâneur*: Fitzgerald's gaze upon New York reflects "the profound alienation" experienced by the *flâneur* who "seeks refuge in the crowd. The crowd is the veil through which the familiar city is transformed for the *flâneur* into phantasmagoria" (Benjamin 39). Once iridescent, Fitzgerald's New York "no longer whispers of success and eternal youth" at the close of "My Lost City." "All is lost save memory" he records, "yet sometimes I imagine myself reading, with curious interest, a *Daily News* of the issue of 1945":

MAN OF FIFTY RUNS AMUCK IN NEW YORK
Fitzgerald Feathered Many Love Nests Cutie Avers
Bumped Off by Outraged Gunman

So perhaps I am destined to return some day and find in the city new experiences that so far I have only read about. For the moment I can only cry out that I have lost my splendid mirage. Come back, come back, O glittering and white! (Wilson 33)

What is remembered of New York and how it is remembered become contested issues, offset by Fitzgerald's humorous imagining of a future New York afterlife in which he, like his creation of Gatsby before him, becomes the victim of a wronged and vengeful husband.² In the guise of both biographical and fictional creations, whether as himself, or as Gatsby, or lastly as Louis Trimble, Fitzgerald mediates

the experience of New York as fantasy, as memory, and finally, it could be argued, as reality. Neither seeking to repeat the past nor attempting to predict some vain-glorious fate in the future, Trimble produces a timeline of his present-day city grounded in pragmatic readings of and dealings with a real New York.

In terms of its subtle deployment of history, of place, and of time, "The Lost Decade" raises a number of intriguing questions, both about its place within Fitzgerald's corpus, and also about its possibly valedictory impulse in relation to a New York that he would never set foot in again. Fitzgerald's last actual encounter with New York had been a fleeting one in the company of Sheilah Graham early in 1939. Following three days (10–12 February) at Dartmouth with Budd Schulberg working on *Winter Carnival* during which time Fitzgerald caught a heavy cold and both men drank heavily, culminating in both being fired from the production by the film's director Walter Wanger, Graham and Schulberg registered Fitzgerald at Doctors Hospital in New York where he would remain for three days. A week's stay in a hotel after his discharge preceded his final return to California (Brucoli 538–39; Prigozy 129–33). An inauspicious episode certainly; whether it influenced Fitzgerald's thoughts when writing "The Lost Decade" is impossible to conjecture, but his near total disconnection from the city during this final visit because of illness is overturned in the story by Trimble's urge to be in the city, out walking on its streets, or wishing to go "[s]ome place with young people to look at" (*Short Stories* 748). At one level then, the story could be deemed a fantasy, a fictional counterpoint to Fitzgerald's ill-starred last experience of New York. Yet, even allowing for such an interpretation, the fantasy is wholly unfantastical, desiring contact with the ordinary and anonymous routines of New York City. As Fitzgerald's proxy, Trimble resolutely, yet unassumingly, wishes to take an unobtrusive place among the rank-and-file, restarting his life not from atop one of the city's magnificent towers but rather with his feet on the firm ground of the tangible city.

The temporal issues that the story introduces raise some important questions that previous critics have left unasked: why does Fitzgerald provide the wrong year when dating Trimble's disappearance from New York? Trimble recalls that it was the year "[t]hey'd begun the Empire State Building" to which Brown responds that was "[a]bout 1928" (748). Excavation work on the Empire State Building began on 22 January 1930, construction beginning St Patrick's Day, 17 March; one year and one day later, the Empire State building was topped off at 5:42 p.m. on 18 March 1931 and was officially opened on 1 May 1931 by President Hoover (Korom 425). However, if 1928 is the year that was intended, construction work did begin on the Chrysler Building on 19 September 1928,

with work completed by 20 May 1930 (Robinson and Bletter 84). So, either Brown is mistaken in his dates, or Trimble is wrong about his city and the buildings within it. It seems a glaring error that Fitzgerald himself would not have missed, particularly as he was so precise in “My Lost City” to date a visit to the Empire State Building as having occurred in “the dark autumn” (Wilson 32) two years after the Wall Street crash.

Is Fitzgerald guilty of getting the year wrong, or is he highlighting another issue with this apparent “mistake”? Is he undermining the accuracy of the history provided by Trimble, or is he making a pointed comment about the hack journalist’s knowledge of the city and its recent past? The discrepancy, while it could be discounted simply as an error, brings New York into the story as an elusive third character whose time-clock shifts between the late 1920s when Fitzgerald was more familiar with the city and the late 1930s when New York functioned primarily for him as a remembered place. Indeed, if Fitzgerald’s brief, drunken return east in early 1939 is to be incorporated as a useful biographical counterpoint to the story, it could only color “The Lost Decade” with a powerful sense of regret on Fitzgerald’s part, something that is not demonstrated by the narrative and particularly not by its conclusion that focuses on possibility, not impossibility, in its impulse toward discovery, not loss. On that brief final visit, New York was an absence to a Fitzgerald confined to hospital and hotel beds, whereas “The Lost Decade” realizes the city in very significant and very particular ways. Viewed in the late 1930s by Trimble, but uncovering the period of construction from a decade previously, the New York of this story is a palimpsestical entity for Fitzgerald as he revisits its initial advent within this textual recovery of New York’s post-Crash potential.

Orrison Brown’s role in the story is a split, indeed anomalous, one. To people outside the newspaper office, he elevates his status to “one of the editors,” while in reality he undertakes the odd jobs around the news-weekly office that no one else would take on: “during work time he was simply a curly-haired man who a year before had edited the Dartmouth *Jack-O-Lantern* and was now only too glad to take the undesirable assignments around the office, from straightening out illegible copy to playing call boy without the title” (*Short Stories* 747). The Schulberg-Dartmouth connections resonate and give fuel to the readings that presume the story a somewhat barbed response to the younger writer’s social faux pas. In terms of the story’s characterization of Brown, readers are encouraged to determine that his status is permanently undercut: as a journalist, he is not much of a journalist, supplying the anomalous date of 1928. That said, Brown elsewhere proves himself a thoroughly reliable guide. He walks Fifth Avenue

with Trimble, pointing out the relevant places and the new buildings that have appeared during the previous decade: Rockefeller Center (begun in 1931, completed on 1 November 1939 [Gordon 106]), the Chrysler Building and “the Armistead Building, the daddy of all the new ones” that, it transpires, Trimble himself designed. This last is dated as “[e]rected 1928” (749) and is located somewhere on Fifth Avenue in midtown, with a view of Rockefeller Center (48th–51st Streets) as well as of the Chrysler Building (42nd Street and Lexington Avenue).

Orrison, as a journalist, has a superficial knowledge of the city; he lacks key historical information and is revealed as limited when set alongside Trimble who, as an architect, had held foreknowledge of the city. Indeed, in specific ways, Trimble is one of modern New York’s founding fathers, his building “the daddy of all the new ones” (749). Although his decade of drinking has ensured that he has never actually seen his own building properly before this moment, it no longer holds any interest for him, a monument to a previous existence. He studiously ignores Brown’s compliment about his building’s status and, unlike Rip Van Winkle, refuses to indulge in historical reminiscence. Trimble’s new interaction with the city is based in viewing the (inter)operations of its people and places, and equating with the mechanics of their lives, down to the smallest detail: “‘The weight of spoons,’ said Trimble, ‘so light. A little bowl with a stick attached’” (749). His impulse is as democratic as it is revolutionary: he is no longer their architect but one of the people who learns the city anew by living in it, at street level, seeing the physical interplay of its constituent parts, the urban maneuvers of its population, and cataloguing the minutiae of New York’s aggregate geographies.

The vivid detail of the lived world, of how real things and normal people operate in real time, encapsulates Trimble’s response to the re-imagined city. An extended reading of other New York fictions of the period that display similar attention to the minutiae of reality is not possible here, though it would prove fertile territory for looking again at a number of Fitzgerald’s works. Long hailed as the definitive author of the surface glamour of the Jazz Age and the “swirls and eddies” (*Gatsby* 47) of its mutating concoctions of revelry and vice, closer attention to Fitzgerald’s art of observation also needs to become the focus of critical study. To broaden the scope briefly, one author who emulates Fitzgerald’s care for incidental yet essential detail in his narratives is Saul Bellow. Early in his novel *Seize the Day* (1956), set on New York’s upper west side, Bellow writes: “The old man was sprinkling sugar on his strawberries. Small hoops of brilliance were cast by the water glasses on the white tablecloth, despite a

faint murkiness in the sunshine" (31). This momentary evocation is provided from the viewpoint of Wilhelm, the son of the old man (Dr. Adler) referred to in this typically attentive piece of description. For the record, Wilhelm, like the former Trimble, is known for his alcohol intake and furthermore is a man terrorized by the realities of contemporary New York: "The sidewalks were wider than any causeway; the street itself was immense, and it quaked and gleamed and it seemed to Wilhelm to throb at the last limit of endurance" (115). For him, "New York is like a gas," its streets "[throb] through the dust and fumes, a false air of gas visible at eye level as it spurted from the bursting buses" (50, 74). The apocalyptic potential of New York, here etched by Bellow a decade after the liberation of the concentration camps in Europe, is plotted in the city's immense and crowded thoroughfares and descriptions that retain an ominous as well as Biblical resonance: "Light as a locust, a helicopter bringing mail from Newark Airport to La Guardia sprang over the city in a long leap" (74). This New York, seventeen years after "The Lost Decade" was published, is a location of potential terror and tangible claustrophobia for a citizen overpowered by the demands of modern urban living; Bellow's New York is a city overlaid by a sense, first of paralysis, and then of danger.

Recovering "The Lost Decade" After 9/11

As Fitzgerald's literary depictions of New York signal, keeping the city within the bounds of a proportionate response to its possibilities proves a central dilemma. Through Trimble's actions, Fitzgerald succeeds in consolidating New York as a location capable of accommodating itself and its citizens to new realities after national depression or personal trauma. The process of setting aside the past and understanding the present, of balancing memory with contemporary reality, and comprehending what had been previously unknown, in relation to New York City, came into stark tension in September 2001 when two hijacked airliners wrought unprecedented destruction upon downtown Manhattan, rending what had constituted regular, ordinary life with the cataclysmic intrusion of the fantastical and incomprehensible. The critical turn in American literary and cultural studies since the 9/11 attacks has been marked in general terms by a decade of responses seeking the right words (if they actually exist) to explain and comprehend the exceptional events of that day. By holding 9/11 as an unparalleled occurrence, a seismic moment of rupture (most immediately for New York and then more widely for America, but

by extension for the western world), a narrative has developed that records that September day as an incomprehensible, unspeakable, and traumatic breach in the order of things. Examples from established fiction writers (DeLillo, Franzen, and McInerney, to name but three) writing in the aftermath of the attacks are numerous, but a work such as Patrick McGrath's *Ghost Town* (2005), comprised of three novellas (a structural echo of Paul Auster's *New York Trilogy* [1987]) is a suitable case in point. In the third section, "Ground Zero," the narrator is a New York psychiatrist who, as a result of the traumatic events perpetrated by the terrorists, is losing her mind and who holds 9/11 as "a date which was rapidly becoming a watershed in all our lives, a line of demarcation, or a point in time, rather, before which the world seemed to glow with a patina of innocence and clarity and health. And after which everything seemed dark and tortured and incomprehensible, bearing nothing but portents of a greater darkness to come" (212). This issue of portents is striking, the attacks turning a nostalgic and imagined sense of American or urban innocence prior to 9/11 into a new reality of terror and loss.

In November 2011, a special issue of the *Journal of American Studies*, titled "10 Years After 9/11," collected ten essays on the attacks and subsequent cultural and critical reactions. Two in particular bear relevance here. The first of these is Lucy Bond's perceptive and timely reconsideration of how American Studies has responded to the attacks on the United States connecting a number of literary and theoretical reactions to 9/11 to trends she identifies as already active within critical and psychoanalytic discourse, in particular trauma studies, from the early 1990s. Bond argues that "[w]hat appears to occur in the aftermath of 9/11 is a conflation of a particular school of critical theory and elements of political, memorial, and literary practice resulting from two related phenomena: the overextension of the attribution of trauma to national, even universal, levels, and the over-personalization of the American public sphere" (738). The events of 9/11 heightened the application of these modes of cultural and political interpretation to such a degree that it obscured the fact that these theoretical trends were current before the attacks occurred. For Bond, 9/11 consequently did not register "a different world" as Jonathan Franzen referred to it in a piece for the *New Yorker*: "In the space of two hours, we left behind a happy era of Game Boy economics and trophy houses and entered a world of fear and vengeance." Instead, Bond carefully resets the coordinates for considering how critical studies, and western society more widely, had already begun to deal with things deemed unspeakable back to the decade before 9/11, in a period that was already alert to millennial tensions and fears. For the purposes of this

argument, extending that backward glance further, back into the 1930s and 1940s, allows a reconsideration of how earlier examples of New York writing similarly identified and responded to personal as well as public cataclysms.

The second essay of relevance in the special issue is Catherine Morley's "How Do We Write about This? The Domestic and the Global in the Post-9/11 Novel," which argues that the turn to the domestic and the personal that has been prevalent in American fiction since 9/11 was similarly a key component of fictional practice before the terrorist attacks. Citing works such as DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997), Roth's American trilogy (*American Pastoral* [1997], *I Married a Communist* [1998], *The Human Stain* [2000]), but also looking further back to Updike's Rabbit tetralogy (*Rabbit, Run* [1960], *Rabbit Redux* [1971], *Rabbit Is Rich* [1981], *Rabbit At Rest* [1990]) as examples, Morley identifies an American "preoccupation with the individual and the domestic" that "framed domestic events against the vast panorama of American history" (721). Earlier examples of this trait can be found in the work of numerous American writers, and Fitzgerald certainly anticipated such later-century variants of American fiction: whether in the passing references to the fixing of the 1919 World Series in *The Great Gatsby*, or the more considered reflections on the Great War in *Tender Is the Night*, the political contexts of his times, national as well as international, are not distant specks on some horizon unrelated to his fictional enterprise. As both "My Lost City" and "The Lost Decade" indicate, the very real circumstances of New York City before, during, and after the Depression are central to Fitzgerald's post-Jazz Age writing. How he wrote about that period in the city's history, producing divergent responses to its particular Depression-era contexts, marks Fitzgerald as one of the most important authors on New York. More than just its Jazz Age biographer, Fitzgerald records the city's turmoils as well; and in "The Lost Decade," he theorizes a mode of response to disorder and chaos relevant to New York's early twenty-first century traumas.

The recovery of New York through its citizens and the mechanics of their urban lives charted over four pages by "The Lost Decade" anticipates how New York fictions sixty years later would seek to establish a new pragmatism or realism to counterbalance the traumatic excesses of the events of 9/11 and its aftermath. Curnutt's analysis of how "My Lost City" was the second most cited work (after W. H. Auden's "September 1, 1939") in the weeks immediately following the attacks establishes valuable critical parameters for discussing questions of appropriation and the use of trauma discourse in relation to a work such as "My Lost City." As he notes, Fitzgerald's essay received a number of airings in American newspapers, editorial columns, and critical analyses

of the attacks due to its apparent recording of a period of lost innocence and vulnerability. "My Lost City," it was perceived, held a valency for the newly traumatized American populace at the start of the twenty-first century, and parts of its remembrance of New York past were redeployed to serve a number of arguably salient, yet also conflicting, purposes. Highlighting how "My Lost City" is "something of an awkward choice" (85), particularly its concluding sections, to provide solace after the terrorist attacks, Curnutt identifies an "ethic of mourning" (87) in Fitzgerald's essays of the 1930s that conflicts with the construction of American national grief after 9/11. Fitzgerald's essay was, and remains, as Curnutt makes clear, an indictment of New York, in particular of the self-delusion it offers its protagonists. The essay's appropriation by a post-9/11 need to reconnect with a deemed lost New York was a problematic, inappropriate maneuver. Fitzgerald's last pages variously list the city as "an echoing tomb," as a "ruins" sounding with "the plaints of the wounded" and "the groans and wails of the dying" (Wilson 32): "uncomfortable" metaphors to say the least in the post-9/11 context (Curnutt 87). "My Lost City" is neither a patriotic evocation of a sense of homeland nor an elegiac paean to innocence or glory, yet it was mined for vestiges of these concepts in a time of modern American crisis.

Releasing Fitzgerald's "My Lost City" essay from its nostalgic misappropriation in late 2001, and reading it again in its entirety, Curnutt resets both contextual and contemporary approaches to Fitzgerald's work. Moreover, where Curnutt is right to point to the lack of consolation at the end of "My Lost City," aspects of this consolatory vitality searched for in the earlier essay could have been located in "The Lost Decade," had it been the Fitzgerald text turned to after 9/11. Fitzgerald's farewell to New York here also functions as a postscript to his earlier essay, rescripting its negative aspects into the briefest and yet most revitalizing of tales. Its conclusion is open, as Trimble continues his walk through midtown leaving Orrison Brown to resituate himself within a city that he too is now seeing for the first time. The difficulties and the possible traumas of Trimble's decade-long condition are elided; a momentum toward living again, living in the city again, is clearly etched in the forward drive of the whole episode. Coming to grips once more (literally so) with the mechanics of life, of city living, and the materiality of New Yorkers' lives: this is Trimble's objective in his exclusive concern with what is real centered in his quiet observations of how New York's community of citizens interacts with its environment and one another. Recovery through reintegration with the city, allied to a shared sense of co-existence, is the

legacy of Trimble's fleeting incursion into Orrison Brown's life. By the story's close, in the wake of Trimble's departure to continue his observations of the city, everything is changed.

Relevant narrative reference points outside of Fitzgerald's story abound, none more so than E. B. White's 1949 essay *Here is New York* which, like Fitzgerald's "My Lost City" essay, found itself frequently referenced immediately after 9/11. More famous for writing *Stuart Little* (1945) or *Charlotte's Web* (1952) or for his regular contributions to the *New Yorker*, White in this short but illuminating piece writes about New York ten years after the publication of "The Lost Decade" with a mixture of awe and apprehension similar to Fitzgerald's approach in "My Lost City." For White, New York is primarily a place of possibility, and particularly of history:

[I]n New York you feel the vibrations of great times and tall deeds, of queer people and events and undertakings. I am sitting at the moment in a stifling hotel room in 90-degree heat, halfway down an air shaft, in midtown. No air moves in or out of the room, yet I am curiously affected by emanations from the immediate surroundings. I am twenty-two blocks from where Rudolph Valentino lay in state, eight blocks from where Nathan Hale was executed, five blocks from the publisher's office where Ernest Hemingway hit Max Eastman on the nose, four miles from where Walt Whitman sat sweating out editorials for the Brooklyn Eagle, thirty-four blocks from the street where Willa Cather lived in when she came to New York to write books about Nebraska, one block from where Marceline used to clown on the boards of the Hippodrome, thirty-six blocks from the spot where the historian Joe Gould kicked a radio to pieces in full view of the public, thirteen blocks from where Harry Thaw shot Stanford White, five blocks from where I used to usher at the Metropolitan Opera. (19–20)

Here New York is a space of things and deeds, of events and personalities; all the fibers of history and a nation's literary heritage live in its streets. The city is a calculation of the sum of its present parts as well as of its past, geography and history intermeshed. New York is a fine balance between competing interests in White's account: between races; between neighborhoods; between history and the present. Seeking portents of deeper shadows to come, White notes, however, that New York has become home to a palpable sense of destruction latent within its architectural splendor:

The subtlest change in New York is something people don't speak much about but that is in everyone's mind. The city, for the first time in its long history, is destructible. A single flight of planes no bigger than a wedge of geese can quickly end this island fantasy, burn the towers, crumble the bridges, turn the underground passages into lethal chambers, cremate the millions. The intimation of mortality is part of New York now: in the sound of jets overhead, in the black headlines of the latest edition. (54)

Where Fitzgerald closed "My Lost City" with self-referential humor in an imagined newspaper article, prophecies of headlines of disaster recur in White's words.³ It is clear why White's essay held relevance after 9/11: ominously predictive, it is a salutary interpretation of the latent frailties of New York, "this riddle in steel and stone, this lofty target scraping the skies and meeting the destroying planes halfway" (56). Similar to "My Lost City," *Here is New York* is another mid-twentieth century, bifurcated reading of the city that readily tallied with the ethic of traumatic rupture that was triggered by 9/11, providing, at least in part, a relevant critical context for the reappearance of White's text after the attacks.

"The Lost Decade" bids an altogether different adieu to the city, proffering a hopeful vision to displace the lost hope and intimations of ruin that close "My Lost City" and countermanding New York's apocalyptic potential identified by White a decade later. Its four pages set aside both past catastrophes and devastations, whether hypothetical or all too real, to come. The contingent material world of New York, its tangible vitality, is what predominates in "The Lost Decade." This is what Trimble both seeks to reconnect with and is the legacy that he leaves Orrison at the story's close: to repeat the closing sentence, "He felt suddenly of the texture of his own coat and then he reached out and pressed his thumb against the granite side of the building by his side" (*Short Stories* 750). Concluding with this motion, it is a moment that seeks reassurance, through physical contact and authentication, through lived experience; no longer an epistemology of loss, New York is reconceived as the touchstone of being. For an American population recovering from 9/11 and its aftermath, "The Lost Decade" plots an opportune retrieval of both self and city, refiguring these twinned identities through contact with the buildings and spaces of Manhattan but, most particularly, with the shared identification of fellow citizens with their city. The mechanics of the lives being lived in New York is what intrigues Trimble upon his return. Asked by Orrison what he wishes to see most, he replies, "Well—the back of people's heads. . . . Their necks—

how their heads are joined to their bodies. I'd like to hear what those two little girls are saying to their father. Not exactly what they're saying but whether the words float or submerge, how their mouths shut when they've finished speaking" (749). "The Lost Decade" provides the account of weight and balance that Trimble seeks; it takes the measure of people and the places they inhabit to find a new accommodation with the real world. It initiates the need for contact between individuals and their environment, counterbalancing the materiality of the urban world with the mathematics of human life in the calculable city. It engineers the recovery of personal, social, and metropolitan identity for any generation wishing to find it.

Notes

1. Among its famous alumni, the Jack-O-Lantern Society numbers Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, and former editor of the *Jack-O-Lantern*.
2. That the "new experiences" of New York awaiting some putative return to the city in the future include a variation on his own fictional themes is not a surprising Fitzgerald ruse: *The Great Gatsby* is prefaced by lines from the fictional poet Thomas Parke D'Invilliers, who also appears as a minor character in *This Side of Paradise*.
3. The interest in how journalism may record New York's futures that is shared by White and Fitzgerald provides another link to "The Lost Decade," which opens in "the offices of the news-weekly" (*Short Stories* 747), a further indication that Orrison Brown's career status is not on a par with the columnist of a reputable New York daily.

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